

## ***From Beasts to the Son of Man: God's Kingdom Revealed (Daniel 7:1-28)***

### **I. Dreams in the Darkness: God's Kingdom Breaking In**

In Daniel 7, the prophet is given a vision that takes this book to a whole new depth—revealing the rise and fall of kingdoms and the triumph of God's eternal rule. Dreams and visions have come up before, but we will go much deeper into this mysterious realm of symbolic communication from heaven.

In this second half of the book, Daniel receives remarkably accurate insight into the future. This includes our present day, which is why we should lean in close to listen to the revelation given here.

- **A Preview:** *Through Daniel's visions, we learn how the Kingdom of God was inaugurated on earth in Jesus's first coming—which means we are **saints of the Most High** who are advancing into a victorious future, even if the powers-to-be have been granted “an extension of life...for an appointed period of time” (Daniel 7:12).*

Before moving ahead, it's important we pull back and remember the larger context of the book. Daniel was only a teenager when King Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Jerusalem and took prisoners from the royal family. The experiences of Daniel and his three friends in Babylon went on to become vibrant signposts of the Messiah.

Daniel primarily served under three kings. Most of his life was with the great conqueror Nebuchadnezzar. After many years, Daniel got to see this ruthless man's humbled (ch. 4). Soon after, Daniel's position of influence waned as Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar came into power (ch. 5). But the “writing was on the wall” for this immature leader as his kingdom was overtaken by a new world power (ch. 6).

When Daniel was in his 80s, the Persian Emperor Cyrus conquered Babylon and installed one of his generals over the region. This was most likely the one called Darius in Daniel 6. Under this ruler, Daniel once again came into a place of advisory power—until accusations from his enemies put him in a lion's den where he emerged victoriously in perhaps one of the clearest foreshadows of the Messiah in all the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

This is how the first half of Daniel ended, concluding a beautiful life that was a light in the darkness. Now, in Daniel 7, we go backward in time to the first year Belshazzar came into power:

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<sup>1</sup> It wasn't just his dreams that told of Jesus—his entire life foreshadowed the coming King.

**1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. (Daniel 7:1)**

Daniel is an older man here. Nebuchadnezzar is gone and, unfortunately, his grandson Belshazzar is just as spiritually dull and wicked as he was during most of his life.

We can imagine Daniel quite weary at seeing a breakthrough with Nebuchadnezzar's repentance being followed by more corruption in the government. Daniel stood on the precipice of global revival when Nebuchadnezzar began publicly acknowledging Yahweh as the true King. But now Babylon descends further into wickedness and decay, with new threats from another godless empire reaching their borders.

Daniel has lived his whole life faithfully but continues to see brokenness in the world and its rulers. On top of this, Israel—which is supposed to be God's chosen light for the Gentile nations—is still in exile after almost 70 years.

It is in this dark moment God meets Daniel in the darkness of the night. He gives him a dream that unveils a much bigger Story going on. In these dreams and visions, God is going to remind Daniel of what was shown to Nebuchadnezzar many years prior about a heavenly Kingdom crashing into the kingdoms of this world (ch. 2).

## **II. End of the Age (Antichrist & "The Little Horn" Pt. 1)**

**2 Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.**

The "great sea" is a biblical image of humanity, revealed mostly clearly in Revelation 17 (v. 15). The "four winds" speak of the spiritual powers and principalities that influence humanity. These powers "stirring up" the sea is about their activity in the nations (often violent) as they work to bring about change. The "four great beasts" are human kingdoms arising through these stirrings.

**4 "The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind ("heart") also was given to it.**

This first beast points to Babylon which often used lions as a national symbol. Its king, Nebuchadnezzar, had his power—*his wings*—plucked in Daniel 5. Afterward, he was humbled and arose, being given a human "heart" (a better and more literal translation than "mind").

In this part, Daniel is seeing the amazing work of grace and how God can transform even the vilest of people. *The “beast” is turned into a man with a heart!* A picture of hope for humanity...

Unfortunately, the dream goes on to show another beastly creature rising:

**5 "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'"**

The bear with three ribs in its mouth speaks to the three emperors of the Persian Empire who came after Babylon (Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Darius). Some believe it could relate to three major Persian conquests (Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt). Being “raised up on one side” most likely speaks to an unbalanced partnership with Media, as Persia was much stronger than Media.

**6 "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.**

As principalities and other forces continued to stir up the sea, dominion and power was transferred over to the Greeks. A creature of speed, agility and deadly precision, the leopard points to the empire established by Alexander the Great. He conquered vast amounts of territory incredibly fast, which is perhaps why wings were added to the back of an already swift creature.

As we’ve learned, Alexander’s empire was divided into four sectors following his untimely death, hence the “four heads.”

After this would come another beast unlike any that preceded it...

**7 "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.**

**8 "While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.  
(Daniel 7:7-8)**

Here we come to the Roman Empire, which was also the final part of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue in his dream years prior. Many believe the “ten horns” speak to the ten Roman emperors that led up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

- 1. Julius Caesar (49–44 BC)** - Dictator, often included as the first “emperor” in this scheme even though the principate formally begins with Augustus.
- 2. Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)**

3. Tiberius (AD 14–37)
4. Caligula (Gaius) (AD 37–41)
5. Claudius (AD 41–54)
6. Nero (AD 54–68) – “Little Horn”?
7. Galba (AD 68–69)
8. Otho (AD 69)
9. Vitellius (AD 69)
10. Vespasian (AD 69–79) - *Began the campaign against Judea; his son Titus destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70.*

There are many who believe **70 AD** was the “end of the age” that Jesus, along with many prophets, spoke about—and that Daniel is very much pointing to this as well. From this perspective, the prophets would be speaking of the end of the age that *they* were in—an age we could call the Old Covenant Age, inaugurated by Moses. When Jesus came, he ushered in a new age (and a new world) with the release of a New Covenant.

This was inaugurated at the cross around 30 AD; however, Jesus hinted at a forty-year window of grace for Israel (Matthew 24:34) where the nation could embrace this new era or stay on the path of destruction. Sadly, like the Hebrews in Moses’s time, many chose the way of unbelief. The Old Covenant and its people were destroyed 40 years later in 70 AD. Though Israel continues as a nation today because of the continued grace of God, the Old Covenant era of Mosaic Law is forever gone.

This is why 70 AD marks the “end of the age.” It was also the end of the world *as they knew it*. Therefore, Daniel 500 years prior seeing a “beast with ten horns” is so incredible, considering how the tenth leader of the Roman Empire would usher in this end of the age. (Even the most skeptical scholars of Daniel have to admit that it was written at least 100 years before Julius Caesar arrived on the scene.)

God truly sees the end from the beginning. Humanity has free agency along with the rebellious spiritual beings that use their power to influence history—yet history remains *his story*. He weaves together all our broken choices, both human and angelic, toward a beautiful and triumphant end.

It’s important to look at the “little horn” in Daniel’s vision, for it points to someone who played one of the most vital roles in this period. In verse 22, we learn that his little horn was “*waging war against the saints*” and “*overpowering*” them.

There are many reasons to believe the little horn coincides with Emperor Nero, the sixth ruler from Julius Caesar. Nero was an insanely wicked leader who began the first empire-wide persecution of the church. He was the one who oversaw the execution of the apostle Paul, the apostle Peter, and many others in the church.

Of significant importance, Nero was also the Emperor during the Jewish War which would be the catalyst of the end of the age and the fulfillment Jesus's warnings about Jerusalem. His reign, therefore, involved great tribulation for both Jews and Christians. This is why many believe the warnings of a "great tribulation" were written to *that generation* about Nero and the years leading up to Jerusalem's fall.

It's interesting that in the line of Roman rulers, Nero would have been the *sixth horn*—a number connected to the beast that shows up in Revelation and is associated with an antichrist figure.

➤ **See "Addendum: Nero & 666" at the end of this section.**

In Revelation, the apostle John is shown a beast with seven heads. He learns this about the heads:

**10 and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.**

**(Revelation 17:10)**

If Revelation was written during the time of Nero, this would be very fitting. Five rulers of Rome had fallen, "one is"—meaning Nero, the sixth, who was in power—and the next would remain only a "little while."

Nero eventually took his own life and left the Empire in chaos. In the wake of civil war, three different emperors came and went within a matter of months. This is why 69 AD is known as the Year of the Four Emperors. Amazingly, this coincides with Daniel seeing a little horn who caused *three other horns* to be uprooted. The tenth horn, Vespasian, stabilized the empire. One of his first actions was then completing what was started under Nero—the destruction of Jerusalem.

This is why many believers and scholars throughout history believe the "little horn" of the Antichrist already came, and that the "end of the age" already happened. We will explore this further in Daniel 8 when another "little horn" is shown to Daniel two years later. We will find that there is still much room for mystery and debate here.

What is not open for debate, however, is the reality that we are *now in a new era*. Since the tenth horn and Jerusalem's fall, Rome and every other human kingdom has been slowly influenced by another King who is unlike any other—a King who remains on his throne to this day. This will now be our focus as we turn to one of the most glorious visions ever given to a human being in Daniel 7:9-14...

### **III. When the Ancient of Days Takes His Seat**

**9 "I kept looking**

**Until thrones were set up,**

**And the Ancient of Days took His seat;**

His vesture was like white snow  
And the hair of His head like pure wool.  
His throne was ablaze with flames,  
Its wheels were a burning fire.  
10 "A river of fire was flowing  
And coming out from before Him;  
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,  
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;  
The court sat,  
And the books were opened.  
(Daniel 7:9-10)

In Isaiah 43:13, God says, ***“Even from eternity I am He.”*** God is the Ancient One who existed *before days were*. He is the One who transcends mankind and his kingdoms. He existed before time itself, and he is a King who reigns forever, even when the world chooses darkness.

God shows Daniel how his Kingdom is going to break into the beastly systems that devour the earth’s resources and enslave humanity. Daniel is being given a deeper look into what Nebuchadnezzar saw in the Rock that crashed into the four-part statue and became a mountain that filled the earth.

First, he sees the Ancient of Days taking his seat. God the Father is coming into his position of authority to render a judgment that is going to affect the whole world. Next, Daniel will see a “Son of Man” approaching the Ancient of Days. This is the title Jesus very often used of himself.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus is described just like the Ancient of Days. He has white garments, hair white as wool, fire at his feet. This is the mystery of how Jesus and the Father are truly One (John 10:30). In Daniel, we see two different Persons of the Trinity coming together to accomplish the same thing, but with different roles... And the third Person is found in the fire burning in the midst of them.

The fiery wheels on the chariot speak to the reality that God’s “throne” is mobile. This is the same vision Ezekiel saw (Ez. 1), who was a contemporary of Daniel’s during the Jewish exile. This is the moving tabernacle of Christ’s body.

A “river of fire” flowing from the throne parallels a river of water flowing from God’s throne in Revelation 22. Though fire is often a symbol of judgment, the merging of water with fire reveals that God’s judgment is ultimately about cleansing and healing. The river in Revelation brings life to the world. We see this literally play out in the book of Acts where people are baptized in water and the fire of the Spirit comes upon their lives to purify their hearts.

God’s fire is his love. His judgment is his grace.

The fire comes to eradicate darkness and restore humanity to their true design, made in the image of the Son of Man.

**11 "Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. 12 "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.  
(Daniel 7:11-12)**

Daniel sees the little horn and the entire beast destroyed by fire.

Looking at the fulfillment of this prophecy backward in time can help clarify the heart of God's judgment and the nature of his fire. The Roman Empire didn't burn in one sweeping act of heavenly judgment. It fell slowly because of its own corrupt decisions—yet it was also internally transformed as more and more people within the beast were baptized into the name of Christ.

Though strong persecution came against this small sect—this group who believed in the resurrection of a Jewish Rabbi—they slowly overtook the entire region through otherworldly love, divine miracles, and by continually blessing their enemies. They waged a different kind of warfare, yet the result was still the eventual end of Rome. The beast burned in the fire of the Spirit and now its carcass in Italy is engraved with the name of Jesus everywhere.

The passage goes on to say that “dominion” was taken away from all human kingdoms. True power and authority has now been transferred somewhere else. For this, Daniel receives even more specific revelation from heaven:

**13 "I kept looking in the night visions,  
And behold, with the clouds of heaven  
One like a Son of Man was coming,  
And He came up to the Ancient of Days  
And was presented before Him.  
14 "And to Him was given dominion,  
Glory and a kingdom,  
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language  
Might serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
Which will not pass away;  
And His kingdom is one  
Which will not be destroyed.  
(Daniel 7:13-14)**

Suddenly, Daniel sees the emergence of the new Kingdom—blessed by the Ancient of Days Himself. One like a Son of Man comes before the throne to “present” himself. This is sacrificial

language. In this, we see the Lamb of God, the One who reflects the Ancient of Days with hair “like wool.” Indeed, this is the Messiah, who is both God and man.

**We must understand this vision is describing Jesus’s first coming, which took place during the time of the fourth beast—Rome.** When Jesus was crucified, he took the keys of death (Revelation 1:18). Though the “*books were opened*” in judgment against us, Jesus was presented to the Father as a sacrificial Lamb representing humanity.

Jesus stood in our place and, despite our dark and beastly ways, this sacrifice of love was accepted. Heaven is not counting mankind’s sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:19). Instead, Jesus stands as the new Adam, forgiving us and removing the stain of the “beast.”

- In this perspective, the “four beasts” do not only speak of those four ancient kingdoms, but the entire scope of the earth. This is part of the symbolic meaning of the number four.

When Jesus resurrected, he told his disciples: “***All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me...***” (Matthew 28:18). From heaven’s vantage point, the whole earth has been rightfully purchased by the blood of Jesus. All nations belong to him and are destined to serve their true King—the only King who lays down his life for his subjects, loving them with an everlasting fire.

## IV. The Kingdom Age Has Already Begun

After this, Daniel begins to receive understanding into the vision. It is always vital we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding into dreams and visions. We cannot figure them out through mental reasoning or psychological astute.

**17 'These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth.  
18 'But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'  
(Daniel 7:17-18)**

There are numerous ages to come. Daniel was seeing the end of the Old Covenant age. Since then, for 2,000 years, we have been in a Kingdom age. This is just the beginning of many more advancements of Jesus’s Kingdom on earth. Just like Daniel in the sixth century B.C., we cannot fathom all that is ahead.

The “Highest One” is an ancient Hebraic reference to the God who is higher than all other “gods”—the principalities and cosmic powers influencing the universe—because he created them in the first place. The “saints” are those who will possess God’s Kingdom for all ages to come.

But Daniel is particularly intrigued and distressed about the fourth beast and the little horn. He is then given this word of encouragement:



**25 'He (the Little Horn) will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. 26 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.**

**27 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.' 28 "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."  
(Daniel 7:25-28)**

*"A time, times, and half a time"* is traditionally understood to represent a period of three and a half years. Remarkably, there are some strong connections to Emperor Nero and the period leading up to 70 AD.

First, Nero's campaign of persecution against the church lasted a little under four years. It was also during his reign that there was about three and a half years of war leading to 70 AD.

When Nero died and the Temple system was crushed, these were key markers that a new Kingdom Age had been ushered in. Daniel said, *"the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One..."*

Typically, people view a promise like this as being about the final return of Christ. However, keeping with everything we've learned, this has already happened. **We have been given the world**, and are now called to go and declare the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Originally, the word "Gospel" was a term used for the news about Roman victories. It was a political term that Jesus subverted and purified, transforming it into a message about God's victorious reign on earth. Now each of Jesus's disciples are charged to go and make new disciples, spreading the message of this eternal, hidden Kingdom of grace.

This can be very hard to receive, just like it was hard for the Jews of Jesus's day to believe in a Messiah bringing in a supernatural Kingdom. If Jesus has truly taken away all authority from the enemy, why is there still so much darkness? Why do wicked systems like Nazi Germany or the Isis Caliphate continue to rear their ugly heads?

The answer is partially found in something that was revealed earlier to Daniel...

**12 "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.  
(Daniel 7:12)**

Dominion has truly been taken away through Christ's work on the cross. Christ's work has forever dismantled the devil's claims on humanity. Christ is the Head of the human race. He is the truth about who we are and where we are headed. He is the "First-Fruit" of a new world.

However, an "extension of life" has been granted to the fallen systems of man, which continue to assert themselves in ideologies like Communism or Sharia Law or secular humanism. There is a tension we live in today, where Christ is the exalted, yet there is still darkness. The reason for this is that Christ is not a King like all the other Tyrants of history, who forced people to bow to them. Jesus calls people to awaken to love. (*This is why religious and controlling sects of Christianity are also just another defeated beastly system wrapped in the name of Jesus.*)

Regardless, there is a true Kingdom spreading and it's found in people's hearts as they surrender to Jesus. This Kingdom expands through love and the miraculous power of the Spirit.

On this note, the most important three-and-a-half-year period in the Bible was the earthly ministry of Jesus. For three and a half years exactly, Jesus taught his future Kingdom subjects ("disciples") that their life in this Kingdom would involve continued persecution.

Jesus released his own heavenly "manifesto" in the Sermon on the Mount, telling his followers they would need learn to exhibit the life of heaven through forgiveness, turning the other cheek, praying for our enemies, and fighting battles on our knees in prayer. ***This was a different kind of Kingdom, but certainly a real and present one.***

Now, for the past two thousand years this Kingdom has been advancing in people's hearts, slowly changing the world, even through martyrdom. Indeed, we are on the precipice of another major awakening in the West, even as revival continues to break loose throughout Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel heard these incredible words that we need to weigh in our own hearts as disciples of Jesus, subjects of this eternal Kingdom: ***The dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One...***

**You have been given the world!** The whole world is yours to go and "take" for Jesus. Not by force, but by following the Spirit and learning to share and live out the Gospel.

## **Follow-up Encounter:**

*Go back to Daniel 7:9-14 and meditate slowly on each verse. Take as much time as you're able. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you as **the Ancient of Days**. As you take communion, recognize that you are a member of His eternal Kingdom—right now. You are an ambassador and messenger for his Name. Ask the Lord for fresh boldness, as well as wisdom as to how to see your life more aligned with this true and everlasting Kingdom.*

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<sup>2</sup> The week these notes were written, Charlie Kirk was assassinated. Kirk was a public voice for Jesus in the midst of beastly systems still influencing humanity within their "appointed period of time."

### ➤ Addendum: Nero as “666”

In Revelation 13:18, John writes: “*This calls for wisdom. Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*” Some manuscripts even have **616** instead of 666, and that variant is actually part of the puzzle.

In the ancient world, letters doubled as numbers. This system—called *gematria* in Hebrew or *isopsephy* in Greek—allowed names to be “calculated” into numerical values.

If you take the name of an enemy and add up the letters, you get a secret code number: *Nero Caesar* → 666. When you transliterate “Nero Caesar” into Hebrew letters (נרון קסר, *Neron Qesar*), then add them up, you get:

nun = 50) נ  
resh = 200) ר  
waw = 6) ו  
nun = 50) נ  
qoph = 100) ק  
samekh = 60) ס  
resh = 200) ר

**Total = 666**

But sometimes “Nero Caesar” was written in Latin without the final *n* in *Neron*. That version, when transliterated, adds up to **616**. This could explain why some early manuscripts of Revelation have 616 instead of 666—both were known ways of writing Nero’s name.

So, Revelation says the beast’s number is “the number of a man.” 666 = Nero Caesar in Hebrew. 616 = Nero Caesar in Latinized form. The variant reading *strengthens* the identification, because both numbers were in circulation as Nero’s numerical signature.