**DANIEL CHAPTER 7**

The Book of Daniel is divided into two sections. The first six chapters are historical in nature. These chapters are the most familiar to us and show how God worked in the lives of Daniel, Shaddrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, and three pagan kings – Nebucchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius the Mede. The last six chapters that we will be focusing our attention on over the next several weeks are prophetic in nature. They contain prophecies concerning the future of God’s covenant people and their Messiah.

So how did God reveal these prophecies to Daniel? Through dreams and visions, often while Daniel was asleep; and also through angels, God’s heavenly messengers. The first of these visions is described in Chapter 7 with the Vision of the Four Beasts. Now, I’m going to teach this lesson in a way that drives some of you crazy. I’m not going to go in verse order. I’m going to skip around. Here’s the method to my madness: I will discuss the vision that Daniel sees and then follow that with the interpretation that is given later. I think by doing it this way you will better understand what it is that Daniel is seeing in his vision.

READ Daniel 7:1. God gave Daniel this vision very late in Daniel’s life. It is some time during the first year of King Belshazzar’s reign, around 553 B.C. The vision recorded here in Chapter 7 comes 14 years before the fall of the Babylonian Empire at the hands of Cyrus the Persian (539 B.C.). Chronologically, the visions in Chapters 7 and 8 fall between Daniel Chapters 4 and 5.

One other thing I need to point out. Even though there is a gap of 20-30 years when Daniel is not on center stage (between Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and the end of Belshazzar’s reign) he is not inactive. He continues to study, to meditate and to pray to the Lord. It is during this “silent” period of Daniel’s life that he received some of the visions from God recorded in this last part of the book of Daniel.

One last thing about these visions – they are not ordinary dreams like you and I have. Look at these verses that come later on in this chapter…

READ Daniel 7:15-16. Daniel’s visions are vivid images in DVD clarity that are very disturbing to Daniel. At the very end of this chapter Daniel remarks that “my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed.”

[Question 1] What is interesting to note is that either in Daniel’s dream or when Daniel awakes, God provides an angelic messenger to answer Daniel’s questions. So, let’s take a look at the vision of the four beasts in Daniel 7.

READ Daniel 7:2-3. The “great sea” refers to the Mediterranean Sea. The “four winds of heaven” symbolize four angelic princes. These are not God’s angels but those principalities of Satan who rule over the four empires that are to seize world power in this chapter. They are what Ephesians 6:12 describes as “the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” These evil forces are subject to Satan and have great influence upon all the nations of the earth. Each one of these four world powers emerges from the sea one by one, each manifested by its own “beast.” Each is powerful, but different from the others. The “stirring sea” is symbolic of war. Each of the four empires will rise to power on the crest of a tidal wave of war.

The order that the beasts emerge out of the sea is the chronological order that the nations they represent will arise, conquer and rule over the earth. These four beasts correspond to the four metals in the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream 70 years before (Daniel 2). Verse 17 makes it very clear that the four beasts are four world powers. The angelic messenger tells Daniel… READ Daniel 7:17. Each of the four beasts is from the earth meaning that they’re human. God in His sovereignty allows these various kings to rule even though they are empowered by Satan. Why would God allow such evil to rule His earth? That’s a very good question and I’ll answer it at the end of this lesson.

So let’s take a close look at the first beast…

READ Daniel 7:4. [Question 2a] The LION represents the supremacy of the Babylonian Empire. At first the lion has wings of an eagle signifying speed. Under Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian Empire’s conquests were rapid – they conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Tyre. But after a while this flying lion is transformed. Its wings are plucked away and it stands upright on two legs, like a man. Nebuchadnezzar eventually shifts his concentration away from military conquests and more toward domestic affairs. The trend away from war toward more peaceful pursuits remains the Babylonian policy even after Nebuchadnezzar’s reign.

Now let’s look at the second beast…

READ Daniel 7:5. [Question 2b] The BEAR represents the savagery of the Medo-Persian Empire. Though it is not as fast as the lion, it is more powerful. The three ribs in the bear’s mouth represent the three kingdoms swallowed by this empire – Lydia, Babylon and Egypt. The reference to devouring much flesh is indicative of the way the Medo-Persians waged war – with a massive number of soldiers that crush any enemy resistance; always with great loss of life on both sides.

There’s a third beast…

READ Daniel 7:6. [Question 2c] The LEOPARD represents the swiftness of the Greek Empire. Like the lion before, it has wings. The leopard is an animal of grace and beauty, speed and ferocity. History tells us that Alexander the Great virtually leaped across the world and subdued it in relatively short order. The four heads represent the four generals among whom Alexander divided his kingdom.

Finally there is a fourth beast…

READ Daniel 7:7-8. [Question 2d] This beast looks like nothing Daniel had ever seen. He doesn’t know what to even compare it to. He describes it as “dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong”…with “large iron teeth” and “ten horns.” What a horrible beast this is! It represents the mighty Roman Empire. This fourth beast has iron teeth, which give it the power to rend and to tear, representative of the brutality shown by the mighty iron legions of Rome.

For a better look at this fourth beast look at verse 23. READ Daniel 7:23. History tells us that all the conquered nations of Rome were held with an iron grip. Insurrections were not treated lightly but were put down quickly by bullying Roman forces. Those who dared to resist Rome were captured and crucified and their bodies left to rot on wooden crosses. A great network of roads was constructed to bind the kingdom to its capital city of Rome. Thus the expression, “all roads lead to Rome.”

[Question 3] I will be referring to many parallels in the book of Revelation as we go through Daniel’s prophecies. For example, this fourth beast has ten horns, just like the beast the Apostle John sees in his vision in Revelation 13.

[Question 4] So then, this fourth beast has great power.

There have been many conjectures as to what the ten horns specifically represent. The first part of verse 24 gives us a hint. READ it. Most commentaries believe that these ten horns represent ten reappearances of the original Roman Empire. They emerge in new forms throughout history. All of them demonstrate the same appetite for world domination that the Roman Empire did. All exhibit brutal military might and bullying tactics, just like Rome. We can think of a few of these world powers throughout history…Genghis Khan of China, The British Empire of the 18th and 19th Centuries, France under Napoleon, Nazi Germany under Hitler, and Soviet Russia under Stalin, just to name a few.

The little horn in verse 8 that plucked three of the ten horns out by the roots and had eyes like a man and a bragging mouth is explained in verses 24 and 25. READ it. This little horn is a person. He will speak out against the Most High, against God. He will persecute the saints. He will establish his own laws. That last expression, “a time, times, and half a time” has been interpreted by most Bible scholars to be three and a half years.

The description of this beast in these verses corresponds to the beast that the Apostle John saw coming up out of the sea in Revelation 13. John tells us who this beast is. He is the antichrist. He will be empowered by Satan and will quickly garner a worldwide following. Daniel Chapter 7 adds that this beast, this antichrist figure uproots three world powers. Again there is a lot of conjecture as to who these world powers are. Only God knows for sure. All who resist his evil influence, including true believers in Christ, will be persecuted and many will be martyred. There is a direct correlation between the events of Daniel and Revelation. Both the prophet Daniel and the Apostle John are shown visions of the same events. But they are being viewed from different vantage points in time.

The scene shifts from earth to heaven. The earth is in turmoil as another brutal dictator had been successful in seizing control of the world, this time without much of a fight. He now stands defiantly against God boasting of his great achievement and immense power and wealth. Since the fall of the Roman Empire many others have tried to control the world and a few had come close, but ultimately all of them failed. This little horn here in this chapter, this tyrant, has come out of nowhere and succeeded in taking control of the world. Will God intervene? Let’s read on…

READ Daniel 7:9 [similar to Ezekiel and Revelation] READ Daniel 7:10.

The thrones described here are the same thrones described in Revelation Chapters 4 and 5. Daniel observes thrones being set up in preparation for God’s judgment. This is the judgment of the fourth beast and the little horn we just talked about. Revelation tells us that 24 elders and a host of heavenly beings observe God’s judgment of the antichrist and his followers.

[Question 5] This term Ancient of Days is used three times in this chapter, but it’s found nowhere else in the Bible. This title is a reminder that the One who has existed forever, before anything was created will, in the end, be the Judge of all.

With that glimpse of heaven Daniel shifts his attention back to earth…

READ Daniel 7:11. Like the annoying buzz of a pesky fly, Daniel is distracted by the constant noise of boastful words coming out of the mouth of the little horn (the antichrist). Then, just like that, the fourth beast with the little horn is slain and its body burned up. This corresponds to the events of Revelation Chapter 19. Revelation tells us that this antichrist will reign over the whole earth for a period of three and a half years during the last part of the tribulation period.

God’s heavenly courtroom decides that enough is enough and it pronounces judgment on the antichrist. READ Daniel 7:26. The book of Revelation tells us that the armies of evil will assemble for a great fight against Jesus at the Battle of Armageddon. They will be soundly defeated and the antichrist will be seized and thrown alive into the burning lake of fire. The books of Revelation and Daniel give us different perspectives of the same event – the destruction of the antichrist and his followers.

READ Daniel 7:12. Continuing on with the vision from heaven’s perspective we see that the first three beasts, the lion, bear and leopard represent the Babylonian, Persian and Greek Empires. They too get swallowed up. All of these great empires have come and gone. We can see this looking back in time over the annals of human history. But, remember, while Daniel is observing and writing all of this down, none of these events have happened.

[Question 6] Each one will last until God says, “ENOUGH!” Verse 12 mentions an appointed period of time for each of these empires to exist. For Babylon that period will be a mere 70 years. For the Medo-Persians, it will be 200 years. For Greece, 180 years. For Rome, 500 years.

Daniel next catches a glimpse of what the Apostle John writes about Revelation Chapters 19 and 20, the return of Jesus Christ to earth with the saints. Here is the exciting part. We know exactly what Daniel sees because we have the book of Revelation to compare alongside the book of Daniel. I think that’s pretty awesome!

READ Daniel 7:13-14. In Matthew 26 when Jesus was placed under oath by the high priest – “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God” – Jesus answers by quoting Daniel 7:13. These verses speak about Jesus’s return to earth which we can read about in Revelation 19. Of course the high priest and Jewish leaders did not want to hear that!

Once Jesus does return to Earth with His saints there will be the little matter of taking out the forces of the antichrist who oppose him. This will occur at the Battle of Armageddon. Like I mentioned before they will be soundly defeated. Revelation 19 tells us that just one word from Jesus’s mouth and the armies of evil will be wiped out!

Now we see this same event from heaven’s perspective…

READ Daniel 7:18-22. The little horn (antichrist) is waging war against the saints on earth and winning. We know from Revelation that many of God’s dear saints will be martyred for their faith. God passes judgment in favor of the saints of the Highest One, Jesus. He shows up, wipes out the antichrist and his followers, and the saints take possession of God’s kingdom on earth – both the saints who had been on earth as well as all those millions of saints who had been in heaven and had returned with Jesus. This marks the beginning of the 1000-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20. Of course we studied all of that recently.

Now for the final piece to the puzzle – God’s eternal kingdom. This corresponds with the new heaven and new earth and the new Jerusalem of Revelation 20 and 21.

READ Daniel 7:27. This describes an eternal kingdom. It will never end. At some point God will create a perfect place for His saints to live forever. God did this back in Genesis 2.

[Question 7] By the time we reach Genesis 3, man messes everything up. But this time there will be no sin, no Satan, no death. It will be as God intended for it to be all along. The eternal kingdom will be a place of perfect intimate fellowship between holy God and His creation. It will be as Revelation describes a place where there is no sickness and no more tears.

In verse 28 Daniel is deeply moved because he sees that, in the meantime, before any of that takes place, that terrible tribulation lies in store for his people. Earlier I said that God allows evil governments to rule even though they are empowered by Satan.

[Question 8] Why would God allow such evil to rule? Here’s the answer…

After sin entered into the world through man’s own choice, God allowed this as a part of the curse. It also is His way of determining who is with Him and who is not. I suppose that God could have made us to be robots programmed to do His will. After all, He derives some pleasure from the singing birds and flowers in nature that glorify Him without a conscious choice to do so. But God gets the greatest pleasure from a human heart that, of its own free will, seeks Him and worships Him as God.

This is the design: God reveals Himself to us, He courts us and we respond by acknowledging Him, worshipping Him, adoring Him, praising Him, blessing Him and honoring Him; not only with our lips but with our lives. Intimate fellowship with His prized creation – that’s what thrills God!

This is a heavy lesson. There’s a whole lot here to take in. Any questions?