

Is Anyone Really In Control? Yes! God Is!

Daniel 7:1-28

Introduction 1) In the sci-fi thriller “Aliens” (1981), a rescue team from earth faces off against hostile Alien Monsters that inflict serious carnage on the team. Amazingly, a small girl named Newt has lived for months on the planet as the lone survivor of a prior mission. After a particularly bad encounter with the Aliens, Newt informs leader Ellen Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver) that the team needs to quickly get back to a safe place. Why? Her words are classic and memorable, “We better get back because it will be dark soon. And they mostly come at night...mostly.” Newt is right, monsters, they mostly come at night...mostly. They come out at night when it is dark. They come out at night when we lie in our beds. They come out at night when we sleep in “dreams and visions,” as the prophet Daniel would quickly affirm.

2) Daniel 7 has been called, “the most comprehensive and detailed prophecy of future events to be found anywhere in the Old Testament” (S. Lewis Johnson, “The Four Beasts of Daniel,” sermon, Believer’s Chapel, 2008). It is a connecting chapter that overlays and ties Daniel 1-6 with Daniel 7-12. Beginning in Daniel 2:4 and going through Daniel 7:28, the book is written in Aramaic. Before and after those verses, the book is written in Hebrew. Thus the Aramaic section of

Daniel begins with a vision given to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2 and it ends with a parallel vision given to Daniel in chapter 7. Daniel 1-6 is narrative and personal. Daniel 7-12 is apocalyptic and cosmic. These latter chapters, like the former, emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God over all things. And, chapters 7-12 give us insight concerning the future as God graciously reveals to us, through Daniel, his plans for world history and the end of time. Dan Duncan is correct, “From chapter 7 on, the book is very different. It doesn’t continue the chronology of events, but reverts back in time to a series of visions that Daniel had. It’s not history; it is prophecy. In a sense, the first half of the book gives the credentials of the prophet, the reliability of the messenger. The second half gives his message. Now, the message of chapter 7 through chapter 12 is really not new....It’s the message that God is sovereign” (Dan Duncan, “God and Monsters,” sermon, Believer’s Chapel, 2014). God is indeed sovereign. Is anyone really in control? Yes! God is! Daniel 7 makes this truth abundantly clear as it provides something of a panoramic preview of coming attractions from the time of Daniel until that day when time is no more. The chapter naturally divides into three movements or sections (1-8, 9-14, 15-28). Ideas of “seeing” and “looking” dominate throughout. In the vision of chapter 2 we see history as man sees it. In chapter 7, we see history as God sees it. The perspectives are very different.

I. God is sovereign over the nations 7:1-8

1) The Bible utilizes various genres and literary styles to teach us God's truth.

Daniel 7-12 is primarily what we call apocalyptic; visions, pictures. David Helm says, "story-telling gives way to movie-watching" (*Daniel For You*, 117).

Those who are visually oriented like this form of communication. Our children who are immersed in the world of video games identify with it better than their parents! What is the big deal about a leopard with 4 wings and 4 heads (v.6)?!

Now, what do we mean by apocalyptic genre, literary style, communication?

Dale Davis is helpful when he writes, "I would say that biblical apocalyptic is a sort of prophecy that seeks to enlighten and encourage a people despised and cast off by the world with a vision of the God who will come to impose his kingdom on the wreckage and rebellion of human history – and it

communicates this message through the use of wild, scary, imaginative, bizarre and head-scratching imagery." (*The Message of Daniel*, BST 93).

2) So, the sovereignty of God is going to be taught via sci-fi. Truth will be conveyed symbolically through wild, crazy and strange imagery. There is real stuff behind the symbols, but it will be a challenge to find the right keys to unlock these spectacular scenes that flash before us.

1) He reveals what He chooses to show us 7:1

- Daniel provides a historical marker for us: “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon.” Belshazzar gets one chapter in Daniel, chapter 5. It was not a pretty picture as his drunken orgy ends with his death and the fall of the Babylon Empire to the Medes and Persians. The first year of Belshazzar’s reign was around 553 B.C. Daniel would have been in his mid-60’s and Belshazzar in his mid-30’s (Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, 194).
- It was at this particular time that God chose to give his divine revelation to Daniel in dreams and visions at night “as he was laying in his bed.” Believing, knowing, that this was from God, “he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter” (*ESV*; the *HCSB* says, “here is the summary”). We are indebted to Daniel for preserving what God showed him on this particular night “in his mind.” We are the beneficiaries. God revealed and Daniel wrote. That is a good description of how our Lord delivers His divine, infallible and inerrant revelation.

2) He raises up whom He chooses for power 7:2-8

- These verses record what could be called “the rise of the beasts!” Sinclair Ferguson notes that what we have here, “is essentially a book of pictures, appealing to our senses. We are meant to see, hear, and smell the strange beasts that appear throughout this chapter. We are

meant to be overwhelmed as Daniel was..." (*Daniel*, 135). Daniel first sees that, "the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea" (v.2). That the four winds of the compass (N, S, E, W) are winds of heaven teach us this is God's doing. "The great sea" should be understood symbolically as the raging chaos, confusion, and conflict among the nations of the world. Isaiah 17:12 says, "Ah! The roar of many peoples –they roar like the roaring of the seas. The raging of the nations – they rage like the raging of mighty water." (cf. Job 41:31; Rev. 17:15).

- Verses 3-8 reveal that Daniel saw, "Four huge beasts [come] up from the sea, each different from the other" (v.3). Let's quickly examine each one. Chapter 2 and our understanding of it will be helpful because the two visions are parallel. Interestingly, allowing animals to serve as a symbol for a nation continues in our day. For example, Britain utilizes the lion, Russia the bear and America the eagle.
- The first beast "was like a lion but had eagles' wings." This is Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. It was ferocious (lion) and swift (eagles wings). However, "its wings were torn off" (*ESV*, "plucked off"), most likely a reference to Nebuchadnezzar's humbling insanity in 4:28-33. However, the lion "was lifted up from the ground, set on

its feet like a man, and given a human mind.” The phrases “it was lifted up” and “the mind of a man was given to it” (*ESV*) are what we call a “divine passive,” indicating both were the activity of God. He is the implied agent of action. Nebuchadnezzar was restored from his beastly existence and behavior by God (4:34-37). It is worth noting that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel compare Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon to a lion and an eagle (Jere. 4:7; 49:19; 50:44; Ezekiel 17:3, 11-12).

- Daniel’s “jungle book” continues as his first scene fades off the apocalyptic screen and a new one takes its place. He sees a second beast, a bear. “It was raised up on one side” (by God!), and had “three ribs its mouth between its teeth.” It was told (also by God!), “Get up! Gorge yourself on flesh.” This is Medo-Persian. Raised up on one side may describe the dominance of the Persians over the Medes. Three ribs in its mouth tells us “it was not fasting.” (Davis, 94). Dogmatism is unwarranted in identifying the three ribs. However, James Montgomery Boice offers a plausible possibility when he points out, “Cyrus, the Median-Persian King, and his son Cambyses conquered (1) the Lydian Kingdom in Asia Minor, which fell to Cyrus in 546 B.C.; (2) the Chaldean Empire, which he overthrew in 539 B.C.; and (3) the kingdom of Egypt, which fell to Cambyses in 525”

(*Daniel*, 76). Miller sees it slightly different suggesting the three ribs represent “Babylon (539 B.C.), Lydia (546 B.C.), and Egypt (525 B.C.)” (*Daniel*, NAC, 199). Miller’s view is probably more likely. The idea that the three ribs represent “the insatiable nature of the beast” (E.J. Young, *Daniel*, 145) is certainly a safe interpretation!

- The third beast in verse 6 looks like a leopard with four wings of a bird and four heads. It is a powerful beast because it “was given authority to rule.” This is clearly Greece and Alexander the Great. With speed and agility that was unprecedented, he conquered the world of his day (all the way to India) only to suddenly die at the age of 32. Stephen Miller provides helpful insight on both the symbolism and what transpired following Alexander’s death. The accuracy of biblical prophecy is truly amazing!

“In Scripture “heads” may represent rulers or governments (e.g., 2:38; Isa. 7:8-9; Rev. 13:3, 12), and that is the case with the leopard’s four heads. Daniel predicted that this one empire would ultimately evolve into four kingdoms, and this is exactly what occurred. Alexander died in 323 B.C., and after much internal struggle his generals carved the kingdom into four parts: (1) Antipater, and later Cassander, gained control of

Greece and Macedonia: (2) Lysimachus ruled Thrace and a large part of Asia Minor; (3) Seleucus I Nicator governed Syria, Babylon, and much of the Middle East (All of Asia except Asia Minor and Palestine); and (4) Ptolemy I Soter controlled Egypt and Palestine. A quadripartite character is definitely ascribed to the Greek Empire in the next chapter (cp. 8:8 with 8:21-22), and it is reasonable to interpret the leopard's "four heads" in light of that clear teaching." (*Daniel*, NAC, 200).

- The fourth and final beast is described in verses 7-8. Additional commentary concerning this beast will be provided by Daniel in verses 19-26. This beast is the most "frightening and dreadful of all." It is also "incredibly strong, with large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled with its feet whatever was left." And, it was of a different nature all-together from the other three beasts. It also had ten horns which convey at minimum great and complete power (cf. 2:40-42). This beast is without question the Roman Empire, and yet it, I believe, is Rome and more. Verse 8, and later verses 19-26 drive me to such an understanding. Verse 8 tells us an 11th horn, a little horn, emerges from the 10. It begins small, but grows to have both great intelligence (eyes of a man) and a big mouth. Revelation 13 can

be heard in the background. We will expand our study of this beast shortly, but James Boice seems to be tracking right when he says, “This seems to be the first biblical reference to the individual later described in the Bible as the Antichrist. He appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 as “the man of lawlessness...doomed for destruction” (v.3) and is seen again in Revelation” (*Daniel*, 76).

- Daniel 2, 7 and also 8 overlap and parallel one another. A visual chart could help us see that relationship more clearly. The one below is slightly adapted from the *Believer’s Study Bible*, page 1180.

Correlation of Dreams and Visions in Daniel				
	Image Chapter 2	Beasts Chapter 7	Beasts Chapter 8	Kingdoms Represented
The Times of the Gentiles Luke 21:24	Head of fine gold	Like a lion with eagle’s wings		Babylon 626-539 B.C.
	Chest and arms of silver	Like a bear	Ram with two horns	Medo-Persia 539-330 B.C.
	Belly and thighs of bronze	Like a leopard with four wings and four heads	Male goat with one great horn, four horns and little horn	Greece 330-63 B.C
	Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay	Incomparable beast with ten horns and little horn		Rome 63 B.C. - ?
	Stone that becomes a great mountain	Messiah (Son of Man) and saints receive the kingdom		Kingdom of God

II. God is sovereign over His Kingdom 7:9-14

- Daniel saw quite a show in verses 3-8. However, he has not seen anything yet! As terrifying as those verses were, verses 9-14 are more awesome, more glorious and certainly more comforting. God is sovereign over the nations because as we now see, He is sovereign over His kingdom.
- Verses 9-14 contain three scenes that follow in rapid fire succession. If Daniel 7 is, as many say, “the single most important chapter of the book” (Miller, 191), verses 9-14 are almost certainly the most important verses in Daniel and some of the most important verses in all of the Bible. They are important theologically. They are important eschatologically. And, they are important Christologically.

1) He is sovereign because of His eternality and purity 7:9-10

Daniel looks or sees again (vs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 21). This scene is radically different from the previous ones. He does not see a beast. He sees thrones and “the Ancient of Days” who takes a seat on his throne (see 1 Kings 22:19ff; Isa 6:8; Rev. 4:4). Only Daniel calls God the Ancient of Days. This is God the Father on his eternal and universal throne. As the ancient of Days he is eternal not old. He is wise not senile! He is a big God, bigger than even Daniel realized, and bigger

than the petty beast kingdoms of this world. The following description makes that crystal clear.

- “His clothing was white like snow” speaks of His holiness, purity and righteousness.
- “The hair of his head [is] like whitest wool speaks of His eternity, purity and wisdom. He has always been around and He is wise beyond all comparison.
- “His throne was flaming fire” speak of purifying and righteous judgment.
- “Its wheels were blazing fire” tells us there are no spatial limitations or restrictions on His judgment. He sees everything and He is everywhere present.
- “A river of fire was flowing, coming out from His presence” reinforces the two previous ideas and conveys the righteous fury and wrath of his judgment. Psalm 97:3 says, “Fire goes before Him and burns up His foes on every side.”
- “Thousands upon thousands served Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him” sounds like Revelation 5:11 and is a reference to angels.

Court is called into session “and the books were opened.” The Ancient of Days does everything by the book. His judgment, as always, will be fair and equitable. There is no partiality, not a hint of unfairness. This is true for everyone beginning with the beast.

2) He is sovereign with His sentence and patience 7:11-12

- The little horn (v.8) is still mouthing off as the vision reverts back to him. This arrogant braggart and his boasting is framed or sandwiched by two God-focused poems (7:9-10; 13-14) [Ronald Pierce, *Daniel, Teach the Text*, 125]. Suddenly and without elaboration, he is taken out! “The Beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire” (cf. Rev. 19:19-21; 20:10). Turn out the lights on the beast. Game over! It is that quick. It is that simple.
- In contrast to the 4th beast, the others had “their authority removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time.” Greidanus notes that Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece, even after losing their dominion, continued to exist and live as part of the Kingdom that conquered them. They were a shadow of themselves, but they were still there, but in a much diminished sense. God was more gracious and patient with them as He has been with many other kingdoms throughout history. Not so for the Roman Empire as it

comes to its fullest and greatest expression in the little horn, the Antichrist. “When God judges the little horn, the last remnant of the Roman Empire will be annihilated” (*Daniel*, 241).

3) He is sovereign in His man and plan 7:13-14

Two persons take center stage in this night vision, “one like a son of man” and “the Ancient of Days.” These are two very important verses in the New Testament, being referenced numerous times, and they are loaded with theological significance. Daniel sees someone “coming with the clouds of heaven,” a clear indication of divinity, a theophany of Yahweh (see Ex. 16:10; 19:9; 24:16; 34:5; Num. 11:25; Ps. 97:2; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Nah. 1:3). “He approached the Ancient of Days (God the Father) and was escorted before Him.” The one like a son of man is then given by the Ancient of Days a universal and eternal kingdom (v. 14). Verses 14 should be read carefully and slowly so that its impact and weight is fully felt and taken in. The eternal and universal kingdom of God is given to “One like a son of man” who comes in divine manifestation “with the clouds of heaven.” So the question begging to be asked and answered is, “who is this son of man?” A non-exhaustive list of possible candidates includes: Daniel, Israel, Michael, Gabriel, Judas Maccabee, faithful Israel and glorified Israel. However, none of these is

satisfactory. Furthermore, Jesus Christ Himself tells us who the Son of Man is. It is He! The title Son of Man was Jesus' favorite self-designated title and was used almost exclusively by Him (see also Acts 7:56; Rev. 1:13). The title appears 69 times in the Synoptic Gospels and 12 times in John. In Mark 10:45 Jesus weds the title to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and thereby redefines the concept of Messiah. In Mark 14:62 He weds the title to Psalm 110 and the King/Priest portrait of Messiah. Concerning the title Son of Man, Sinclair Ferguson says, "The expression "Son of Man" appears to be the virtual equivalent of "man," but when "One like the Son of Man" appears, the title has particular rather than general significance. This is the True Man in contrast to the man-become-beast in the earlier elements of the vision. This is the one who is able to stand in the presence of the God whose throne is made of the fire of His judgment. This is the one who is worthy to receive "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion" (v.14). This True Man is all that humans as God's image were meant to be but failed to be" (*Daniel*, 144-45).

Psalm 2 also speaks into the scene of Daniel 7:13-14. Christ was given this glorious Kingdom following His work of atonement when He

ascended back to heaven. However, Jesus, Himself, declares in Matthew 24:29-31 that the full manifestation and realization of this kingdom will occur when He comes again “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Jesus Christ did not hesitate to identify Himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7, and neither should we! A vision “that began like a nightmare with monsters coming out of the sea, ends happily and hopefully with a Man coming out of heaven whom God crowns sovereign over the world!” (Duncan, sermon).

III. God is sovereign in His judgment

7:15-28

- It is amazing to realize that sometimes even a vision of the greatness and glory of God is still not enough to overcome our anxieties, concerns and troubled heart. I take some comfort in knowing I am not alone. Daniel had the same struggle! I guess we are in good company when those moments of distress afflict and overwhelm us.
- Verses 15-28 bring the vision of Daniel to a close. It easily divides into 3 parts: vs. 15-18 (“my spirit was deeply distressed within me”); vs. 19-27 (“Then I wanted to know...”), and v. 28 (“This is the end of the interpretation”). Because verse 27 stands in contrast with verses 23-26, I will join it to verse 28 in our teaching outline.

1) God's people will receive an eternal kingdom that will last forever

7:15-18

Daniel notes that all that he has seen to this point deeply distressed him (*ESV*, “my spirit within me was anxious”) and “the visions in my mind terrified (*ESV*, “alarmed”) me” (v.15). He “approached one of those standing by” (probably an angel) and asked for some help. The angel obliged and provided an interpretation (v.16). As we noted earlier the four beasts are four kings/kingdoms “who will rise from the earth” (v.17). They stand in contrast to the son of man who comes down from heaven (v.13). Their temporal kingdom (v.12) also stands in contrast to the kingdom of the saints of God, here identified as “the holy ones of the Most High” (v.18). These holy ones “will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes, forever and ever.” Once again we see the biblical principle of solidarity with our head. We share in what the Ancient of Days gives the Son of Man. The use of the title Son of Man certainly points in that direction. I cannot improve on the words of Sinclair Ferguson at this point. The Scotsman’s insights are spot on! He writes,

“The One like the Son of Man is related in some special way to “the saints of the Most High” so that they share in His dominion.

The correctness of this view is underlined by the way in which the One like the Son of Man here appears to be all that Adam failed to be. Adam was a historical individual according to Scripture, but he was also an individual whose actions carried unique consequences for others. Paul expounds this in great detail (Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:47ff.). In and through Adam's fall, sin and death came to all who followed. His actions had consequences for a whole species. So, too, with the One like the Son of Man. His conquest means that all those who belong to Him share in the victory. This teaching is also examined in Hebrews (Heb. 2:5-18). Taking up the words of Psalm 2 that all things are under human dominion (cf. Gen. 1:28), the author reflects on the contrast between the promise and the reality. We do not yet see everything in subjection to ourselves, but, says Hebrews, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). This is what Daniel perceived so vividly, if puzzlingly, in chapter 7. The coronation of the One like the Son of Man is the assurance that those who belong to Him will share in His dominion (cf. Rev. 20:6). (*Daniel*, 147-48).

2) God's people will suffer in an earthly kingdom that will last only a short time 7:19-26

Daniel expresses his desire to know about the 4th terrifying beast of verses 7-8 in verses 19-20. The two descriptions are virtually identical. In verse 21 he sees the little horn warring against God's holy ones (saints) and defeating them (see Rev. 13:7). He was able to do so until the Ancient of Days stepped in and rescued them, and in the process giving them the kingdom (v.22).

Verses 23-26 describes this fourth beast who is also the final beast. He is Rome and more as Revelation 13:1-10 clearly teaches. He is an incredibly powerful and vicious king/kingdom who will "devour, trample, and crush (v.23), rise and subdue (v.24), speak against the Most High, wear out the saints and change the times and law (v.25). He is different from any and all other kingdoms (vs. 23, 24). However, his reign is a limited one, "time, times, and half a time" (v.25), and he will be decisively judged and destroyed by God in the end (v.26). Some specifics of this vision must remain a mystery (the ten kings of verse 24 and the three kings put down in the same verse). Again, I am greatly aided by the insights of Sinclair Ferguson,

“Ten horns grew out of the beast. If the beast represents the Roman Empire, then the ten horns are best taken as the continuation of the spirit that was so powerfully expressed in that empire. The little horn arises in this context and engages in hostile activity against three of the horns.

Earlier protestant commentators often saw a reflection of the little horn in the power of the papacy. Calvin, on the other hand, saw its fulfillment in the Roman Empire itself. In Daniel’s vision, however, the little horn represents the final consummation of evil. It belongs to the final days. Therefore, it ought not be given a specific identification in any historical figure. Notice, however, that the little horn emerges in the context of the beast and the ten horns. It should not surprise us that there will be continual expressions of the characteristics of the little horn that will reach their apex in appearances of the little horn in the last days as described in Daniel’s conclusion. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that many dictators and empire-builders have been identified with the little horn and have shared some of its worst features. We have been told that the Antichrist will come in the final days, but that does not

preclude our recognizing that many antichrists have already strutted across the pages of history (1 John 2:18).” (*Daniel*, 149).

Antichrists and “the Antichrist” blaspheme God, persecute God’s people and are lawbreakers and disrupters of God’s good design (see Dan. 2:21). They self-defy themselves and turn the social order into godly chaos. This reaches a climax when the “Beast out of the Sea” in Revelation 13 emerges. He has and has had many forerunners, but he will top them all. However, his reign will quickly come to an end and when it does, no human like him will ever appear again!

3) God’s people will be given a universal kingdom that will last forever

7:27-28

Daniel is told for a second time that saints will be given a universal and eternal kingdom (v. 27). The God “Most High” will see to it. Piddly despots like Antiochus Epiphanes come and go (175-64 B.C.). Madmen like Nero are here today and gone tomorrow (A.D. 54-68). Lunatics like Hitler have their reign of terror only for a season (1933-45). Antichrist, the final ruler emerging from the sea, will have his day for only 3½ years. In marvelous and striking contrast, God’s Kingdom “will be an

everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will serve and obey Him” (v. 27), they will obey the Son of Man. This is good news and the “end of the matter” (*ESV*, v.28). However, it is a lot to take in! I think we can readily understand why Daniel says, “my thoughts terrified me greatly, and my face turned pale (lit. “my brightness changed on me”), but I kept the matter to myself” (cf. Eccles. 12:13; Jere. 51:64). Perhaps Daniel’s perplexity might be explained like this: I know a great and wonderful and eternal Kingdom is on the way. But, there is a long and hard road of suffering before it arrives. Battles will be lost but the war will be won when the Son of Man comes. Wow! Oh, my! I need to meditate on all of this some more.

Conclusion: Where is Christ in this Text?

This is a very easy question to answer in this text. He is front and center in 7:13-14 as the Son of Man, the divine-human person, who receives the universal kingdom from His Father, “the Ancient of Days.” Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9-13 worshipfully draw from this glorious vision in Daniel. Universal worship of the Son of Man is on the way! And yet, there is more. Who is it who destroys the beast (7:11) but the Son of Man in His majestic 2nd Coming (Rev. 19:11-21). Oh, the deathblow was delivered in His 1st Advent when He cried “it is finished” from

a bloody cross (John 19:30). Therefore even before He ascended to His Father (Luke 24; Acts 1), Jesus could declare in Matthew 28:18, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” So, the beast, and Satan who works behind him and through him, may “wear out the saints of the Most High” for a season (v.25), but it will come to an end. Until then, realize the Son of God became the Son of Man that He might identify with us and comfort us. Spurgeon said it well, “As surely as He overcame, And triumphed once for you, so surely you that love his name, shall triumph in him too” (*Sermons on the Book of Daniel*, 154). Can you hear Daniel 7:18, 27 whispering in your ear?