

Daniel 7:1–28 (ESV)

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. **2** Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. **3** And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. **4** The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. **5** And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ **6** After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. **7** After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. **9** “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. **10** A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. **11** “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. **12** As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. **13** “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. **14** And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The beasts- scarier than the scariest horror film

Daniel begins by telling us **when** he saw the dream that he is about to report on. It was the first year of Belshazzar's rule. So we know for sure that what he is reporting is not in chronological order, like the rest of the book was. Now he goes backward in time. The first part of Daniel are God's treatment of others and prophecies about others. The last half of the book are prophecies given to Daniel. **2 Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.**

The picture that is being painted here is of kingdoms that are **arising** out of **sheer chaos and evil**. The great sea is humanity in rebellion against God. It is used that way several times in scripture. We also get that clue because when the angel explains where the beasts came from in verse . 17 he says '**These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth**. So we know we are talking about imagery. They didn't pop out of the seas or the earth. But they are earthy, rather than heavenly. These kings did not come from heaven. They did not come in the clouds. They came from the earth. They are natural, not supernatural. The four winds are the chaos and turmoil. Mankind has often had plans to create a **utopia**. But **utopia** will **never** come from man in rebellion against God. What we see is that world governments will **come** and **go** but none of them will bring in the kingdom of God. None of them purely reflect God's interests. In fact, most are directly counter to God's interests. Most do not intend good toward God's faithful ones. When we look at the world's situation, we need to consider the source. These governments are the **manifestation of humanity living apart from God**. So what they develop into will always be beastly. That is not always the **intention** of those who form the government. Our founding fathers may not have intended to form a beast. But beastliness is in the nature of all governments. This truth should govern our expectations toward all world governments, even our own. This passage tells us about the **nature** of world governments. We see here where they **come from** and we will see next **what they are like**. So while it is true that God appoints leaders and governments, it is not true that they are ministers of His kingdom, even if those who are in the seats of power are trying to serve the one true God. The world kingdoms are presented like they have a life of their own. They are all **self serving**, and at their core there is a wicked agenda. While scripture says that God appoints the leaders, much of the time those leaders are children of the devil. This is very important to remember. **At the heart of all earthly world governments is a mean dog on God's leash**. You only

find out the dog's real heart when the leash is removed. Thank God for God's strong leashes.

Next we see four beasts. Here is the million dollar question. Are we supposed to figure out what each of the beasts represent? Which kingdoms are they? Many think that the 4 kingdoms are the same kingdoms as the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw. Many agree that the first kingdom is Babylon. Then after that opinions vary.

I think this text gives us a clue about how to approach it. Look down at verse 19.

19 "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast,

So an angel approached Daniel and was giving him the interpretation of the dream. Daniel asks him for more specifics about the fourth beast. Think carefully about this. What did God want Him to know? What did the angel tell Daniel so Daniel could make best use of this information?

This is how the angel started.

23 "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

It is odd but Daniel is told very little more than what had **already** been told to him. Why? What was the angel's purpose if it was not to clearly identify which government was which?

The explanation goes on, but it is very difficult to make sense of it. He is not told where it would be. He is not given any names. He is given a general description. By the time the angel is done, all Daniel knows for sure is that this government is going to **do more evil to the people of God** than any other government.

Those who take a futurist view of Revelation tend to interpret this kingdom as the revived Roman government. The closest equivalent right now would have to be the European Union. Many of the reformed scholars do not think that the intent in this passage is to identify **which government is which**. They believe that it is more to teach us about **the nature** of our world. So I am not so sure **our** major effort should be to assign **each beast** to a **period of time**.

But it does look to me like this government will be clearly identifiable once it fully appears, if these are actually clues that should be used by us to identify a specific government.

Nevertheless, I am not going to spend much time trying to identify the kingdom.

We will spend more time looking at the unignorable lessons we can learn.

So, these kingdoms arise from the wicked sea of humanity in rebellion against God. They come in times of world turbulence.

This is what we are told next.

4 The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.

I don't think the kids would sleep for days if Pixar made films about these beasts. And that is really the point. They are beasts. And they are scary. There is little scarier to an African village than a man eating lion. We see them in Zoos. We have never been in danger from one. I'll bet Daniel had a different image of them. Although this dream would have been prior to his sleep-over at the lions house. Lion's were scary.

Most scholars think the wings being removed has to do with the time when Nebuchadnezzar was driven insane and then had his mind restored.

5 And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.'

Now a bear is something that we may have had some experience with. When we were hiking in Montana we carried pepper spray. And it wasn't some sissy can. It was enough to season several people very well if the wind blew the wrong way. One time we camped in Yellowstone and I heard "woofing" like Grizzly bears do. I slept with a very big knife under my pillow. In reality, all that knife would have been useful for is to identify my remains after I attacked a bear with it.

Probably Dan and Sarah and Caleb and Mark also kept aware of the possibility of Grizzly bears. I have read of several attacks. Unless you are heavily armed you would probably spend a few terrifying moments. A man eating bear would be horrifying.

This second one is ravenous. Depending upon the translation it looks like its mouth is already full but it is told to devour more.

6 After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

OK, the lion and the bear are scary images. Exactly how they are like a lion and a bear we are not told. But lions and bears are limited to their territory. If you are far enough away, you might be able to avoid them.

But what do you do with this beast? You will never get away from this one. Not only is a leopard very fast, this one is supercharged. It has wings. That expands its territory. Essentially we get the picture that no one is getting away from this

swift beast. And then on top of that it has four heads. He is not going to miss you if he is looking for you. No one is getting away.

7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

This fourth beast has more information with it. But it is worse than all the other beasts. The others were scary enough, but this one is even worse.

We need to understand just how effected Daniel was. And Daniel was a guy who could stand up to the threat of a lions den. Try to think of something that is terrifying to you and dreadful and exceedingly strong. Diane, maybe think of a one ton snake that is coming after you. Suz, a 10 foot high Pitbull. That is the effect we are to get. If Belshazzar had seen these, he would have passed out cold. There is something creepy about metal teeth. I think of the character, Jaws, in a James Bond movie. Metal teeth are scary. But they aren't nearly as scary as a **kingdom** with iron teeth. It **chomped** on anyone that stood in their way and **tromped** on them to finish them off.

We get a picture of a beast that is unstoppable. It maintains absolute power. There is no way to attack this beast. There is no way to protect yourself from it. You certainly won't break out its teeth. There are lots of horror stories we have heard about or know. Some involve sneaky things you never see coming. Others have deadly things that can't be touched. Some have diseases that spread. This is not like any of those. This would be like the experience of blitzkrieg when the Nazi's attacked unsuspecting countries. It is an unstoppable force, swift and powerful. Unstoppable. Violent. Destructive.

But it is different than the rest. We cannot know how it was different. It just was. Maybe the difference is related to the horns. The horns are usually kings or leaders. If that is what makes the difference, the difference might mean that this kingdom is made up of an alliance. If that is what it is describing, we see that there are 10 countries that the alliance is made up of.

8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

It is possible one leader takes over three countries and completely removes their identity. The futurists would conclude that this is the antichrist. And so it might

be. What it looks like is this horn has a very human speaker. It is like a devilish person is the mouthpiece and the representative of the power.

This kingdom is going to make fabulous claims. My guess is this kingdom will represent everything that Christians hate.

Let's read on.

9 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. 11 "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

While we often get distracted about determining the **mysterious identity** of the **beasts**, I think God's point is that we take note of the **sure identity** of the **judge**. While **we** might be stricken with fear to see the **beasts**, the **beasts** have reason to be stricken with fear by the **judge**. This would have been the encouraging point for Daniel. This is the hope of all who read Daniel's prophecies and for all those who taste the teeth of the beasts. Judgment is coming. The judge is coming. Nothing or no one will stop Him from making things right.

We are given some descriptions, probably all are imagery rather than actual appearance. God is Spirit. The Ancient of Days has no body.

So we see clothing as white as snow. This is probably to display the **absolute purity of God**. There is no flaw. There is no stain. This is God and nothing but God.

His hair was **white as wool**. This probably represents God's purity and his **perfect wisdom** to **perform** the judgment and to **assign** the punishment.

A Chariot throne flamed with fire- This would have represented a warrior on a chariot with the **absolute power** to **destroy all of his enemies**.

River of fire came out from before Him- This shows the absolute ability to **carry out** any judgment He assigns.

Here we see a judge who has the wisdom to sort out right from wrong, the purity to choose the right, and the power to enforce his judgments.

Iain M. Duguid, Daniel, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 114–115.

a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

We do not know if these are angelic beings or people or a mix. It does not matter. What it shows is the **greatness** of God's kingdom. The beasts may have thought they were **really something**. But none ever reached the power and authority and majesty of the Ancient of Days. His kingdom makes all the others look like a child's pretend game.

So the judge is on his throne. He sits in judgment. And the books are opened.

You can almost hear the drumroll.

But look where Daniel's attention is.

With all that was going on, this is what got Daniel's attention.

11 "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

Now look at this horn, this king, this person. Even in the presence of the Ancient of Days he is still spewing his poison. He is still lofting himself up. He is still making great claims. It looks like he stands in rebellious hatred against God until his very last breath. This is sheer arrogant evil.

We need to keep this in mind. We need to embrace this idea. The most important consideration is never the **ferocity** of the enemy. It is the **omnipotence** of our protector.

This beast, while enabled for some unknown period of time to do horrible things to God's people, is killed without event at exactly the moment the judge decides.

12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

Now this makes our text hard to understand. The kingdoms in Daniel's statue all came after each other. They did not exist at the same time.

Yet here we see that the rest of the beasts were allowed to continue, even though they no longer had power to rule.

What can we conclude here?

Either the judgment is not at a single point in space and time, or the beasts all coexisted with each other at the same time. Either one opens up all kinds of possibilities. Both make it even harder to identify who the beasts are.

So when the thrones are placed and the Ancient of Days sat on it, was this at a point of time in the past and He has been sitting in judgment over all the beasts across time?

Or were the beasts all coexistent and he deals with them all at one point in time? Or are there other logical options?

If you find a way to get an answer to this, please let me know.

I am puzzled.

Since so much of this is imagery, I am thinking that God is always sitting in judgment, but there is coming a day for final judgment. This may be describing the process rather than the event.

13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Just about everything Daniel was seeing would have been mind blowing. For us we are drawn to solve the mystery of when or what **the beasts were**. For Daniel this may have been the greatest mystery. **Who was this son of man?** He would have known who the **Ancient of Days** was. But who was this who came in the clouds of heaven? Coming in the clouds would be something Daniel understood from other scriptures that **only God** could do. But the phrase “son of man” would have meant to Daniel someone **born as a man**. How could this human be acting like God. And how in the world would he **take charge** of this kingdom of God? How could he take the place that **only God** should hold. And all humans everywhere are to serve him and give him glory. And it is **HIS dominion** that is an everlasting one. Daniel would be thinking, I thought that was God’s kingdom.

Who is this Son of man? **What** is this Son of man?

When we read this, it is no mystery at all to us. We know it is Christ. But this would have been a real puzzler to Daniel. After all, there is only ONE God. Who is this? What does it mean?

This Son of man was surely treated with great dignity. He was presented to the Ancient of Days and the Ancient of Days accepted him instantly.

14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

God has judged all the beasts. He has stripped them of power. And now he is replacing all of the man made beasts with His kingdom. He assigned it to the Son of Man.

Notice it says all peoples, nations, and languages will serve Him. This is why some think that every tribe must be evangelized before Christ can come back. I am not so sure, since all doesn't always mean each and every. But it is still a wonderful thing. People from all over the world are coming to Christ and will continue to come to Christ until he returns. This shows God's priority that the Gospel be taken to every corner of the earth.

This kingdom did not come from where all the **others** came from and it is not going where every other kingdom **went**. Our kingdom will last forever under King Jesus. It did not come from the sea. It did not come from the earth. It was not natural. A man can do nothing natural to enter it. It is only entered by a supernatural work of God. It begins by God making a dead person alive. No man can **naturally** enter it and no man can **stop a man** from entering it. It does not rely on any earthly act to maintain it or to advance it. Everything that sustains this kingdom has its source in God.

That is why we are told over and over again to seek those things above, where Christ is. Set our minds on things above, not things on earth. We are told to see this earth as a temporary stop. We are pilgrims, not citizens. Our best hope is in the future, not here, not now.

Are you disappointed with your present circumstances. That is no surprise. This is a disappointing place. It is inhabited by beasts. The kingdoms are bred in rebellion and joined in chaos. This is not **our** destination. The democratic republic of the US is not our hope. The Supreme Court, the Senate, the House or the President are not our hope. We see some evidence of beastly things in our government. What a shock. It came from the sea and was initiated in turbulence. Wow. What a surprise to find out there are evil agendas.

The beasts were upsetting to Daniel. We will see next week, Lord willing, that Daniel was visibly shaken by this dream. These beasts caused the blood to run out of his face. We know that we are interpreting Daniel correctly if we receive this in a manner that is shocking. I think harm is sometimes done to this text by

those who are primarily concerned **by which kingdom** it is describing. That curiosity will not lead to the effect this revelation had on Daniel. He said- **my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart."**

Daniel did not have the whole Bible like we do. He may not have realized that God will allow his children to suffer persecution for His sake. Maybe he saw no reason that would explain the visions he was seeing. It may have blown his mind over the conception of God and conception of the world. We don't know. We only know it really really shook him up.

But the beauty of the whole vision is that God provided an insight into what happens in God's court. And that vision is **the only thing** that will lift us above the turmoil we experience in life. Time after time, that which we need most is to lift our eyes higher. We must, by faith believe what scripture says is truer than what we see. We must believe that God's **purpose** for what we go through brings **meaning** to what we go through. We must believe that God will make it worth our while no matter what sacrifice He calls us to make.

I think maybe the safest application to make with this text is to accept that the source of every government is earthly, it is flawed, it will eventually, if allowed to, show all of its true colors, and it will not last. That kingdom that **Christ** calls us into is **perfect**, it will eventually show **its** true colors, and it will **last forever**. Which one do we want to fixate on this week?