

Understanding Daniel 7:1-8

Daniel received the vision of Daniel 7 in the first year of King Belshazzar. This would be 553, fourteen years before the fall of Babylon.

The great controversy theme is at the very centre of the book of Daniel in general and of Daniel 7 in particular. This central theme can be described in the following way:

Since the inception of sin in heaven, there has been an invisible, cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan. Although this is a heavenly conflict, it is reflected on earth in a visible battle between the followers of Christ and the followers of Satan. In the course of this battle, Satan and his wicked followers have appeared to prevail over god and his people, but in the end god and his people will prevail because he controls and guides history to its desired end.

The passive voice of many of the verbs of Daniel 7 clearly points to someone who is directing history from behind the scenes. We will notice this when we do a verse by verse study of the chapter.

The Links between Daniel Two and Daniel Seven

Before anything else is said, we must recognize that historicism should be the governing principle in the study both outlines (See the charts at the end of this material, The Four Prophetic Outlines of Daniel, and Sequence of Powers in Daniel 2, 7 and Revelation 13.

There are several reasons for linking Daniel 2 and Daniel 7: First of all, in the chiasmic structure of the book of Daniel, chapters 2 and 7 are on the same branch of the candelabra (See The Literary Structure of Daniel 1-7") Secondly, Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 have the same number of basic elements. Daniel 2 has four metals and Daniel 7 has four beasts. Notice how the enumeration of the basic elements is the same in both chapters:
Daniel 2 Daniel 7

Gold Lion (7:4)

After thee Bear = second (7:5)

Third Leopard = another (7:6)

Fourth Dragon = fourth (7:7)

In the third place, the Iron characterizes the fourth kingdom in both lists. In Daniel 2 the legs are of iron and in Daniel 7 the dragon beast has great teeth of iron. A fourth consideration is that Daniel 2:44, 45 and Daniel 7:14 describe the last kingdom the everlasting kingdom with very similar terminology. In both, the everlasting kingdom follows the fourth power in the sequence.

A Look at the Literary Structure of Daniel Seven

Without exception, earthly events in Daniel 7 are described in prose while heavenly events are described in poetry. In Hebrew thinking, extremely important events are frequently depicted in poetic language. We will see in our study of Daniel 7 that earthly events are not isolated from heavenly events. There is a close connection indeed between heavenly and earthly events:

Verses 2-8 Earth Prose

Verses 9-10 Heaven Poetry

Verses 11-12 Earth Prose

Verses 13-14 Heaven Poetry

Verses 15-22 Earth Prose

Verses 23-27 Heaven Poetry

The vision of Daniel 7 is structurally divided into four parts, each concluding with the setting up of the everlasting kingdom:

Vision: 7:1-14: The full vision in its chronological sequence.

Explanation: 7:15-18: Daniel wants to know the meaning of the vision. An angel gives a brief explanation ending with the eternal kingdom

Inquiry: 7:19-22: Daniel desires to know about the fourth beast, the ten horns, the little horn and the everlasting kingdom.

Explanation: 7:23-27: The angel provides the final and fullest explanation of the fourth beast, the ten horns, the little horn and the everlasting kingdom.

Verses 9-10, 22, and 26 clearly reveal that the judgment occurs immediately after, and as a result of, the malignant work of the little horn in verses 8, 21, and 25. This means that the judgment could not have taken place at the cross or in apostolic times or even when a person dies. The judgment must have begun sometime after 1798.

Another important structural item of Daniel 7 is that the fourth beast has three periods of existence. First it rules for a period by itself. Then ten horns grow from its head. Finally, after the ten horns have governed for a period of time, a little horn arises among them to rule over them.

This clearly shows that Rome would rule in three consecutive stages (see, Daniel 7:23-24). In Revelation we will find that Rome will have a fourth stage when the beast's deadly wound is healed.

It is also important to remember that the judgment in Daniel seven has three distinct stages:

1. INVESTIGATIVE: The books are opened (verses 9, 10).
2. VERDICT OR SENTENCE: Given in favour of the saints (verse 22)
3. The time came when the saints POSSESSED the kingdom. It is clear that the judgment has an investigative stage, a sentencing stage and an execution stage (verse 22, last part)

Not only does each outline of Daniel expand upon the previous outlines, but each outline also enlarges upon itself as the chapter progresses. For example, as we have already seen, Daniel 7 repeats the same events four times yet each time the final events of the outline are amplified and intensified. The interest of Daniel is clearly focused on the end-time. The first powers of the outline are brought to view primarily to give us a sequence and framework for end-time events.

For an exemplification of this, see the chart at the end of this material, AA Synoptic View of the Four Parts of Daniel 7"

A Verse by Verse Study of Daniel Seven

Verse 1:

The date for this chapter, as we have already seen, is 553. The text clearly states that Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed. This is what we might call a prophetic dream.

Daniel also had prophetic visions while he was awake. It is remarkable that Ellen White also had both kinds of prophetic communications from the Lord.

Verse 2:

Winds in prophetic language are symbolic of strife, war, bloodshed and destruction. Jeremiah, a contemporary of Daniel, makes this very clear in Jeremiah 25:31-33. Ezekiel, another of Daniel's contemporaries, also affirms the same (Ezekiel 7:1-2). In Revelation 7:1-4 when the four angels release the winds, the result is a universal conflagration and destruction (Revelation 6:12-17).

Concerning the winds, Ellen White remarks:

Winds are a symbol of strife. The four winds of heaven striving upon the great sea represent the terrible scenes of conquest and revolution by which kingdoms have attained to power. (The Great Controversy, p. 440)

The sea symbolizes multitudes of unconverted peoples who are inimical to the people of God (see, Isaiah 17:12-13; 8:7-8; 60:5; Revelation 17:15). When symbolic winds and waters are placed together the meaning is, nations which are warring for world dominion. It is of great importance that these four beasts arise from the sea, while the winds of strife are blowing. In contrast, Revelation 13:11 depicts a beast which arises from the earth, where there are no waters and no winds!!

Verse 3:

Several things must be taken into account when we examine this verse.

1) Do the four beasts represent four kings or four kingdoms? The answer is simple. The four beasts represent four kingdoms which were ruled over by a succession of kings (study carefully, Daniel 2:37-39; 7:17, 23; 8:20-22; Revelation 17:12; 20:4-6; 1:5-6).

2) Why are wild beasts employed as symbols? Notice the following inspired comment:

Earthly governments prevail by physical force; they maintain their dominion by war; but the founder of the new kingdom is the Prince of Peace. The Holy Spirit represents worldly kingdoms under the symbol of fierce beasts of prey; but Christ is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (Christ Object Lessons, p. 77)

In this context it is significant that the two beasts of Daniel 8, in contrast to the four beasts of chapter seven, are domestic sanctuary animals (more on this when we study Daniel 8).

3) It is worthy of notice that the fulfilment of prophecy moves from east to west. The lion and bear are powers which bear sway in Asia. The leopard governs toward the eastern part of Western Europe and the dragon rules in the western portion of Western Europe. When we study Revelation, we will see that the second beast of Revelation 13 rules west of Europe (the United States of America). While Protestant eyes are fixed on the east as

the place for the fulfilment of Bible prophecy, it is fulfilling in the west right before their eyes and they can't see it because they are looking in the wrong place!!

Verse 4:

The lion represents Babylon. Everything connected with Babylon is >top of the line=. Gold is the most precious metal, the lion is the king of beasts, the eagle is the king of birds, etc. Archaeological excavations have proven that lion sphinxes were very common in ancient Babylon. Jeremiah affirms that the lion represents Babylon (see, Jeremiah 4:7; 50:17).

Wings in Bible prophecy represent speed of conquest (see Ezekiel 17:3, 12; Lamentations 4:19; Habakkuk 1:6-8). The plucking of the wings symbolizes the reality that Babylon will no longer be swift to conquer the nations. A lion with a man's heart is cowardly (even though fictional, the story of the Wizard of Oz picks up on this. Richard the Lionhearted, king of England, was so called because of his great courage). Babylon's cowardice is clearly displayed by King Belshazzar when the kingdom fell to the Medes and Persians (see Daniel 5:6).

Notice the passive verbs in this verse: wings were plucked, Ait was lifted up, it was made to stand, and a man's heart was given to it. It is clear that someone else is guiding history!!

Verse 5:

The bear symbolizes the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (Daniel 8:20). This is made clear in Daniel 5 where the Medes and Persians are described as the conquerors of Babylon. The fact that the bear was higher on one side than on the other indicates that one of these co-ruling kingdoms was to be more powerful than the other. This is made clear in Daniel 8:3 where we are told that the ram has two horns and the highest one comes out last. This is remarkably true to history. When the kingdom began, the Medes were dominant but at the end the kingdom was ruled exclusively by Persian kings and the Medes receded into the background (see the chart at the end of this material, The Dynastic Succession of the Medes and Persians).

The three ribs in the bear's mouth represent the three provinces which the Medes and Persians conquered in order to ascend to power:

- 1) Lydia (ancient Turkey/Anatolia) was conquered in 547.
- 2) Babylon, was overcome in 539 and,
- 3) Egypt, was forced to submit in 525.

Notice, once again, that someone is active behind the scenes of history: they said unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. It is obvious that someone is giving the Medes and Persians permission to conquer. They in this verse no doubt refers to the watchers or angels who are the emissaries of God in the guidance of human events (compare Ezekiel 1 where the angels carry on God's redemptive purpose on earth).

Verse 6:

The leopard represents the kingdom of Greece. The leopard in itself is a swift animal, but this leopard has wings. This must mean that Greece would conquer the world in a swifter fashion than Babylon. And this is exactly what happened.

Alexander the Great conquered the whole Near East (from Egypt to the Indus Valley in India) in just 3 years. Nebuchadnezzar took 13 whole years to just reach a stalemate with Tyre. In contrast, Alexander conquered Tyre in just eight months.

It is important to underline that the leopard did not have the four heads when it began to rule.

How do we know this? The answer is, by a comparison of Daniel 7 with Daniel 8. In Daniel 8 the he-goat (a symbol of Greece, 8:21) governed for a period with a notable horn on its head (Alexander the Great) Only after that great horn was broken, did four others come out to replace it.

So, just as the he-goat governed for a period and then sprouted four horns, so, the leopard ruled for a period and then it grew four heads. It is clear that the four heads and the four horns came up after the leopard and he-goat had ruled for a period of time (see, Daniel 8:5-8).

In Daniel 7 the leopard was swift, but it was made even swifter by wings. In Daniel 8 the he-goat is so swift he does not even touch the ground. Once again we are told that a power outside history is guiding world affairs: and dominion was given to it. Notice that the leopard did not take dominion. Rather, dominion was given to it!!

Verse 7:

The dragon beast represents the Roman Empire (168 B. C. - 476 A. D.). This empire came to be known as the iron monarchy of Rome (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 4, p. 161).

The ten horns represent the ten kingdoms into which the Roman Empire was divided when it fell apart. These ten kingdoms, according to Edward Gibbon, were: The Alemanni, the Franks, the Burgundians, the Vandals, the Suevi, the Visigoths, the Saxons, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards and the Heruli (see, M. H. Brown, *The Sure Word of Prophecy*, pp. 54, 55).

The historian Machiavel, without the slightest reference to this prophecy, gives the following list of the nations which occupied the territory of the Western Empire at the time of the fall of Romulus Augustulus [476 A. D], the last emperor of Rome:

The Lombards, the Franks, the Burgundians, the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Vandals, the Heruli, the Sueves, the Huns, and the Saxons: ten in all. (H. Grattan Guinness, *The Divine Program of the World=s History*, p. 318)

Already in the fourth century, Jerome had spoken of the fragmentation of the Roman Empire in the following terms:

Moreover the fourth kingdom, which plainly pertains to the Romans, is the iron which breaks in pieces and subdues all things. But its feet and toes are partly of iron and partly of clay, which at this time [note that Jerome was living when this was happening] is most plainly attested. For just as in its beginning nothing was stronger and more unyielding than the Roman Empire, so at the end of its affairs nothing is weaker. (Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, comments on 2:40, column 504).

In the days when Jerome lived, the Roman Empire was falling apart. The barbarian tribes from the north had descended upon the empire with a vengeance and broke it up into the nations which today constitute Western Europe.

Verse 8:

We must now take a closer look at the little horn. There are at least eleven identifying characteristics in chapter seven:

- 1) The little horn arises from the fourth beast (7:8). The fourth beast represents Rome, so the little horn must be a Roman power.
- 2) The little horn arises among the ten horns. The ten horns are the divisions of Western Europe, so the little horn must arise in Western Europe (7:8). Notice that these first two characteristics restrict the geographical location of the little horn to Western Europe.
- 3) The little horn rises after the ten horns (7:24). According to historians, the ten horns were complete in the year 476 A. D., so this must mean that the little horn was to arise to power sometime after 476 A. D.
- 4) The little horn was to pluck up three of the first [ten] horns by the roots (7:8). This means that these three nations would be uprooted from history. Daniel 7:20-21 explains that three of the first horns would fall before the little horn, and Daniel 7:24 tells us that the little horn would subdue three horns. In other words, three of the first ten nations would disappear from history!!
- 5) The little horn was to speak great words against the Most High (7:21, 25). Revelation 13:5 explains what these words would be, namely, blasphemy. And, what is blasphemy according to the Bible? It is when a merely human power claims to be God on earth and when it thinks it can exercise the prerogatives and functions of God (see, John 10:30-33; Mark 2:7).
- 6) The little horn was to be a persecuting power against God's people. This is stated in Daniel 7:21 and repeated in verse 25.
- 7) The little horn would think it could change God's times, that is to say, God's timetable of prophetic events. (Daniel 2:21). We shall see that the little horn invented false systems of prophetic interpretation to rival historicism.
- 8) The little horn would even have the audacity to THINK that it could change God's holy law. (7:25).
- 9) The little horn would be different from the ten horns. It would be an amalgamation of church and state (7:24)
- 10) This power would govern for a time, times and half a time (7:25). This comes out to 42 months or 1260 days (see, Revelation 13:5-6; 12:6, 13-15). In Bible prophecy, literal days are symbolic of years, so this power was to govern for 1260 years (we will study the year/day principle later on in this material).
- 11) The little horn had eyes like a man. In Bible Prophecy, eyes are symbolic of wisdom (see, Ephesians 1:18; Revelation 5:6). Even today, an owl is a symbol of wisdom because of its large eyes. In other words, this power was to depend on human wisdom.