

The Dream of Four Great Beasts of Daniel 7

Aramaic¹

Dan. 7:1 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 this summary of it.²

Nebuchadnezzar ³	605-563 B.C.
Evil-Merodach (Man of Marduk), Neb.'s son	563-561 B.C.
General Neriglissar (E-M's brother-in-law)	561-556 B.C.
Labashi-Marduk, Neriglissar's son	556 B.C.
Nabonidus, leader of revolt against L-M	556-539 B.C.
Belshazzar, Son of Nabonidus	549-539 B.C.

Dan. 7:2 Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision at night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea."⁴

Dan. 7:3 "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another."⁵

Dan. 7:4 "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. In addition, a human mind (אֱנוֹשׁוּת אִלְמָוּת) (ἄνθρωπίνη καρδία) was given to it."⁶

¹ Daniel 1:1-2:4 is written in Hebrew, along with 8:1-12:13. The rest of Daniel, 2:5-7:28 is written in Aramaic.

² The first year of Belshazzar would be 549 B.C., when his father Nabonidus presented the authority of ruling Babylon to him while the father resided in Teima, an important Edomite city (see footnote below).

³ **Babylonian Persian (Mede) Greek Syrian Greek Egyptian Greek Roman** M.E. Messianic [Expositor's Bible Commentary – Nebuchadnezzar died in 563 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach ("Man of Marduk") (cf. 2 Kings 25). He was assassinated by his brother-in-law, General Neriglissar, two years later in 561 B.C. Neriglissar died five years later in 556 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk, who was murdered nine months later in 556 B.C. The revolt's leader, Nabonidus, who was not related to the royal family but married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, took over in 556 B.C. and ruled Babylon until its fall to the Persians in 539 B.C. However, during the last ten years of his life, he spent most of his time in Teima, an important Edomite city, and left the central control of the empire to his son, Belshazzar. The Persians, under Commander Ugbaru, diverted the waters of the Euphrates River in order to reduce its level flowing into Babylon and snuck into the city at night in September of 539 B.C., taking it by surprise. Belshazzar must have died that night (v. 30).]

⁴ Four winds of heaven = God's authoring the story. The sea = the sea of humanity at the time of these empires and in the Middle East. The book of Daniel seems more Middle Eastern centric than otherwise. Thus, all the rulers, kingdoms, and peoples spoken of in the dreams of the book of Daniel center not only in the Middle Eastern, but really on the land of Israel. In other words, the Jews really are the focal point of the book, and their land, which is surrounded by and sometimes swallowed up by Middle Eastern empires, kingdoms, and governments is the geographical center of the book, because the Jews and their land promised to them by God in Genesis 12-21 play the most significant role in the rule the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, on earth from the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem.

⁵ These four great beasts are four powerful empires or kingdoms, which correspond to the five kingdoms of the statue of Daniel 2, with the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 comprising the combination of the fourth and fifth kingdoms of Daniel 2.

The difference in each of these kingdoms is the ethnic/religious origin of their rulers—Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Islamic respectively.

⁶ As we find out later in the chapter and in the explanation of the dream, each beast is a kingdom that is ruled by a king. Thus, each kingdom is representative of mankind and the way he thinks in the midst of his moral depravity, i.e., in rebellion against God, culminating in the greatest example of this with the fourth beast.

This first beast is the Babylonian Empire, with Nebuchadnezzar's ruling it from 553-539 B.C.

The Babylonian Empire, specifically Nebuchanezzar 553-539 B.C.

Dan. 7:5 “Then, behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear, and it was raised up on one side. There were also three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. Thus, they said to it, ‘Arise, devour much meat!’

The Medo-Persian Empire, specifically Cyrus the Great⁷ 539-331 B.C.
Darius the Mede⁸ 539-530 B.C.

Dan. 7:6 “After this, I kept looking, and behold, another beast, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. This beast also had four heads, and a sovereign government was given to it.⁹

The Greek Empire 331-63 B.C.
Alexander the Great
Successors to Alexander the Great

Dan. 7:7 “After this, I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, there was a fourth beast, dreadful, terrifying, and extremely strong. Also, it had large iron teeth, with which it devoured and grinded. Whatever was left, it trampled with its feet, so that it was different from all the beasts that were before it. Plus, it had ten horns.¹⁰

⁷ The Medo-Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great (559-529 B.C.) and his son Cambyses (529-523 B.C.) conquered the Lydian Kingdom in Asia Minor (Turkey) in 546 B.C., the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C., and the Egyptian Empire in 525 B.C. These would be the three ribs in the beast’s mouth. Plus, the Persian Empire sought to expand as much as possible, even into Greece.

⁸ This is not the same as Darius the Great, i.e., Darius Hystaspis, who ruled Persia from 522-485 B.C. Apparently, there is no explicit evidence outside the Bible for this man, but he is most likely a “king” of Median descent, who was appointed ruler of the Babylonian region by Cyrus the Great, much like Herod the Great and his sons who were appointed by the Roman Senate and Emperors as rulers of the area of Israel and granted the title “king.” The word *dara* means king in Avestan Persian, allowing us to conclude that Darius was an honorific title much like even the Hebrew Messiah.

⁹ Eventually, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great not only takes over the Middle East, but Alexander even rules it from the Middle East by virtue of the fact that he kept leading his army farther and farther away from home. Indeed, Alexander never saw his home again and died in Babylon in 323 B.C. Therefore, this Greek Empire is definitely Middle Eastern centric, even though its leader is Greek.

After Alexander’s death, this kingdom ended up with “four heads,” i.e., four divided kingdoms, two of which played a prominent role in the Middle East and in regard to the land of Israel.

¹⁰ Some commentators interpret the ten horns as a confederation of ten states, e.g., the European Union. Another possibility is ten ruthless rulers during the time of the Roman Empire (27 B.C. – A.D. 395). In the light of interpreting the fourth and fifth kingdoms of the statue of Daniel 2 as the Islamic Caliphate, it makes more sense to see this fourth beast with ten horns as referring also to the Islamic Caliphate. However, this representation of it skips dividing it into two different time periods like the Daniel 2 statue. Instead, the focus in this dream will be on the eleventh horn in v. 8. Nevertheless, this beast, like the fourth and fifth kingdoms of the Daniel 2 statue, has as part of its description the metal iron—“large iron teeth.” With its iron teeth, this beast grinds up its opponents as a result of its incalculable intolerance of differing views, particularly religious views. In this way, this beast of the Islamic Caliphate is terrifying towards those over whom it rules. In addition, it tramples down its enemies rather than extending any kind of tolerance or mercy.

Like the fifth kingdom of Daniel 2, this beast or kingdom has ten divisions, i.e., ten horns, either geographically or chronologically. But an eleventh will arise in v. 8. The ten divisions could be the ten existing Islamic, or at least Islamic leaning, governments in the Middle East—Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab

Dan. 7:8 “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. Behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.¹¹

Islamic Caliphate – a M.E. Kingdom
Culminating in the Man of Lawlessness

A.D. 622-in the future

Dan. 7:9 “I kept looking until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days (אֲנִי־יָקִי־יְהוָה) (παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν) took His seat.
His clothing was like white snow,
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.¹²

Dan. 7:10 “A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him.¹³
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him.¹⁴
The court sat, and the books were opened.¹⁵

Dan. 7:11 “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

Emirates, Yemen, and Qatar. Jordan is not counted because of its relative neutrality.

It should be noted as was the case in Daniel 2 that this fourth beast does not necessarily have to be the Islamic Caliphate, if this fourth kingdom/government exists much farther in the future, when and if, perhaps, Islam and its influences are eliminated in the Middle East by some other ideology. However, the description of this beast does fit well the history of Islam since its inception in the 7th century A.D.

Also, similar to the argument in the notes of Daniel 2, this beast cannot represent Rome and the Roman Empire, which was comparatively tolerant and was not Middle Eastern centric in its rule.

¹¹ Like the description of the first beast in v. 4 that was made to stand on two feet like a man, and a human mind was given to it, this horn’s possessing eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts is intended to indicate that this beast is a man and a very apt representative of morally depraved mankind. The description of the little horn is much like that of Daniel 11:36ff. where one last ruthless and anti-God ruler of the Middle East will dominate it. Thus, this is the Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2. Apparently, he destroys the power and influence of three of the confederation of Islamic governments that comprise this beast in its last days. He also utter great boasts, probably referring to his pretending to be the twelfth iman, so that his claim is that the God of the Muslims is greater than the God of the Jews, making him also greater than the God of the Jews.

¹² This particular dream in Daniel 7 highlights the transcendent God’s thoughts and actions with respect to all of mankind, and especially with respect to the last and final Middle Eastern government ruled by the Man of Lawlessness at the time when God will also fulfill His eternal purposes of establishing His proxy, the Messiah and King of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, as the ruler of the final Middle Eastern government with its capital in Jerusalem.

The fire in this throne scene is a reference to God’s purpose to judge humanity, thus finding some who not only deserve His condemnation, but also who will receive it, while finding others who will experience His mercy because of their genuine, biblical belief in the midst of the advocacy of the Messiah as high priest on their behalf (cf Hebrews).

¹³ The statements about fire in these two verses is a reference to the intention of God’s sitting in His court. It is to exercise justice and even condemnation where necessary.

¹⁴ The multitudes refer to all of humanity who will stand before God and receive His just decision regarding their inwardness and whether or not they receive His condemnation or His mercy.

¹⁵ This scene represents in the dream the final judgment of mankind, which becomes the basis for the return of the Messiah and the destruction of the Man of Lawlessness with his government.

and given to the burning fire.¹⁶

Dan. 7:12 “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 (עֲדָתָם וְזִמְנֵן וְעַד) (ἕως χρόνου καὶ καιροῦ).¹⁷

Islamic and other governments in the Middle East	future to us
The last ruthless ruler of the world	future to us
The Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2	
Also called the Son of Destruction	
Arises in the Middle East and is destroyed (cf. Daniel 11,12)	

Dan. 7:13 “I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven,
One like a son of man was coming (כְּבָר אִיּוֹן אֱנוֹשׁ אֲתֵה) (ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο).¹⁸
And he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.

Dan. 7:14 “To him was given a sovereign government, glory, and a kingdom,
So that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language may serve him.
His sovereign government is an everlasting one (שְׁלֹטָתוֹ עַלְמָה) (ἐξουσία αἰώνιος),
which will not pass away.
And his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.¹⁹

The Messianic Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth	future to us
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Dan. 7:15 “As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my

¹⁶ In the previous verses, the dream set the stage with the judgment scene of God for what now follows, the destruction of the Man of Lawlessness. Thus, the eleventh horn is the last episode of the fourth kingdom, the Islamic Caliphate, which is destroyed by God. Here, it is also referred to as a “beast” in his own right (cf. Revelation 11:7ff.). Thus, the kingdoms are viewed as beasts because their rulers are such. They generally treat people poorly to say the least, manifesting the worst of man’s moral depravity and rebellion against God. Cf. Tacitus’ words, “Dominandi cupido cunctis affectibus flagrantior est” (the lust of ruling is more powerful than all other desires)

¹⁷ The people who live in the area of the other beasts, the Middle East, are permitted to continue living until a future time (the millennium?), in spite of the fact that the previous governments, the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, and the Greek Empire no longer exist *per se*.

¹⁸ Commentators attempt to associate Jesus’ use of the title Son of Man for himself in the gospels with this verse. However, it makes more sense that he is referring to Psalm 8, where David identifies the Son of God, i.e., the Davidic king, and most specifically Solomon his son, as a mere human being who gains the authority to rule over the entire creation as God’s proxy. Thus, he is a *bona fide* man and human being. Commentators also interpret this man’s approach to God “with the clouds of heaven” as a reference to his heavenly origin that requires the conclusion that he has divine essence along with human essence, i.e., that he is both God and man. But does this mean that the “clouds” also have divine essence because they are of the realm of God too? No. Then why does the phrase “clouds of heaven” have to refer to divine origin? [Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Nothing could be clearer than that Jesus himself regarded Daniel 7:13 as predictive of himself and that the two elements “like a son of man” and “with the clouds of heaven” combined to constitute a messianic title.]

However, an interpretation that makes more sense of the whole data regarding reality is that in this vision/dream, where the transcendent Creator is made to appear in a theophany, there is a person who is very much like an ordinary human being, because he is an ordinary human being, who is provided a grand entrance in order to highlight his importance in the story of God. And this person is granted the role of the final Davidic king who rules over the creation as God’s proxy.

¹⁹ The appearance of the transcendent Creator in this vision grants the human being Jesus the right to rule over the creation as His proxy according to the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2, and Psalm 8.

mind kept alarming me.

Dan. 7:16 “I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things,

Dan. 7:17 ‘These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings, who will arise from the earth (אַרְבַּע הַמְּלָכִין קִוְּמוּן מִן־אֶרֶץ) (τέσσαρες βασιλῆαι, αἱ ἀπολοῦνται ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς).

Dan. 7:18 ‘However, the set apart ones of the Highest One (קְדוֹשֵׁי עֲלִיוֹנָיִם) (ἅγιοι ὑψίστου) will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come (עַלְמֵי עַלְמֵי עַד) (ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰῶνων).²⁰

The Babylonian Empire, specifically Nebuchanezzar	553-539 B.C.
The Medo-Persian Empire, specifically Cyrus	539-331 B.C.
The Greek Empire, specifically Alexander the Great	331-63 B.C.
The Islamic Caliphate	A.D. 624-the future
The Messianic Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth	In the future into eternity

Dan. 7:19 “Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, grinded, and trampled down with its feet whatever was left.

Dan. 7:20 I also wanted to know the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell—namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts, and which was larger in appearance than its associates.

Dan. 7:21 “I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the set apart ones and overpowering them,²¹

Dan. 7:22 until the Ancient of Days (עֲתִידֵי יוֹמָיִם) (τὸν παλαιὸν ἡμερῶν) came, and judgment was passed in favor of the set apart ones of the Highest One (קְדוֹשֵׁי עֲלִיוֹנָיִם)

²⁰ Here is a great summary of the whole dream, and, indeed, of all of human history as it pertains to the Jewish Messiah and his kingdom. Many other kingdoms will exist on earth, and four in particular that directly affect the Middle East and the land of Israel. However, these are only temporary and will relate to the people of God, the Jews, in two ways, either granting them the right to exist and live on the land of Israel, like ancient Persia which allowed them to return from the Babylonian captivity and even rebuild the temple, or seeking to do away with them, especially those who properly embrace the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, like the eleventh horn. Nevertheless, in the end, the Messianic Kingdom will win out over all other kingdoms, and the people of God, believing Jews in Israel and believing Gentiles everywhere else will acquire citizenship in this final and eternal kingdom.

Individual rulers in the dream represent whole groups of people, and whole groups of people represent individual rulers. The “Highest One” (עֲלִיוֹנָיִם) (ὑψίστου) in this context is the greatest king of all the kings that arise to rule over the people of the ANE, whether Babylonian, Persian, Greek, or Islamic. The term “Highest One” is drawing attention to his being God’s proxy, who rules over the creation with a level of authority that is “a little lower than God,” i.e., a little lower than the transcendent Creator’s Himself (cf. Psalm 8:5). This king’s “saints/set apart ones” (קְדוֹשֵׁי) (ἅγιοι) are those who have been separated from the rest of humanity by God, thus being ultimately loyal to their king, the Messiah. In this context, they are Jews as authentic believers among the chosen people of God.

It is interesting that this dream focuses not so much on the Messiah himself, even though obviously he plays a vital role and is granted his kingdom by the transcendent Creator, but on the Messiah’s followers, especially Jewish followers living on the land of Israel.

²¹ For a while, the last ruthless ruler of the Middle East, the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2, will heavily oppress and persecute authentic believers in the Jewish Messiah, the final king of the created reality. Those whom he will particularly oppress will most likely be Jews living on the land of Israel, whether believers in Jesus as the Messiah or not.

(τοις αγίοις του ὑψίστου), so that the time arrived when the set apart ones took possession of the kingdom (וּמְלִכּוּתָא הַקְּדוֹשָׁנָא קְדִישִׁין) (τὸ βασίλειον κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι).²²

Dan. 7:23 “Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms. It will devour the whole earth (וְהִאכְלָה כָּל-אֲרָצָא) (ἥτις διοίσει παρὰ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν), tread it down, and crush it.’²³

Islamic Caliphate – a M.E. Kingdom

A.D. 622-1924

Dan. 7:24 ‘As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise. Then, another will arise after them (אֲחֵרֵיהֶן) (μετὰ τούτους), and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.’²⁴

Dan. 7:25 ‘He will speak out against the Most High (וְלִקְדָּשִׁי עֶלְיוֹנָיִם) (εἰς τὸν ὑψίστον) and wear down the set apart ones of the Highest One (וְלִקְדָּשִׁי עֶלְיוֹנָיִם) (τοὺς αγίους του ὑψίστου). Also, he will intend to make alterations in times and in law (וְזַמְנֵין וְדִין) (καιροὺς καὶ νόμον). Plus, they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time (עַד עַד וְעַד חֵצֵי עֵד) (ἕως καιροῦ καὶ καιρῶν καὶ ἕως ἡμίσεος καιροῦ).²⁵

Dan. 7:26 ‘However, the court will sit for judgment, and his authority will be taken away, annihilated, and destroyed forever (עַד-כּוֹפֵא) (ἕως τέλους).²⁶

Other Islamic governments in the Middle East
Culminating in the Man of Lawlessness

present and future to us

Dan. 7:27 ‘Then, the sovereignty, the government, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the set apart ones of the Highest One (לְעַם קְדִישִׁי עֶלְיוֹנָיִם) (λαῶ ἀγίῳ ὑψίστου). His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom (מְלִכּוּת עֲלָם) (βασιλείαν αἰώνιον), and all the governments will serve and obey

²² Before the last ruthless ruler and man of lawlessness has an opportunity to do complete harm to Jews in Israel, God will intervene and destroy him and his government. The “Highest One” is the highest ruler of human history, the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Cf. vs. 25 & 27.

²³ As in other places in Daniel, “total earth” refers to the Middle East, keeping this dream just as Middle Eastern centric as the statue of Daniel 2. This last awful ruler will vent his anger towards Jews on the land of Israel, particularly towards those who have embraced their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

²⁴ Ten Middle Eastern rulers/governments who will be dominated by the man of lawlessness. Indeed, three of them will lose their power and influence (cf. v. 8).

²⁵ For a period of 3½ years, the man of lawlessness will attempt to do away with all that the Jews should be doing on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis in their obeying God according to the Mosaic Covenant.

There are two other places in the Bible where this phrase “for a time, times, and half a time” is used—Daniel 12:7 and Revelation 12:14. In Daniel 12:7, the “man in linen” indicates that this will be the length of time that the “king of the North” at the end of history before the 2nd coming of the Messiah will be allowed to harass the Jews, and this phrase is the answer. In Revelation 12:14 the same phrase is used to where the “woman,” believing Jews, are spirited away on eagle’s wings to be fed in the wilderness away from the serpent.

²⁶ God will judge the man of lawlessness before the final judgment and destroy his kingdom and him before he is allowed to run amuck too much among the Jews and authentic believers in the land of Israel. Cf. Daniel 11:45, which indicates that he camps with his army on the land of Israel, and then is destroyed by Jesus the Messiah.

him.²⁷

The Messianic Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth

future to us

Dan. 7:28 “At this point, the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me, and my face grew pale. Nevertheless, I kept the matter to myself.”²⁸

²⁷ As in Daniel 7:22 and 25, the “Highest One” (יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל) (τοῦ ὑψίστου) refers to the highest king, the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. It is his government that will survive until the end of the present realm. In other words, “everlasting kingdom” (מַלְכוּת עוֹלָם) (βασιλείαν αἰώνιον) here refers to the end of the creation as we now know it, before God destroys this creation and brings a new one into existence (cf. 2 Peter 3:5-10). Notice also that “all the governments will serve and obey him,” meaning that, while Jesus will rule the Messianic Kingdom of Israel from Jerusalem, his government will be the primary one on the whole earth, and no one will be able to overthrow it during the millennium. Indeed, all other governments will submit to him, because it will be clear that he tolerates no dissension. However, he is allowed to be so demanding, in contrast to the Islamic Caliphate and the Man of Lawlessness, because only Jesus is God’s proxy and His representative on earth, just as David, Solomon, Rehoboam, et al. could have demanded submission in their similar roles as Sons of God according to the Davidic Covenant.

²⁸ Until Daniel wrote down this whole book and made it public in his later life.