

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Daniel 7 is one of the key visions contained in the book of Daniel. Because the vision begins with symbolic imagery, some commentators have interpreted the vision as mostly symbolic. Some have even proposed that the vision refers to the spiritual victory that occurred as a result of Jesus' crucifixion and ascension. Other commentators maintain that the vision refers to the future because the language goes beyond what happened at the cross. Let's examine the chapter to see if a clear interpretation can be found.
- B. To interpret Daniel correctly, we first need to understand how the chapter is broken down. Daniel 7 can be broken down into three primary sections.
1. ***The Symbolic Vision (Daniel 7:1-8)*** – The first part of the chapter is a vision by Daniel in which he sees four kingdoms symbolized by disfigured beasts.
 2. ***The Heavenly Response (Daniel 7:9-14)*** – The second part of the chapter is a heavenly vision in which Daniel sees God's response to the beasts. Daniel's vision is heavenly, but not symbolic in the same way the first part of the chapter is.
 3. ***The Angel's Explanation (Daniel 7:15-28)*** – In the third and final part of the chapter the angel explains the symbolic vision of Daniel 7:1-8 using literal language.
- C. Can we look at Daniel 7 and determine conclusively whether the vision refers to the past or to the future? The good news is that, if we examine the chapter carefully interpreting it is not difficult.
1. The first thing to recognize is that God provided an angelic interpreter so that Daniel would understand the interpretation of the symbolic vision. In verse 16, Daniel tells us that "one of those who stood by" interpreted the vision for him.
¹⁶I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: (Daniel 7:16 NKJV)
 2. God sent an angel to Daniel to make the vision plain so that he would understand it, and so that we would understand it. This means that the vision is so important to God that He did not want to leave any room for misinterpretation. He wanted us to know the plain meaning of the strange things Daniel saw.
- D. The angel explained the symbolism in the vision using plain language that describes a very specific sequence of events. These events are obviously important to God because He took the time to include them in the chapter, therefore these events should be important to us. These events form a basic storyline and when we study that storyline, it becomes clear whether Daniel 7 is referring to something that has happened in the past or is describing events that remain in the future.

II. THE STORYLINE

- A. The angel gives Daniel the heart of the storyline in Daniel 7:23-27. Let's look at some of the key phrases in the angel's explanation in order to understand the storyline.
- B. ***A "Different" Kingdom*** – The first thing that angel emphasizes is that a kingdom will arise on earth that is different from every other kingdom. Daniel uses the word "different" four times in this chapter to describe this kingdom, to emphasize that this kingdom bears little resemblance to the great empires of history.

²³“Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all other kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces. (Daniel 7:23 NKJV)

1. It is important not to miss the overarching context of Daniel's vision because it helps us to better understand the angel's words. Daniel lived during the golden age of Babylon and he lived as a conquered subject of the empire. Babylon was destroying every other kingdom in the region and was about to decimate Daniel's people and leave their land desolate. Daniel was intimately familiar with the king who was a megalomaniac and led a cruel, conquering army growing an empire given to pagan religion and sensuality. Daniel's people were experiencing the weight of Babylon's crushing, the seduction of Babylon's religion, and being carried off as conquered slaves. Jerusalem had been completely destroyed and laid desolate. The angel tells Daniel that a kingdom is coming that will be "*different, different, different, different*" from Babylon.
 2. The vision itself emphasized the difference of this final kingdom because it was represented by a beast that is completely unnatural and bears no resemblance to anything in the natural realm. In contrast, the three other kingdoms in the chapter are symbolized by distorted, natural beasts (a lion, bear, and leopard).
 3. Daniel is also told that this kingdom devours the whole earth. This language is not applied to any of the other beasts, so it is not a hyperbolic statement, instead it's a statement that differentiates this kingdom from the other three. This final kingdom has an unparalleled effect on the earth. It devours, tramples, and "breaks into pieces" the entire earth. Of course, many empires have sought to do this, but no one has yet accomplished this.
- C. ***The Rulers of this Kingdom*** – Next Daniel is told that ten kings will arise from this kingdom first who will then be followed by a much more dreadful king.

²⁴The ten horns are ten kings Who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, And shall subdue three kings. ²⁵He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time. (Daniel 7:24–25 NKJV)

1. The angel compares the dreadful king to the other ten in the same way he compared the final kingdom to the other three. Just as the final kingdom is “different” so too this king will be “different” from the initial ten rulers of the kingdom. In other words, not only does he emerge from the most dreadful kingdom, he himself is far more evil, and dreadful than the rest of the leaders who lead the kingdom.
 2. After this dreadful king emerges, he then subdues three of the ten kings ruling in this kingdom – presumably because they do not fully submit to his leadership and agenda.
 3. Daniel is also told that he will persecute the people of God and obtains a temporary victory over them. God’s people will be subject to this king during his dreadful reign.
- D. ***The End of the Rule of the Evil King*** – The angel tells Daniel that the rule of this wicked king will be short lived. A court of judgment will be seated and his dominion will be taken away.
- ²⁶‘But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. (Daniel 7:26 NKJV)***
1. This king has “dominion” because the kingdom he is leading has trampled and devoured the earth. We must recognize is that the king is a real king and the kingdom is a real kingdom on the earth. The language in the angel’s interpretation is all physical, earthy language because he’s describing events that will happen on the earth. Those events have a spiritual dimension to them, but we cannot lose site of the fact that the angel describes these events from a physical perspective. This means the destruction of this king will end a physical kingdom on the earth. Though this king is spiritually wicked, he is a real, physical king who must be physically destroyed.
 2. The angel also tells us that this wicked king’s dominion will be consumed and destroyed forever. This is a key indicator. It means that this king, though an earthly king, is more than a king. There is something trans-historical about him. There is a reason that his dominion is consumed “forever.” When he is removed from his position, the dominion of wickedness over the earth is ended. It is a spiritual victory, but it is more than a spiritual victory. The victory happens through the defeat of a king leading a kingdom on the earth and this victory secures a season of blessing that affects the earth and the structures of society. The victory over this king has spiritual implications, but it is a physical victory that ends the reign of evil over the earth.
- E. ***The Divine Transition*** – Verse 27 describes a dramatic transition after the removal of this wicked king.
- ²⁷Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.’ (Daniel 7:27 NKJV)***

1. Verse 27 begins with a conjunction usually translated “then” and sometimes translated “and.” The key thing is to recognize that the verse is a part of a sequence. Verse 27 is the result of the destruction of the evil king in verse 26. That means the blessing of verse 27 cannot come until the destruction of the wicked king in verse 26 happens. Therefore if the blessing of verse 27 has not yet happened, then it means the evil king of verse 26 has not yet been destroyed.
 2. The angel tells Daniel that, after the evil king is destroyed, the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the saints of the Most High. The language of kingdom in the angel’s explanation is consistently referring to kingdoms on the earth and it is important that we interpret it consistently. This means that the kingdom and dominion referred to in verse 27 is a kingdom and a dominion on the earth. The wicked king led kingdom on the earth and now God’s people are given a kingdom on the earth.
 3. Verse 27 describes the most dramatic transition in the experience of life on the earth since the fall. The saints will be given governmental authority in the earth as part of God’s everlasting kingdom. The angel refers to the realm where God’s people are given government as the “kingdoms under heaven.” This phrase was used in Daniel’s time as a reference to the realm of the earth. Again, this emphasizes that he is referring to a kingdom in the earthly realm and predicting that the saints will be given governmental authority on the earth. The promise in this chapter is not primarily a promise to rule spiritually in the heavens, but primarily a promise to rule physically on the earth.
- F. If we look at the key points of the storyline in Daniel 7, it becomes clear that this has never happened in history. The angel predicts a kingdom that tramples the entire globe. Many have sought this, but so far no one has accomplished this. The angel also tells us that this kingdom is completely different from anything else in history. Again, an evil empire has not yet emerged on the earth’s stage that merits this kind of description. We are also told an evil king is coming that is far more wicked than any other. When this king is defeated, as a physical king, it is the end of the dominion of wickedness on the earth. This obviously has not yet happened. Finally, we are told that the saints are going to rule and reign over the earth when this evil king is defeated. Again, we can clearly see that the saints are not yet ruling on the earth. To give us even more confidence in the time of the vision, the angel also includes specific details such as the fact that there will be ten kings, three of whom are deposed, along with a very specific time period for the most intense part of the king’s rule. There is simply no time in history that matches the sequence of events the angel predicts.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Daniel 7 is a key passage in Daniel’s visions and because it contains apocalyptic imagery it is important that we are careful to interpret the vision correctly. The good news is that God wanted to make sure that we understood the vision so he sent Daniel an interpreting angel to explain the plain meaning of the vision.

- B. The angel’s interpretation describes a very clear sequence of events that take place on the earth, and he includes specific details about those events. Each of these details were given by God so that we would understand the vision. The details help us to know and understand the time of the fulfillment of the vision. If the details are not fulfilled literally, then we know that the events of the vision have not yet come to pass.

- C. When we understand the structure of Daniel 7, we see that the chapter is relatively straightforward. It begins with a symbolic vision, but it ends with a very specific interpretation of this imagery. Some commentators have tried to interpret the events of Daniel 7 as “spiritual” events because of the symbolic imagery at the beginning of the chapter. However, the chapter does not allow for this interpretation because the interpretation given by the angel refers to a specific series of events that must happen on the earth. We cannot “spiritualize” these events because the angel did not.

- D. When we allow the angel in Daniel 7 to be the authoritative interpreter of Daniel 7, we can conclusively say that the events of Daniel 7:23-27 are yet future. These events will have an unparalleled effect on the earth, and God gave us this information ahead of time so that we would be understand how the age ends and prepare the earth for that hour of human history.