Daniel 7:1-12 – Daniel's Dream

Chapter 7 is the last chapter of Daniel written in Aramaic. It is also the last chapter of the chiasm of chapters 2 through 7. Chapter 7 has similarities with chapter 2. Chapters 2 and 7 are the "A"s of the ABCCBA pattern; the bookends. Chapter 6 was the last chapter of the historical section. Chapter 7 begins the second half of the book which mostly contains dreams and visions. To put everyone at ease, I will not predict the day when the world will end. I will leave that to others, even though we know that only God knows when the world will end. Chapter 7 contains a passage which many, myself included, believe is a strong Messianic passage. Jesus likely referenced this passage, combined with Psalm 110:1, at his trial before the Jewish leaders.

Read Daniel 7:1-8.

When did chapter 7 take place? We are already familiar with Belshazzar from chapter 5. Since Belshazzar's death coincided with the fall of Babylon, we know that Daniel was still under Babylonian rule when this chapter occurred. The events of chapter 7 occurred before chapters 5 and 6. What happened in verse 1? This makes me think of Zechariah and his visions of the night. (7:1)

In verses 2-3, what did Daniel see in his vision? What does the sea typically represent? See Revelation 13:1. (7:2-3)

What was the first beast like? What did this first beast represent? If this first beast was the same as the golden head of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, what was the first beast? What association was there between ancient Babylon and lions? The lion is the king of beasts as gold was the most treasured metal in that time. What is the significance of the wings? See Jeremiah 48:40, 49:22. What is the significance of the beast standing like a man and being given the mind of a man? Was this a reference to what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4? (7:4)

In verse 5, what was the second beast like? What did the second beast represent? The most common answers are Medo-Persia and just Media. I agree with Dale Ralph Davis that identifying the beast as just Media is very unlikely based on the rest of the book of Daniel. Chapter 8, two years after chapter 7, includes a vision of a ram with two horns. The ram was identified as Media and Persia. It was one animal with two horns. See 8:3, 20. What is the meaning of it being lifted up on one side? What is the meaning of the three ribs in its mouth? An acceptable answer is "I don't know". Revelation 13:1-10 is an interesting passage that has some similarities to the first three beasts in Daniel's dream. Instead of three separate beasts, there is one beast in this passage which is part like a lion, part like a bear and part like a leopard. (7:5)

In verse 6, what was the third beast like? What did the third beast represent? What is the meaning of the four wings and the four heads? Sinclair Ferguson says that the "four" represents universality. That may be the meaning of the four wings, but I disagree about the four heads. He says that it does not represent the four main kingdoms that emerged after the death of Alexander the Great. Again, chapter 8 can help us here. In chapter 8, a goat appears in the vision and casts down the ram with two horns and tramples the ram. The great horn of the goat was broken and four horns emerged. 4 heads = 4 horns = 4 kings. The goat was identified as the king of Greece which was most certainly Alexander the Great. The 4 heads / horns would then be the four main generals of Alexander who established their own kingdoms after Alexander's death. See 8:7-8, 21. Two of the four heads / horns were written about in detail in chapter 11. (7:6)

In verse 7, what was the fourth beast like? What did the fourth beast represent? Note the iron teeth. Was that a call back to the bottom part of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Greece, Rome and an end times kingdom are three identifications for the fourth beast. (7:7)

What do horns typically represent in dreams and visions? How was the little horn described? What is the meaning of the eyes and the mouth speaking great things? ESV has "speaking great things". NASB has "uttering great *boasts*". NKJV has "speaking pompous words". NIV has "spoke boastfully". Who is/was the little horn? Let's put a pin in that for now. (7:8)

Read Daniel 7:9-12.

Verse 9 is a great contrast to the beasts who devoured and brought chaos. In Daniel's vision, different parts of the vision are introduced by "I looked" or "I saw". What and who did Daniel see in verse 9? The "Ancient of Days" is a phrase that is only used in the Bible in this chapter. It is also used in verses 13 and 22. What does this phrase mean? How was the Ancient of Days described? ESV has "thrones were placed". NASB has "thrones were set up". NKJV has "thrones were put in place". NIV has "thrones were set in place". These translations all have the same meaning. KJV is very different. It has "thrones were cast down". What were the thrones for? Who sat on the thrones? (7:9-10)

I will use British understatement and say that verses 11 and 12 are challenging. What made Daniel look in verse 11? What did Daniel see when he looked in verse 11? The phrase "burned with fire" definitely communicates judgment. While Daniel was alive, Jerusalem was burned with fire as part of God's judgment against Judah. In Matthew 13:40, the parable of the weeds, Jesus used the phrase in conjunction with "the end of the age". Which beast was referred to? What is/was the timing of the death of this beast? Does verse 12 mean that the first three beasts will outlast the fourth beast? Notice that they exist but their dominion has been taken away. Some believe the four beasts are Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. This identification allows them to identify the little horn with Antiochus Epiphanes. For those who identify the first three kingdoms as Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, the little horn cannot be identified as Antiochus Epiphanes. Are these verses talking about a judgment which occurred during the Roman empire or are they talking about the final judgment? Who was/is the little horn? (7:11-12)