

DANIEL 7: THE FOUR GREAT BEASTS

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Introduction:

- I. The book of Daniel is one of the most intriguing books of the OT. The vision of Daniel seven has challenged expositors for centuries. In our generation we have the privilege of exploring and seeking to understand its meaning and the relevance of its message for our time. Hopefully this outline will be useful in making your own conclusions about this fascinating vision.

Body:

I. Preliminary observations about Daniel

- A. Daniel's position in the total revelation of God.
 1. The book of Daniel may be said to occupy a position at the historical crossroads of the OT and NT.
 2. It sets forth God's vision of the development of his kingdom from the OT perspective and in anticipation of what would be accomplished through the Messiah.
- B. Daniel's relevance to our understanding of Revelation.
 1. It is appropriate that this study should follow the conference on Revelation; for the study of each aids the understanding of the other.
 2. The book of Daniel might be described as the book of Revelation in miniature; or Revelation could be said to be an inspired elaboration on the message of Daniel.
- C. Approaches to the book
 1. It is not surprising that Daniel should be subjected to similar approaches as that of Revelation.
 2. Daniel belongs to the literary genre known as "apocalyptic". (See Mark Robert's excellent treatment of this genre in last year's study of Revelation). The apocalyptic literary features of the book have made it easy for critical scholars of the 19th century to dismiss the book as nothing more than a desperate attempt "to revive hope when all was lost" (Baldwin, p. 15).
 3. The most common approach has been to see its visions as predictive prophecy of future historical events. In his prologue to his commentary, Jerome affirms that no prophet has spoken more clearly about Jesus than Daniel. "Moreover he went through the years involved, and announced beforehand the clearest signs of events to come." (See Jerome's introduction)
- D. The lack of a consensus interpretation.
 1. Daniel has defeated the most skilled expositors. Even those committed to the inspiration of Daniel have not agreed on its meaning. Numerous viewpoints have been offered, none of which are entirely satisfactory to everyone.
 2. In this study we will consider a number of the proposed solutions. We need to approach the study with caution and humility.

II. Daniel seven in the context of the whole book's structure

- A. The book of Daniel divides naturally into two main divisions.

1. Chapters 1-6 are more prosaic and serve as reports of the faith of God's people in a pagan world. Moreover they demonstrate God's preservation of his faithful people out of judgment and His use of them to bring even those among the pagan world to faith in Him. Even in this section, the idea of God's contemporary sovereignty over the kingdoms of the world is clearly manifest and anticipates the statement of His futuristic sovereignty over the nations yet to come (chapter 2).
 2. Chapters 7-12 are a series of visions given to Daniel that build upon the ideas illustrated in the events of the first section. These visions essentially declare the sovereignty of God and predict the ultimate victory of His kingdom over all the kingdoms of men. A secondary theme in this section is God's sovereign use of Israel in bringing about His dominion over the nations and His discipline of them to prepare them for that dominion.
- B. The chronology of the various chapters points to a thematic structure.
1. The arrangement of the book is not chronological throughout. Each episode in chapters 1-12 does not follow the preceding one in sequence. However, the chapters within the two major divisions (1-6 and 7-12) are chronologically arranged.
 2. In terms of chronology, the vision of chapter 7 falls between the historical events of chapter 4-5; yet, it serves as the starting point for the second section of the book. This clues us in on the idea that the structure of the book is not chronological, but thematic.
- C. The linguistic structure supports the unity of the book.
1. Chapters 1:1-2:4 are in Hebrew.
 2. Chapters 2:4-7:28 are in Aramaic.
 3. Chapters 8:1-12:13 are again in Hebrew.
 4. This A-B-A structure helps bind the material into a unified document. At the same time, the linguistic continuity between chapters 2-6 and chapter 7 serves as a bridge to join the two sections and point to its unity.
 5. Within the Aramaic section there is an intriguing chiasm. Notice this brief outline.
 - a. Chapter two—The four kingdoms to come
 - b. Chapter three—Deliverance from a pagan power
 - c. Chapter four—Judgment of a wicked ruler
 - d. Chapter five—Judgment of a wicked ruler
 - e. Chapter six—Deliverance from a pagan power
 - f. Chapter seven—The four kingdoms to come
- D. There is an impressive use of parallelism that also suggests a single author.
1. This is also another apocalyptic feature of the book. (Compare the similar concept in Revelation).
 2. One might say that the visions of chapter 2, 7, 8, 9, 10-12 make known different aspects of one big picture. The visions of chapters 7-12 could be prophetic overlays of the vision of chapter two (not that each spans the whole period of time of chapter two, but that each might be laid over some part of it to reveal more detail about the whole picture.)
- E. Each of these structural components adds to our appreciation of the fact that this is the work of one author and not a compilation of many contributors. In addition, it suggests a thematic

outline of the book as a whole.

1. God's sovereignty demonstrated in the lives of His faithful people (chapters 1-6).
2. God's sovereignty predicted in visions to His faithful people (chapters 7-12).

III. Relation of Daniel seven to the theme of the book and the second division in particular.

- A. In the vision of Daniel seven we see the declaration of the most important lesson of the entire book of Daniel—that God rules in and over the kingdoms of men. Here that truth is amplified by showing, that even when it appears that the kingdoms of men are succeeding against the kingdom of God, that such merely waits for God's own judgment to take place to rectify the situation. Hence, the power of God's rule implies the victory of His kingdom and those who are a part of it.
- B. If we think of Israel as the contemporary manifestation of the kingdom of God in Daniel's day, we may from this perspective see that Israel must experience in the future, just as it has in the past, a purification through the experience of conflict with the pagan world. This conflict would remove its unworthy citizens and prepare the remaining ones for the victory that gives them the reign over all kingdoms of men through their Christ. In this division of Daniel, we see that from this process will emerge a new kingdom of people of all nations whose God is the Lord and whose trust is in Him for everlasting dominion. Moreover we see the overthrow of all earthly powers that would vie for this dominion.
- C. It is appropriate then that these visions should have been given to the Hebrew children in exile. For they were experiencing in the present the principles upon which God would deal with His people in the future.
 1. God had used the Babylonians as an agent of wrath upon the sinful Israelite nation. Through this judgment, He had preserved a faithful remnant (symbolized in Revelation as the glorious woman of chapter 12) from whom would come the Messiah (the Lamb in Revelation) and subsequently numerous "offspring" from among the nations.
 2. God demonstrated through the faithful remnant His power to preserve and exalt His people in the midst of an unbelieving and hostile world. Through the faithfulness of God's people, pagan rulers were led to confess the sovereignty of the God of Israel. And finally, those very pagan powers that God had used for His purposes were overthrown that His sovereign purpose for Israel might be accomplished.
 3. It was these very principles that would provide hope for the nation in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. For in the future, God would use the pagan power of Rome to bring to consummation His indignation against the sinful nation. From this conflict, God would deliver for Himself a faithful remnant who would reign through the Messiah. The prophecy of Daniel anticipates the progressive victory of this kingdom over all world powers.

IV. What did Daniel see? (Textual insights into the vision)

- A. Introduction to the vision (7:1)
 1. The date of the vision was 553 BC during the co-regency of Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar. Daniel was approximately 67 years old and Israel had been in captivity for several decades.
 2. This revelation of God came in the form of a "dream". To underscore this, emphasis is placed upon the fact that this dream is a "vision seen" and "written in substance (Heb. "rosh") for future reference and verification.

B. The beasts coming up out of the sea (7:2-7)

1. The sea seems to represent here society, the providential birthplace of nations and kingdoms of men. The sea is “the earth” from which the kingdoms of men and Satan arise (Dan. 7:17). The sea may be chosen as the symbol because of its noise and instability (Cf. Is. 17:20; Ps. 65:7).
2. The “winds of heavens” are perhaps the agencies of God’s providential rule in the world. The number four represents the compass points and suggests the completeness or universality of God’s rule. The OT makes clear God’s involvement in the activities of the nations (Is. 10:5-16; 45:1-13; Jer. 27:5-7; 2 Chron. 36:22-23).
3. These creatures are intended to instill fear into the heart of the reader.
 - a. The imagery is common to OT prophecy (See Eze. 29:3; Is. 27:1; Ps. 68:31; 74:13; 80:14)
 - b. It is interesting to compare this vision with the one in Daniel 2.
 - 1) The vision of Daniel 2 (given to Nebuchadnezzar) presents the kingdoms of men in terms of their human glory and wealth. The vision of Daniel 7 (given to a believer) reveals their true nature as kingdoms of Satan that do not honor God and that exist by dint of voracious conquest and fleshly desire (i.e. they are “beasts”).
 - 2) In both visions we may see decreasing moral deterioration along with increasing military strength. This may also be reflected in the decreasing value but increasing strength of the metals of the image in chapter two.
 - c. The first beast
 - 1) Like a winged lion—fierce and fast
 - 2) Plucked and made to stand like a man and given a human heart—a transition from a beastly nature to a more reasoned and respectful human one?
 - d. The second beast
 - 1) Like a bear raised up on its side—ready to devour more, does it convey unbalanced power?
 - 2) Having three ribs—Already successful in conquest; Do the three ribs represent conquered nations?
 - 3) Devour much meat—not satisfied and wanting more, allowed in God’s providence to acquire more territory?
 - e. The third beast
 - 1) Like a leopard with four wings on its back—speed and success in conquest in every direction
 - 2) Four heads—Seats of rule or control; significance of four (universal or literal?)
 - f. The fourth beast
 - 1) Unlike any earthly beast
 - 2) Iron teeth—great strength to conquer
 - 3) Ten horns—rulers or seats of power, number appears to be literal: “out of this

kingdom ten kings shall arise" (v. 24); Are they contemporaneous or successive?

C. The little horn (7:8)

1. "Arises after them" & "different from them"; a ruler coming up "among them" seems to suggest that the ten horns exist simultaneously and the little horn "arises after them" with a different attitude, not content to rule with others but to rule over others
2. Larger than its associates (v. 20) Uprooting three—Indicating increased or superior power as a ruler
3. Eyes like a man & uttering great boasts—Self-directed and proud, irreverent of God and the holy?
 - a. The interpretation suggest someone who "speaks against the Most High" (v. 25) and makes alterations in times and in law (arrogates to himself prerogatives of God?)
 - b. Time, times, and a half (3½ years? A symbolic time period?)
4. Wages war with the saints and overpowers them (v. 21) and wears them down (v. 25)

D. The judgment scene (7:9-14)

1. Thrones are a symbol of authority and judgment
2. Ancient of Days surrounded with images of fire suggest one of wisdom, glory, and justice; it is presumed in Hebrew thought that such a being would be the Creator and Judge of the whole earth.
3. Books symbolize records of man's conduct or laws that must be enforced or both
4. The slaying of the beast and his throwing into fire a symbol of judgment and extinction. The other beasts are granted an extended life through absorption into the next kingdom.
5. One like a son of man—human? possibly not human but human like; possessing human qualities as opposed to beastly ones (i.e. one of reason and respect worthy of rule); a symbol for God's people? (later judgment is given in favor of "the saints" and dominion is given to them, v. 22, 27) Could it be their dominion is associated with the kingdom of the Highest one, i.e. they reign as He reigns?

E. In sum what Daniel saw was a horrifying portrayal of the conflict between an incredibly destructive world power and God's people. He saw the alarming success of an ungodly ruler whose power could only be broken by the intervention of God. The message, though alarming, was ultimately assuring. He saw ultimate victory for the "saints of the most high." He saw that God's kingdom would be victorious.

F. But when and how were these prophecies fulfilled or do they reveal the events of a future time? The critical questions now are:

1. What do these four beasts represent?
2. Who is the "little horn"?
3. What is the nature of the conflict between him and "the saints"?
4. Who is the "son of man"?
5. When did the "judgment" of the "little horn" take place?
6. What is the nature of the reign of the "son of man" or "the saints"?

V. Summary and brief evaluation of various interpretations of Daniel seven**A. The Liberal View**

1. Summary of the viewpoint
 - a. This view explains Daniel, not as predictive prophecy, but as an after-the-fact “revelation” to encourage God’s people in a time of oppression. This interpretation operates from an anti-supernatural bias that seeks out a naturalistic explanation for the vision. It is presumed that the book can not anticipate history. Instead it is an ancient writers’ attempt to give hope to a downtrodden people by urging them to believe that the end of their sufferings is near by reviewing history up to his point in time (inaccurately at times) and then proposing his own “prophecy” of victory for the near future based on the hope of success.
 - b. It is interesting that this view, adopted by many professing Christians, is essentially the position of a third century unbeliever named Porphyry (232-c. 305) who contended that the book of Daniel was a pseudepigraphal creation of an individual from the Maccabean period. (Jerome’s commentary on Daniel appears to have been a published response to Porphyry’s skeptical position.) Many commentaries continue to build their work on this position which was advocated by the German critical school of the late 19th century.
2. Interpretation of the vision of Daniel seven
 - a. Expositors of this view generally date the book of Daniel in the inter-testamental period (c. 166 BC) and affirm that an unknown writer, seeking to encourage his contemporaries in the midst of the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. They affirm that the author simply reviews material from ancient Babylon that shows Hebrews demonstrating great faith against oppressive world powers to encourage the same in his own time. In addition, the author then invents “visions” that bridge the gap to the writers’ present day in order to show that all events up to his time have proceeded under God’s control. Now the writer speaks cryptically of the “end” being near to encourage his contemporaries to remain faithful in the midst of severe persecution or opposition.
 - b. It is affirmed that the writer ignorantly considers the Median and Persian empires as two separate consecutive empires. Thus, the fourth empire in sequence is the Greek empire and the little horn of that empire is Antiochus Epiphanes who arose to power in the aftermath of Alexander’s death.
 - c. Montgomery writes: “After any possible ‘analogy of Scripture’, and indeed any possible interpretation of a book regarded as a unit, the atheistic and inhuman personage described in 11:21ff, who fully corresponds to the role of Epiphanes, the tyrannical persecutor of the Religion and forerunner of the idea of the Antichrist, must be identical with the similar personage described 8:24ff, a king in ‘the latter time of the kingdom’ of ‘Greece’ as is specified in 5:21; and again with ‘the little horn’ of the fourth Beast of the first vision, 7:7ff.” This comment reflects the viewpoint that the visions of Daniel 7-12 are primarily written after the fact and are introduced to urge faithfulness in view of the expected demise of Antiochus. (*International Critical Commentary*)
 - d. Ironically, even some very conservative scholars have opted for the modernistic explanation of Daniel 7 while ignoring the philosophical basis for the explanation. Foy Wallace in “God’s Prophetic Word” suggested that the “little horn” of Daniel 7 was Antiochus Epiphanes.

3. Evaluation

- a. Belief in supernatural predictive prophecy is interwoven with our fundamental conceptions of who God is. His ability to declare what shall be furnishes to man proof of both His existence and divinity (Is. 41:22-23).
- b. In addition, our belief in the inspiration of Daniel's words hinges upon our faith in Jesus Christ and the evidence that supports His claims to be God. Jesus himself appeals to the prophecy of Daniel as a prophetic source for the fact that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Mt. 24:15).

B. **The Amillennial View**

1. Summary of the viewpoint

- a. The amillennial viewpoint rejects the idea of a literal millennium (1000 year reign of Jesus on earth). However, amillennialists (like premillennialists) anticipate the coming of a future Antichrist whose persecutions will be brought to an end by the second coming of Christ.

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

- a. Amillennialists generally reject the preterist explanations of Daniel seven and affirm that there is yet to be a literal fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. They consider the ten horns to be future powers that will arise from the ancient Roman empire and the little horn to be the Antichrist.
- b. Jerome wrote, "We should therefore concur with the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian church, that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is to be destroyed, there shall be ten kings who will partition the Roman world amongst themselves" (p. 77). Then an insignificant eleventh king will arise, who will overcome three of the ten kings, that is, the king of Egypt, and the king of Africa, and the king of Ethiopia...." Jerome equated this little horn with the man of sin of 2 Thes. 2 and referred to him as "Antichrist". Jerome even thought that the Jews of his day agreed with him that the "king of the north" of Daniel 11 was an anti-typical correspondent to Antiochus who would in the future desecrate the temple. However, Jerome was not a premillennialists. In his comments on Daniel 7 he says, "Away, then, with the fable about a millennium!"
- c. This viewpoint has continued to be represented in many expositors through the centuries perhaps in part through Jerome's influence. In the 19th-20th centuries a number of conservative scholars have embraced this amillennial position including Pusey, Keil, and E.J. Young. They each have regarded the fulfillment of the ten-horns and the little horn that will arise among them to be in the future.
- d. Keil wrote: "...finally, as in the Apocalypse the first six heads of the beast are referred to the world-powers that have hitherto appeared in history: so may also the prophecy of the seven heads and the ten horns of the beast perhaps yet so fulfill itself in the future, that the anti-christian world-power may reach its completion in ten rulers who receive power as kings one hour with the beast, i.e., as companions and helpers of Antichrist, carry on war for a while against the Lord and His saints, till at the appearance of the Lord to judgment they shall be destroyed, together with the beast and the dragon" (*Daniel*, p. 282-283).

3. Evaluation

- a. This view has the luxury of postponing verification due to its futuristic viewpoint.

The issue is whether or not there is a past fulfillment that satisfies the details of the prophecy. The advocates of this position have been conservative and respectable scholars. One can be sympathetic to their difficulty of finding a precise literal fulfillment of Daniel seven that satisfies all expositors in all details of the text.

- b. However, it may be possible that there is a satisfactory partial-preterist interpretation, which we shall explore.

C. The Premillennial View

1. Summary of viewpoint

- a. Premillennialists affirm that Jesus will return before a thousand year reign among the Jewish people known as the millennium. This interpretation sees the completed fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in the future appearance of the Antichrist arising out of a revived Roman empire. They contend that there has not been any literal historical fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies; therefore, we must still look for a future fulfillment.

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

- a. The "little horn" of Daniel seven is equated with the "king of the North" in 11:36ff and made the futuristic Antichrist of the NT and the sea beast of the book of Revelation. It is believed that he will arise from a revived Roman empire (the ten horns). Ten nations of the European Common Market are commonly suggested as a possible contemporary fulfillment of the "ten horns". In their view the fourth empire is the Roman empire; but it exists in two stages.
 - 1) Jamieson, Faucet and Brown wrote: "The ten kingdoms, therefore, prefigured by the ten 'toes' (Daniel 2:41; Compare Revelation 13:1 17:12), are the ten kingdoms into which Rome shall be found finally divided when Antichrist shall appear [TREGELLES]. These, probably, are prefigured by the number ten being the prevalent one at the chief turning points of Roman history.... The 'little horn,' in his view, is to be Antichrist rising three and a half years before Christ's second advent, having first overthrown three of the ten contemporaneous kingdoms, into which the fourth monarchy, under which we live, shall be finally divided. Popery seems to be a fulfillment of the prophecy in many particulars, the Pope claiming to be God on earth and above all earthly dominions; but the spirit of Antichrist prefigured by Popery will probably culminate in ONE individual, to be destroyed by Christ's coming; He will be the product of the political world powers, whereas Popery which prepares His way, is a Church become worldly."
 - 2) Walvoord, one of the most prominent but more reserved voices of modern premillennialism writes about 11:36ff: "The passage therefore is to be considered as contemporaneous with the climax of chapter 2, the destruction of the image, and the destruction of the little horn of Daniel 7, a period described in the book of Revelation, chapters 6-19. The king described in v. 36-39 of Daniel 11 and the events of the subsequent verses therefore have nothing to do with the second century bc and are entirely future and unfulfilled." ("Daniel, key to prophetic revelation", p. ?)

3. Evaluation

- a. The premillennial scheme is fraught with numerous contradictions to the simple statements of Scripture that the Messianic kingdom has been established. Its fun-

damental thesis, that Christ's failure to set up the kingdom calling for a prophetic gap (the church age), contradicts the Biblical statement of the church's role in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10). Its practical scheme demands multiple personal coming of Christ and multiple resurrections from the dead in contradiction to the simpler and more forthright NT statements that Christ will return and that all the dead will be raised at the "last day" (Jn. 6:44; 1 Thes. 4:13ff; Jn. 12:48; 1 Cor. 15:22-26)

D. The Post-Millennial View

1. Summary of the viewpoint

- a. Post-millennialists affirm that Jesus will return after a millennium. This view was popular among aggressive anti-papists in the post-reformation era (such as Adam Clark) as well as in our spiritual heritage (such as Alexander Campbell). Typically post-millennialists believe that the Roman Catholic church (the papacy) is an extension of the ancient Roman empire and is to be identified with the "little horn" of Daniel 7 as well as the false prophet of Revelation 13.

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

- a. In commenting on the little horn's war with the saints, Adam Clark wrote in his commentary on Daniel, "Those who make Antiochus the little horn, make the saints the Jewish people. Those who understand the popedom by it, see this as referring to the cruel persecutions of the popes of Rome against the Waldenses and Albigenses, and the Protestant Church in general."
- b. Later he expressed his own view of the little horn whose mouth uttered great boasts: "To none can this apply so well or so fully as to the popes of Rome. They have assumed infallibility, which belongs only to God. They profess to forgive sins, which belongs only to God. They profess to open and shut heaven, which belongs only to God. They profess to be higher than all the kings of the earth, which belongs only to God. And they go beyond God in pretending to loose whole nations from their oath of allegiance to their kings, when such kings do not please them! And they go against God when they give indulgences for sin. This is the worst of all blasphemies!" (Clarke's OT Commentary)
- c. Clark considered the "time, times, and a half a time" as equivalent to 1260 years: "If the papal power, as a horn or temporal power, be intended here, which is most likely, (and we know that that power was given in 755 to Pope Stephen 2. by Pepin, king of France,) counting one thousand two hundred and sixty years from that, we are brought to A.D. 2015, about one hundred and ninety years from the present [A.D. 1825.]"

3. Evaluation

- a. Though the post-millennial view continues to have advocates among brethren today (for example, Wayne Jackson), it demands that the Roman Catholic church be seen as the "false prophet" and the contemporaneous partner of the "sea beast" (the Roman empire). Though a source of persecution to some, it does not appear that the papacy per se satisfies the evidence of the book of Revelation nor Daniel. It appears to me that the "sea beast" and "land beast" must be contemporaneous partners rather than successors as this position demands.
- b. It appears that the seven heads of the beast of Revelation thirteen are "seven kings" five of whom had already fallen (Rev. 17:9-11). The land beast or false prophet

appears to be a contemporary assistant to the sea beast (Cf. Rev. 13:12-14).

E. The Late-Date Preterist (Or Partial-Preterist) View

1. Summary of viewpoint

- a. Among brethren, there has been in this century a strong aversion to premillennial thought due to the controversies earlier in the 20th century. Homer Hailey, following a number denominational scholars, popularized among brethren the late-date position for Revelation and a more symbolic interpretation of the book and for the similar passages in Daniel. This view sees the fulfillment of Daniel and Revelation in the Roman empire and its conflict with the church during the first few centuries of its existence. Scholars differ on whether the “new Jerusalem” now exists or whether the imagery will only be fulfilled in the eternal kingdom of God in heaven.

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

- a. This view associates Daniel 7 along with Revelation as descriptive of the Roman persecutions under Emperor Domitian and perhaps other subsequent persecutors of the church.
- b. Butler contends that the fourth beast is the Roman empire and its ten horns are the Caesars from Augustus through Titus. He considers Domitian to be the “little horn” who waged war with the saints. This viewpoint reflects a late date for Revelation and the belief that the principle concern of that book is to expand upon the persecutions of Domitian. (Bible Textbook Series. Daniel, College Press).
- c. McGuiggan wrote: “The little horn is Domitian. There’s no doubt that Domitian was of the fourth beast. Neither is there doubt that he was the eleventh emperor.” (*The Book Of Daniel*, p. 109).

3. Evaluation

- a. The late date view of Revelation has been embraced by a number of conservative scholars. It makes a serious attempt to deal with the language of the book of Daniel and Revelation. Not all would be satisfied with the explanation of some of the more specific statements intended to identify the characters of Revelation (for example the harlot of chapter 17 or the seven heads of the beast). In more recent times, this viewpoint has been questioned more seriously and an early date for the composition of Revelation is being considered again.
- b. It is interesting to note Jerome’s comment that “the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian church” was that Daniel and Revelation had their fulfillment in a future antichrist. This fact is especially important in view of the fact that many of those commentators were living in the period of the Roman persecution of the church; yet they did not see these events as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel or Revelation!

F. The Symbolic View

1. Summary of Viewpoint

- a. Adherents to this view propose that the fact that Daniel’s message is couched in symbolism suggests that we should seek out a symbolic interpretation and not look for a specific historical fulfillment.
- b. Some affirm that the symbolic message is fulfilled again and again until the final

judgment.

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

- a. The book of Daniel reveals in its vision of chapter 7 the progressive degeneration of man in his earthly achievements. His empires may grow stronger, but also more evil. As such, they become the antithesis of what God seeks for His creation and inevitably conflict arises. Daniel's message is that the dominion of God will prevail. He, as Lord and Creator of all, will remove all earthly powers, however impressive or powerful, and will superintend the establishment and increase of His divine rule in the earth culminating in the final judgment.
- b. Baldwin gives what seems to be a symbolic interpretation to the book and asks this pointed question, "If, therefore, our western minds want a yes-or-no answer to the question we ourselves pose, 'What does the fourth kingdom stand for?', we may be asking the wrong kind of question." (*Tyndale OT Commentary on Daniel*, p. 68).

3. Evaluation

- a. I am not totally convinced that we must leave our interpretation at this level, though we all need to be cautioned about the tendency to become "boxed in" by a commitment to a particular historical fulfillment. In most of Daniel, it is clear that the symbols are more than mere general symbols of evil government or righteous people. They are more specific to place and time. In virtually all parts of the book we see that numbers are not being used symbolically but rather point to literal rulers or kingdoms represented by the symbolic number. The revealers of these visions take the time to make known to Daniel who they are talking about in a real historical context: "You are the king of gold...". So, even though we may not answer all questions, it appears that there was at least some real historical fulfillment of the message that demonstrates the larger message of God's sovereign control over world affairs and the victory of God's cause over all the kingdoms of men (and of Satan).
- b. It appears that the great majority of expositors through the centuries have considered the book to contain precise historical information and have approached the book from that standpoint. However, the symbolic interpretation may be attractive to those frustrated by the many contradictory viewpoints. One can surely appreciate the importance of not allowing the message of the book to be lost in the details of expounding particular features of the vision. This we should all be careful not to do.

G. An Early-Date Partial Preterist View

1. Summary of the viewpoint

- a. In the late 1800's there were a number of commentators who set forth a early-date preterist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. They contended that these books concerned the fall of the Jewish state and the Roman empire. Among brethren, this view has influenced the commentaries of F.E. Wallace and the late Art Ogden. Like the late-date partial-preterist viewpoint, it suggests that almost all of Daniel and Revelation have been fulfilled in the conflict between the Roman empire and the nation of Israel culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It differs from the late date in the explanation of who the primary antagonists of the book are.
- b. In addition, there are also a number of full-preterist interpreters who advocate a

“realized eschatology” and contend that the final coming of Christ also occurred in AD 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. (I do not hold this view; but since it is a full-preterist view based on an early date I want to mention it here.)

2. Interpretation of Daniel seven

a. Theological background of the prophecy

- 1) I would like to suggest that Daniel seven, in parallel with Daniel 2, reveals in prophetic form the developing progress of God’s plan to establish His kingdom in the world through the Messiah. From ancient times, God had established His kingdom among men in the nation of Israel. They were chosen by Him to be a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19) who would honor Him as their king. When they rejected Him and sought earthly kings like the nations, He allowed them to suffer the consequences of this choice and taught them to yearn for an ideal deliverer-king. This king, the hope of the prophets, would be both God and man, the Messiah of OT Scripture. His coming would bring about the world-wide dominion of God’s kingdom through the Messiah’s rule over the nations. The Jewish people were the primary spiritual heirs of this Messianic kingdom; but the expectation was that people of all nations would submit to Messiah’s rule.
- 2) The prophecy of Daniel seven predicts the fulfillment of God’s promise to establish His kingdom among the nations through the Messiah. However, God’s purpose would not be accepted without resistance among the empires of men. The Roman empire would wage war with the holy people seeking to prevent world domination by the Messiah’s kingdom. But God’s sovereign purpose for the nations would be achieved as the Messiah’ kingdom conquered the world.
- 3) It is important to see that it was not merely the physical nation that constituted the true kingdom of God of the OT, but those whose lives truly reflected the dominion of God. Hence, in God’s purpose it was necessary not only that the Messiah appear to His people, but that he purge the nation of its unworthy subjects, preparing a people to share His rule. The challenge to the nation would be to repent and enjoy the victory of Messiah’s rule (Mt. 3:2) or remain impenitent and perish from the earth (Mt. 23:37-39), missing the expected fulfillment of victory over the enemy through the Messiah.
- 4) At the same time, the Messiah’s rule would reach the nations. The new Israel would embrace a “new covenant” that included men of all nations who constitute a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession among the nations. It is to this people that dominion would be given through the Messiah. And it is this kingdom that would reign forever.

b. A brief explanation of the message of Daniel seven

- 1) Four empires to come-In the progress of events toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose, there would be four world powers to arise--the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. During the days of the fourth empire God’s expected Messiah would arise and establish His kingdom. However, the formal declaration of the Messiah as king is not the same as the vindication of the king’s claims to be Lord of all and the establishment of His dominion over all enemy powers. The king must overthrow all of His enemies to truly establish His kingdom.

- 2) Conflict between the fourth empire and the kingdom of God—God clearly reveals that the fourth world power, the apex of human strength for evil would contest the claims of God’s appointed ruler for Israel. This would be a war to the death. Out of the allied strength of the empire (the ten horns) there would arise a dictator who would rule over the empire. Daniel foresees the inevitable conflict between this representative of the empire and the kingdom of God manifest in the nation of Israel. The book of Revelation amplifies and explains this conflict between the Roman empire and the kingdom of God as manifest in Israel. God would use the Roman empire to remove from the nation those unworthy of the promised kingdom. However, he could not succeed against the purposes of God to establish the kingdom of His Messiah.
 - 3) The establishment of the kingdom of God through the Messiah—Though the Roman empire might be used by God as an agent of judgment upon those unworthy to be a part of Messiah’s kingdom, the power of Rome could not prevail against the Messiah and the true Israel that would emerge from this conflict. Indeed, the fall of the Roman empire would bring about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel and all those who had joined with them in faith in the Messiah.
- c. Rationale behind this viewpoint
- 1) The most natural interpretation of the “saints” in the OT would be the Jewish people as those having been set apart and belonging to God. Israel was in OT prophecy the seat of the kingdom of God on earth. OT prophecy consistently portrays the Jewish Messiah as bringing victory of the kingdom of God over all earthly kingdoms.
 - 2) The kingdom of God as manifest in the nation of Israel was not merely a physical people but a spiritual people. The book of Daniel (along with other OT passages) predicts a purging of the nation of its unworthy citizens in anticipation of the victorious kingdom (Dan. 9:25ff). The later visions of Daniel involving God’s indignation upon Israel’s sins are to be seen in context as a necessary part of the purpose of God for His kingdom. The destruction of Jerusalem makes clear the distinction between the physical nation and the true kingdom of God. Out of it emerged a holy people delivered from the empire to live in the excited anticipation of “the new Jerusalem” coming on the heels of the Messiah’s victories over all enemies.
 - 3) The destruction of Jerusalem itself is predicted in Daniel as part of God’s purpose to possess a holy and victorious people. Interestingly, Jesus saw the destruction of Jerusalem as bringing into existence in a fuller way the “kingdom of God” (Lk. 21:31).
 - 4) The visions of Daniel then constitute a series of prophetic overlays that explain each other. In the prophesies of Daniel 11-12 the abominations of Antiochus Epiphanes serve as an anti-typical prophecy of the conflict between Rome and Israel as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God.
 - a) Interestingly, Jesus appropriated the expression “abomination that makes desolate” which comes from the description of Jerusalem’s persecutions by Antiochus as a term to describe the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan. 11:31). There appears to be a clue as to this anti-typical relationship in the parenthetical explanation of Matthew as he records the Lord’s quota-

tion of Daniel and cautions, “let the reader understand” (Mt. 24:15). It is apparent that Daniel’s prophecy per se concerns the Maccabean period; yet in some sense it anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem. In this sense, this “little horn” of Daniel 8 bears an anti-typical relationship to the “little horn” of Daniel 7.

- b) Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, believed that Daniel had prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem and thus equated the fourth empire with the Roman empire: “And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel’s vision, and what he wrote many years before they came to pass. In the very same manner **Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them.**” (Antiquities X.11)
 - 5) The relationship between Daniel and the book of Revelation have prompted this juxtaposed study of the two together. Virtually all students of Revelation present will see the significant connections between Daniel’s prophecy and the beast of Revelation 13. We must forge an explanation that does justice to the details of both books and satisfies the evidence given by the Holy Spirit. The book of Revelation speaks with an urgency that fits very well with the idea that the central message of the book concerns the fulfillment of the mystery of God concerning Israel (Rev. 1:1; 10:7).
- d. An interpretation of the principle features of Daniel seven
- 1) The lion is the kingdom of **Babylon**.
 - a) Cf. the parallel to the first vision and God’s own explanation, viz., “you are the head of gold” (2:38).
 - b) Cf. Jeremiah’s comparison of Nebuchadnezzar to both a lion and eagle (Jer. 49:19-22).
 - c) Ancient nations often employed the winged lion as a symbol of its conquering power (Cf. inscriptions from Assyria and the lions on the Ishtar gate).
 - d) Recall the incident of Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation (Dan. 4) and the somewhat corrected perspective it gave the monarch (Dan. 4:34-37). Perhaps this experience is symbolized in the plucking of the beasts feathers, being made to stand upright, and being given “the heart of a man”.
 - 2) The bear is the **Medo-Persian** empire
 - a) Cf. the parallel explanation in 2:29 (“another kingdom inferior to you” and
 - b) Note chapter 8:20 (“the kings of Media and Persia” represent one entity). Notice that in Daniel they are treated as one (Dan. 6:15).
 - c) The three ribs may symbolize conquered nations like Lydia, Egypt, and Babylonia.
 - 3) The leopard is the kingdom of **Greece**.
 - a) Consider the parallel explanation in 2:39 (“a third kingdom that will rule over all the earth”) and in 8:21 (“the kingdom of Greece”).

- b) The “four wings of a bird” suggest the incredible speed with which Alexander conquered the world.
 - c) The “four heads” appear to represent the kingdoms into which the Greek empire eventually was to break up after Alexander’s death. Cf. Dan. 8:22 (“four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power”). Initially, the kingdom of Alexander was divided among his generals: Ptolemy (Egypt), Antigonus (Asia), Cassander (Macedonia), Lysimachus (Thrace). After Antigonus’ death, Syria and Palestine were given to Seleucus. These spheres of political influence continued until the formation of the next world empire, the Roman.
- 4) The ten-horned beast is the **Roman empire**.
- a) Notice the parallel with chapter 2 identifying the beast with that time when the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Lk. 3:1-3; Mt. 3:1-2).
 - b) Notice that the beast of Revelation 13 is also a ten-horned beast. It is also likened in various aspects to the features of a leopard, bear, and lion, the images under which the predecessors of the beast of Daniel 7 are also described (Rev. 13:2).
 - c) It seems best to treat the ten kings as contemporary rather than consecutive. In this sense, Daniel and Revelation 17 share this common feature. The ten-horns of Revelation are contemporaneous “kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour” (Rev. 17:12). Later they are said to “hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire” (Rev. 17:16). In some way they join with the beast (who seems to represent at this juncture in Revelation one of the Caesars) in fulfilled the words of God in giving their “kingdom” to the beast.
- 5) The little horn is the **Roman emperor** (Vespasian)
- a) In Daniel the little horn represents the sole power of the emperor who used this power against the people of God. He stands in contrast to the 10-horns who were the vassal states represented in the Roman Republic and the two triumvirates (referred to the statement about the little horn who “before which three fell”) who brought the vassal kingdoms under their dominion. What Daniel sees in general outline, Revelation describes in more precise detail in keeping with the promise made to him that “knowledge would increase”.
 - b) The description of Daniel’s “little horn” coincides with the more specific description of the “beast who comes up out of the abyss” in Rev. 13 and is later identified as an “eighth king” who is “of the seven”. It appears then that the “little horn” may more specifically be identified with one of the Roman Caesars. In Revelation this Caesar was slain and “came to life” or returned “from the abyss”. His number is that of his predecessor Nero (666). He is Nero coming back to life. The reference seems to be to the re-institution of Nero’s policies toward the Jewish people by Vespasian after the period of the barracks emperors.
 - c) After holding for many years the late date for Revelation, I have, in more

recent years, found more compelling the evidence for the early date. In addition, I offer some alternative explanations for the Revelation texts that may satisfy the evidence from both Daniel and Revelation.

- 1] The seven heads of Revelation are indicated to be successive rulers of the empire. I believe that we are given a historical time reference for defining who these rulers are. In the vision of Rev. 13 we see that the beast is raised for Satan's purposes **after the ascension of the man-child to God's throne**. Hence the heads of the beast perhaps are to be counted not from Julius or Augustus as has been commonly done but from Tiberius, who was king when the beast was raised up for Satan's purposes. By the time John saw the revelation five had fallen (Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba). One was ruling (Otho) and another was to rule a short time (Vitellius). The eighth king in this succession, Vespasian, was to resume the war with Israel. He is "one of the seven" in this sense that he is Nero revived, i.e. he continues the prosecution of the war with Israel.
- 6) The ten horns are the **vassal kings** who shared dominion with the emperor after the triumvirate.
 - a) In Daniel the ten horns are as they are in Revelation the vassal kings of the Roman empire. In Daniel the "little horn" presents the emperor who was to be the source of the war with Israel. (In Revelation the "little horn" is more specifically identified as a Nero revived, who continues the war with Israel. In other words, Vespasian.)
 - b) In Daniel the three horns that are uprooted seems to suggest the transition in the Roman government from republic to triumvirate to emperor. This feature of Daniel's vision is not enlarged upon in Revelation because it is now a moot point in the drama. The vision of Revelation takes place historically after this transition is made. The vassal kingdoms (ten horns) still exist under the reign of the "seven heads" but the triumvirate has give way to the sole reign of the emperor.
 - c) Notice that the dominion of the beasts was taken away, each being replaced by a successor. However, the judgment of the final beast did not bring to an end to all earthly powers. In one sense, the ten horns represented powers that were yet to establish themselves as successors to the beast. These are the powers that ruled on earth in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman empire, but none of which could be called a world empire as the four great empires of Daniel 2 & 7.
- 7) The war with the saints
 - a) This vision should be interpreted in view of the OT division of Israel vs. the pagan world. Israel (and Jerusalem in particular) was chosen to be the seat of God's kingdom on earth. It was to Israel that a king and earthly dominion was promised; and it was to Israel that the kingdom was restored in keeping with the prophecies of the Messiah. However, it is important to see that God's dominion through Israel was always conditioned upon faithfulness to His covenant. Those in violation of the covenant were never the intended heirs of the Messianic kingdom. Instead

the promise was always reserved for God's "holy ones", that is, those who were faithful to Him! They are the true Israel of God; and included with them are those who are made a part of the nation through the Messiah's work, the believing Gentiles. We can see them in the symbolism of Revelation in chapter twelve in "the radiant woman" and "the rest of her offspring".

- b) Notice these texts where Israel is referred to by the expression "qaddish-in" (holy ones). Twice in Daniel the expression "holy" is used to describe the OT people of God (Dan. 8:24; 12:7). In fact in the constitution of the nation it was God's purpose that Israel be a "holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).
- c) God revealed to Daniel this conflict between the pagan powers and God's people (identified from the OT perspective as his true Israel or "saints"). What Daniel foresees is the attempt of the pagan world, the fourth kingdom in particular, to overthrow God's purpose for Israel to establish His kingdom through the Messiah.
- d) The beast is allowed to succeed but only for a short time (time, times, and half a time).
 - 1] Note the comparable periods in Revelation 11-13.
 - a] The period in which the holy city is trampled by the nations (42 months)—Rev. 11:2
 - b] The period of the beasts war with the saints (42 months)—Rev. 13:5-7)
 - c] The period in which the witnesses of God prophecy in sack-cloth (1260 days)—Rev. 11:3
 - d] The period of protection of the woman from the dragon's power (1260 days)—Rev. 12:6
 - e] While Satan seeks to destroy God's people with false doctrine, God protects them and uses them to testify of the coming kingdom. When their testimony is completed, Satan uses the Roman empire to destroy God's people while God uses it to judge the unrepentant among wicked.
 - 2] The time of pagan domination is important in God's purpose. It is a manifestation of God's indignation toward His unrepentant people. The desolation of Jerusalem serves an important purpose. Through the period of Gentile success, God is separating His true people, the true spiritual Israel, from the physical nation. It is interesting that later when John describes God's purpose for his true Israel that they are delivered from this period of judgment for the same period of time.
- 8) Ancient of Days
 - a) The historical development of the nations has been under God's sovereign control. The time has come for a resolution of this world conflict and only the judge of the world can resolve it. Hence God takes His seat for judgment. The Roman's war with Israel has served its purpose and it

is time to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Cf. Ac. 1:6; Rev. 11:15-18).

9) The Son of Man

- a) The Son of Man is the Messiah promised to the Jewish people. He is the true king of the “saints” who have united with His kingdom and have been at war with the Gentile powers. While on earth, he promised His return “in the clouds” to punish the disobedient Jewish people.
- b) The time period of this “coming before the Ancient of Days” does not demand identification with Jesus’ exaltation to heaven. If so, then the “war waged by the little horn” also predates Pentecost (This is the view of Ogden in his appendix in “The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets”. Ogden then explains that the war with the saints refers to the conflicts between Rome and Jerusalem prior to the coronation of Jesus.). Rather it seems best to see this coming in the clouds as a part of the vision suggesting a time of judgment determined by God. To the apostles Jesus indicated that such “time and epochs” are fixed by the Father (Ac. 1:7).
- c) The identification with Jesus is based on several points:
 - 1] Jesus commonly used this self-designation (Mt. 24:30; 26:64; Mk. 13:26; Rev. 1:7)
 - 2] The action of “coming in the clouds” in Hebraistic thought suggests an act of God
 - 3] “All peoples” are said to serve Him (Dan. 7:14).

10) The judgment of the little horn

- a) Daniel sees God’s judgment on the Gentiles (i.e. the Romans) who have trampled the holy city and served as the agent of His wrath upon Israel. When this judgment takes place, there will remain God’s true Israel reigning through their Messiah! No wonder when John saw this vision he cried with joy, “Come, Lord Jesus!”
- b) What Daniel sees in the little horn is revealed in more detail in the vision of the harlot and beast of Revelation 13-17. In Revelation we see that the harlot (Jerusalem) has joined with the beast (the power of the emperors) to wage war with God’s true people.
- c) The message of Revelation is that both will come under God’s judgment and be destroyed. Emerging from these judgments will be God’s true Israel and kingdom who constitute the “new Jerusalem”.

11) The reign of the saints

- a) Through the Messiah, God’s kingdom is restored to Israel and the everlasting dominion promised them is fulfilled. It is not the physical nation however, but the spiritual seed of Abraham who have dominion through the Lord Jesus Christ. These constitute the new Jerusalem emerging from the destruction of the old. It is made up of only believing Jews and Gentiles.
- b) The kingdom of the Messiah was established upon His ascension to occupy the throne of David at God’s right hand. But his dominion is a pro-

gressive one that increases with the overthrow of all His enemies, culminating in the overthrow of death itself. Hence, the destruction of Jerusalem was another step in the advancement of the kingdom of God (Lk. 21:31).

- 12) Hence, Daniel is given a vision of the vindication of God's choice of Israel as His chosen people. Their Messiah will come and establish his everlasting and universal kingdom over them. However, we must be careful to distinguish between the true Israel of God of both testaments and the physical nation. Premillennialism interprets these texts with the physical nation in view. They should be interpreted with the spiritual nation in view.

VI. Practical lessons from Daniel 7

- A. The Scriptures affirm that God is in control of the birth and destiny of nations (Dan. 4:25; Ac. 17:26).
- B. Earthly governments are destined to fall because they by nature lack respect for God as creator. As "beasts" concerned only with the "flesh" they sow the seeds of their own destruction. (Psalm 9:17)
- C. The conflict between human kingdoms and God's kingdom is inevitable.
- D. The victory of God's kingdom over the forces of evil is certain.
- E. The kingdom is ultimately given to a certain kind of person. The beasts of Daniel stand in stark contrast to "one like the Son of Man" and those who follow him. It is interesting that Jesus' announcement of the gospel of the kingdom centers upon the character of those who will receive it! (Mt. 5-7). Victory for us is not guaranteed by membership in an organization, but in a Christ-like character!
- F. No matter how difficult life for the believer may be, Daniel 7 arises to comfort him. As a part of the seed of Abraham, we are heirs to the victory of the Messiah. No power on earth will be able to withstand His ultimate overthrow of all His enemies. Praise God! "We win!"

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Summary of Viewpoints on Daniel 7

Viewpoint	Liberal	Premillennial	Post-Millennial	Amillennial	Partial – Preterist (Late Date Rev.)	Partial-Preterist (Early Date Rev.)
Representative voices for the position	Porphyry, Montgomery	Walvoord, Wood	Clark, Campbell, Jackson	Jerome, Pusey, Keil, Leupold, Young	McGuiggan, Hailey, Butler	Ogden, Wallace, Chilton
The four kingdoms	Babylon, Media,	Babylon, Medo-Persian,	Babylon, Medo-Persian,	Babylon, Medo-Persian,	Babylon, Medo-Persian,	Babylon, Medo-Persian,

	Persia, Grecian em- pires	Greek, Roman (re- vived in mod- ern Europe)	Greek, Roman (re- vived in Roman Catholicism)	Greek, Roman (con- tinuing in his- torical stages)	Greek, Roman empire	Greek, Roman empire
“The Little horn”	Antiochus Ephiphanes	The future An- tichrist	The Papacy	Antichrist	Domitian	Vespasian
“Ten kings”	Various of An- tiochus’ prede- cessors	European Fed- eration (Anti- cipates future fulfillment)		Vassal king- doms or new forms of gov- ernment com- ing from Rome	Roman Caesars (Julian-Dom- itian omitting Galba, Otho, Vitellius)	Vassal king- doms of the Ro- man empire
“Son of Man”	Jewish people	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus

Note on the chart: These descriptions are general categories of approaches. There are possible variations among the various expositors as to details.

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