

- *The fourth empire*

Daniel is seeing the fourth empire – Rome and all of its successors even into modern times – as it comes under the judgement of God.

- *Empires that flourish for a while until they have fulfilled God's purposes*

As Daniel watches, the fourth empire comes under God's judgement. He was especially interested to see what would happen to the arrogant 'little horn'. <sup>11</sup>*I kept on looking because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the animal was killed and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.* The final empire and all of its successors were wiped out. The last human empire and all of its successors will come under God's judgement. <sup>12</sup>*The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.* The other animals had been present in the vision, for a while. The interpretation of this is: the Babylonians, Persians and Greeks were allowed to flourish for a while until they had fulfilled the ways in which God was using them.

- **'One like a Son of Man'**

Suddenly something new is seen in Daniel's vision. <sup>13</sup>*In my vision at night I kept looking, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup>He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. People of every tribe, nation and language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

- *A symbolic figure used in a developed sense as a title by Jesus*

Just as in Daniel chapter 2 a stone was cut out that crushed the iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold, so in Daniel chapter 7 a 'son of man' exterminates the beastly kingdoms that have arisen from the restless sea. The 'son of man' is a **symbolic** figure. (Jesus' use of the term as a **title** is a **development** of what we have here.) Just as the animals represent earthly kings-and-kingdoms, so a human figure appears representing a heavenly King-and-his-kingdom.

- *Earthly kingdoms and God's kingdom*

Earthly kingdoms are beastly; God's kingdom is humane and kindly. Earthly kingdoms treat other human beings with severity and violence; God's kingdom will bring mercy and salvation. Earthly kingdoms arise from the restless sea – that is from human wickedness. God's kingdom comes with the clouds. It is from God and from the heavenly realm.

- *God's King plus his people – ruling the nations*

The human figure ('one who is like a son of man') approaches the throne of God and is given God's kingdom. Just as the animals stand for kings-plus-their-kingdom, so the 'one who is like a son of man' stands for God's King **plus** his people. This heavenly figure is human in appearance and yet he is divine. He comes from the heavenly realm; he comes with the clouds that hide the divine majesty. We remember the cloud around God's presence on Mount Sinai; it covered the glory of God which could not be totally and directly observed. This human figure is (in Daniel's vision) universally worshipped. He acts as God's King, ruling over the nations in judgement. His kingdom – unlike the beastly kingdoms – will be everlasting.

- *A divine yet human figure coming to the Father to receive kingship*

It is important to notice that 'the coming of the Son of Man' (a New Testament phrase that comes from this passage) is here seen to be a coming of a divine-yet-human figure **to** the Father (not **from** the Father) to receive a kingdom. The 'coming of the Son of Man' is **firstly** something that happens in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, when Jesus comes to the Father to receive the position of being King in the Father's kingdom.

- **Jesus – the Son of Man**

Although the matter is much discussed by biblical scholars, there can be no doubt in the minds of Bible-believing Christians that Jesus used the term 'Son of Man' of himself. He got the phrase exclusively from Daniel

• A prophetic symbol turned into a title

• Jesus coming as the Son of Man – in his own lifetime

• And after his resurrection in final judgement

• First to receive royal authority

• Outpouring of the Spirit

• From the Father in glory

• The Son of Man must suffer

• Jesus literally became everything the symbol of Daniel 7 stood for

7:13, which he handled in a new way. In Daniel 7:13 the ‘man-like’ figure is a **symbol** of the Messiah plus his kingdom. The term ‘Son of Man’ was not used as a Messianic title in Jesus’ day. People were sometimes puzzled when Jesus used it (see John 12:34). Jesus turned a prophetic symbol into a title, and then he taught his followers what the new title meant.

In **Mark 8:38** (and Matthew 16:27; Luke 9:26) Jesus expects to be the powerful Son of Man, reigning in glory. This ‘coming of the Son of Man’ will be within his own lifetime, as Mark 9:1 shows. **Matthew 10:23** also mentions a ‘coming’ of the ‘Son of Man’ – and one which takes place within one generation. **Mark 13:26** (and Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27) obviously alludes to Daniel 7:13 and again is said to be fulfilled within Jesus’ own times (see Mark 13:30). In **Mark 14:62** (and Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:69) Jesus is taking Daniel 7:13 to mean that he himself will very soon be sitting at the right hand of the Father as a Judge in God’s kingdom. His ‘coming’ is not a coming to earth but a coming to the Father to receive power and glory. His accusers will see it themselves – soon! **Matthew 28:18** (‘all authority is given to me’) echoes Daniel 7:14 (where the Greek text has ‘authority was given to him’). After his resurrection Jesus is the glorified and exalted ‘Son of Man’, with all authority. In **Matthew 19:28** Jesus says, ‘the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne’. It seems to refer to the final judgement. In **Matthew 25:31**, Jesus says, ‘the Son of Man will come in his glory’.

It will be noticed that in these seven references (with their parallel passages) five of the seven refer to something that will happen in Jesus’ lifetime. The ‘coming of the Son of Man’ is first a coming to the Father to receive royal authority. It initially takes place in the death and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then this ‘coming’ to receive glory and authority is seen in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the fall of Jerusalem, the extension of the kingdom of God to gentiles, and (finally!) to Jesus’ visible coming from the Father in glory.

There are other ways in which Jesus uses the term ‘Son of Man’, especially when he says, ‘The Son of Man must **suffer**’, but the seven passages I have mentioned are the places where Jesus’ teaching was leaning heavily on the main point of Daniel 7:13. In the time of the fourth empire, the time of the Roman empire and its successors, a figure came riding upon the clouds of heaven. He was in himself the fulfilment of the prediction that a humane, merciful kingdom of God was to start in the days of the Roman empire. Jesus literally became everything the symbol of Daniel 7 stood for. In himself he became ‘the Son of Man’. To fulfil the purpose of God the Son of Man had to suffer (a point not mentioned in Daniel 7), but then – only a couple of days after his suffering – he came to the Father’s throne, was crowned with glory and honour, and was given all authority in heaven and on earth.



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