

• *Section One – six stories – one with a prophetic vision*

The first section of the Book of Daniel has had five stories about life within pagan empires (chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6) and it has had one story which included a prophetic vision (chapter 2). The six sections have been in chronological order:

- Daniel chapter 1 is set in 605 BC. A story.
- Daniel chapter 2 is set in 603/2 BC. A story with a vision.
- Daniel chapter 3 seems to be undated. A story concerning Nebuchadnezzar.
- Daniel chapter 4 seems to be undated. A story concerning Nebuchadnezzar.
- Daniel chapter 5 is set in 539/8 BC. A story.
- Daniel chapter 6 is set in Darius' days. A story.

• *Living within a pagan empire is possible for a believing Israelite*

The six sections have taught us, the readers, that living within a pagan empire is a possibility for the believing Israelite (Daniel chapter 1). God's purpose is still on his mind (chapter 2). Survival despite state religion is a possibility (chapter 3). Pagan kings may be converted (chapter 4) or dramatically removed (chapter 5). Daniel chapter 6 brings the series of stories to a climax. Recognition may be won for the faith of Israel.

• *Section two – four more stories with prophetic visions*

Now the Book of Daniel presents us with four more visions (chapters 7, 8, 9, 10–12). Four more vision-stories will make the book to be more balanced (five stories without prophetic visions; five stories which include prophetic visions). The second half of the book is like the first placed in chronological order, but the second set begins at a point earlier than that of Daniel 6, and starts in about 551 **BC**, chronologically between the times of chapters 4 and 5. The first half of the book has given us an outline of the four empires that rise before the coming of the kingdom of God (Daniel 2) but also has shown us how the believer is to live throughout the times of pagan domination over Israel (Daniel 1, 3, 4, 5, 6). Now we are ready to take up the themes of Daniel 2 once again. We are ready to learn more about the progress of future history through which believers will have to live in the same manner as Daniel and his friends.

- Daniel chapter 7 is set in 552/1 **BC**. A story with a vision.
- Daniel chapter 8 is set in 550/49 **BC**. A story with a vision.
- Daniel chapter 9 is set in 539/8 **BC**. A story with a vision.
- Daniel chapters 10–12 are set in 537 **BC**. A story with a vision.

Four empires

Daniel told of four empires; Daniel 7 will do the same. Daniel 8 will take up two of them. Daniel 9–12 will tell of things to happen before the kingdom of God comes.

• *A symbolic vision of the four same kingdoms as the statue in chapter 2*

The story in Daniel chapter 7 is situated in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, that is, in 552/551 **BC**. In the night-time Daniel had a dream which he recorded ¹. In the dream he sees visions of four animals representing four kingdoms. It will soon become clear that the four animal-like creatures of Daniel 7 represent the same four kingdoms that were represented by sections of a statue in Daniel chapter 2. Daniel is seeing a symbolic vision of the same four empires.

¹ 7:1

• *Worldly kingdoms are thrown up like rubbish from the restlessness of human wickedness*

Worldly kingdoms are thrown up like rubbish from the restlessness of human wickedness. Daniel says, ²*In my vision at night I was looking, and there before me the four winds of heaven were making the great sea very rough.* The sea is a picture of humanity. The many peoples of the world are tossing and turning. 'They thunder like the thunder of the sea' ¹. Out of this restless wickedness human kingdoms arise.

¹ Isaiah 17:12; see also 57:20

• *Worldly kingdoms are beastly, animal-like*

The first empire to rule Jerusalem is Babylon

• *Nebuchadnezzar – cut down – then lifted up*

The second kingdom is the Medo-Persian empire

• *A bear-like lust for power*

The third kingdom is the Greek empire

• *Swift then divided*

• *The rise of earthly powers is entirely under God's control and serve the interests of the kingdom of God*

Worldly kingdoms are beastly, animal-like. Daniel continues: ³*Four huge animals, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. Earthly kingdoms are large, powerful. They are greedy, savage, wild – like fearful animals. Each empire is slightly different from the others, but all of them are beastly.*

The first empire to rule Jerusalem is Babylon. ⁴*The first was like a lion, but it had the wings of an eagle. I watched this animal until its wings were torn off. It was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and a human mind was given to it.*

In every case the symbolic pictures of this chapter stand for a king and his kingdom. The animal in verse 7 represents both an individual (the king) and a corporate entity (the kingdom). Here we have Babylon and its king, Nebuchadnezzar. The wings being torn off recalls the story of Daniel 4 when Nebuchadnezzar was cut down from his arrogance, and became like a grass-eating animal for a while. His being lifted up and given his sanity back reminds us of Daniel 4:36 and the time when Nebuchadnezzar recovered

The second kingdom is the Medo-Persian empire. Daniel sees a second animal. ⁵*Then there appeared before me a second animal, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of meat!' Each animal is fierce and dangerous. The second is like a bear which is hungry. It is lifted up on one side ready to attack a victim. It has already devoured some creature as food and has the ribs in its mouth. Yet it is ready to attack again. The Persian empire had a bear-like savage lust for power and empire-building.*

The third kingdom is the Greek empire. ⁶*After this, I looked, and there before me was another animal, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.* The leopard would speak of the swiftness of Alexander the Great (as it turned out). The four heads suggested it would divide into four in some way. This happened when Alexander died and his kingdom was divided among his successors.

Each kingdom arises as God allows it to happen. Sovereignty and authority belong to God, but he gets his will done amidst the savagery and wickedness of sinful empires. Daniel and his readers are given no details, but the sketchy previews given in vision will be enough to know that the rise of earthly powers is entirely under God's control and in the end will serve the interests of the kingdom of God. When pagan men think they are achieving their will, God is in fact achieving his will.



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