

Daniel 7: Menacing Menagerie

INTRODUCTION

As we compare the dream in Daniel 2 and the dream in Daniel 7, we are able to see some important principles of Bible interpretation. These are discussed under the section covering practical application.

Daniel 7 also expands on the information received in Daniel 2. A comparison of these two chapters provides greater details concerning what to expect in the fulfillment of the various prophecies involved. One of the basic principles of Bible interpretation which relates to outline prophecy is the principle of repetition and enlargement. The vision of Daniel 7 repeats and enlarges the concepts which were presented in the vision of Daniel 2. This process is at work again as Daniel 8 repeats and enlarges certain portions of the vision of Daniel 7.

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

Daniel 7 continues with the message of a progression of kingdoms which was started in Daniel 2. The imagery of the two chapters may be compared as follows:

DANIEL 2	DANIEL 7	KINGDOM	DATE
Head of Gold	Lion with eagle's wings	Babylon	605-539 BC
Chest and arms of Silver	Bear raised up on one side	Medo-Persia	539-331 BC
Belly and Thighs of Bronze	Four headed Leopard	Greece	331-168 BC
Legs of Iron	Beast with iron teeth	Pagan Rome	168 BC through AD 476
Feet of iron and Clay	Ten horns	Divided kingdoms	AD 476 and beyond
	Little horn with big mouth	Christian Rome	1260 years of persecution
Stone destroys image	beasts destroyed		future

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The similarities are significant. It is important to find the absolute correlations between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. We do not want to leave ourselves open to all kinds of conjecture. And so we should look for the correlations which are explicitly mentioned in

the book of Daniel. Though these are not numerous, they are sufficient for the task of connecting the two chapters rather conclusively.

In Daniel 2:40 the fourth kingdom is a kingdom of iron. In Daniel 7:7 the fourth beast has iron teeth. Each view of the future includes iron in its description. And both descriptions explicitly state that this fourth kingdom will break in pieces like iron breaks in pieces. This provides the clearest possible connection between the images of the two different dreams. Though other elements may not be as clearly related, these two elements provide a crystal clear connection between the dreams. One merely needs to look back in each dream to notice that there are exactly three kingdoms listed before this kingdom that breaks in the same way that iron breaks in pieces.

In Daniel 2:38, the golden head is clearly seen to represent Nebuchadnezzar. But after him was not merely another KING. There was to be another KINGDOM (Daniel 2:39). And so it was clear that there would be a series of four major kingdoms, beginning with Babylon, and ending with a great kingdom that would break others in pieces in the same way that iron breaks in pieces. These are the parts that are clear. When we get to Daniel 8, there will be two more elements in the sequence which are so clear that they should not be mistaken to have any other meaning.

But Daniel 7 does not merely go over the same ground that Daniel 2 had covered. It includes a number of new elements. It also takes a different perspective. The king was interested in a political succession of nations. But Daniel was interested in something much more significant. He was interested in how this succession would affect the people of God. And so the dream which was given to Daniel in Daniel 7 includes a number of details relating to the people of God.

Just what are some of the added details as we move from Daniel 2 to Daniel 7? Among other things, the added details include the following:

The bear is raised up on one side. The king of Babylon did not need to know that the kingdom which would follow Babylon would actually be a two-part power and that the one part would be stronger than the other part. But this information could be helpful for Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar would be dead at the time the next kingdom took power. But Daniel would be alive and could possibly benefit from the knowledge that one of the two connected powers would actually become stronger than the other one. There were also three ribs in the mouth of the bear. These pointed forward to the fact that the Medes and the Persians would conquer three primary powers as they became the next dominant power of the region. These powers included Babylon, Lidia (in Asia Minor), and Egypt.

I find it interesting to note that the conquering king was Darius the Mede (or Median) (Daniel 5:31). As a result, Daniel speaks of this dual power as "the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:28). It seems that the Medes were the dominating force when they first captured Babylon. But this is not the way it remained. The other kingdom was the one that was raised up higher. The Persians are the ones who became the dominating

force as Cyrus the Persian replaced Darius the Median (Ezra 1:1). In later writings, this dual power is no longer listed as "the Medes and the Persians." The book of Esther speaks of "the power of Persia and Media" (Esther 1:3). And so the side which became the dominant power was the Persian side.

The third kingdom also has more information in Daniel 7 than in Daniel 2. In Daniel 7 we see that the leopard has four heads. This is the first indication that there would be a kind of breakup of the kingdom before it would be followed by the fourth kingdom. Later visions would give even greater details about this.

Significant details are added for the fourth kingdom as well. It is here for the first time that we learn about the number of kingdoms in the divided kingdom period. While it is true that there were 10 toes on the image of Daniel 2, there is no overt mention of that fact. There is also no significance assigned to the fact that the image had ten fingers. But when we compare the two dreams, the ten toes begin to have meaning since they are parallel in meaning to the ten horns of Daniel 7. And there is even more information. A little horn comes and uproots three of the ten horns. There would be a power that would uproot three of the original ten kingdoms of divided Europe.

During the time of the power of the little horn that works against God's people, there is a time period given for his domination. It is a time, times, and half a time. The word "times" in this phrase of Daniel 7:25 is in the Aramaic dual form. English tends to have singular or plural words. An example would be boy (singular) and boys (plural). But Hebrew and Aramaic have one other form. The dual form indicates that there is more than one, but not as many as a plural. There are two things if the dual form is used. English has very few words that are dual. One such word is "both". When we use this word, we are referring to two things (no more and no fewer). In the sentence, "Both boys came to the party." the word "both" functions to make the word "boys" become dual in nature. There are two boys (no more and no fewer). But in Hebrew and in Aramaic, there is a different form of the word to carry this meaning. No other words need to be supplied. So the phrase, "time, times (dual), and half a time" would clearly indicate three and a half times. But what does this mean?

This time period appears in scripture in seven different places. It is referred to in three different ways. For the purposes of Bible time prophecy, we can see that a prophetic month has 30 prophetic days and a prophetic year has 12 prophetic months. Understood in this way, the following time periods are all seen to be the same. Studying the context around each of these verses can be helpful in shedding light on the meaning of the time period.

This time period is described as:

Daniel 7:25	A time, times (dual), and half a time
Daniel 12:7	A time, times (dual), and half a time
Revelation 11:2	Forty-two months
Revelation 11:3	One thousand two hundred and sixty days
Revelation 12:6	One thousand two hundred and sixty days

Revelation 12:14	A time, and times, and half a time
Revelation 13:5	Forty-two months

This is a terribly long time period for persecution. And this actually took place in History. In A.D. 538, the papal power manifested itself with the stroke of a sword and by the decree of the ruler Justinian. 1260 years later, in A.D. 1798, this papal power was broken when the French general took the pope captive during the French Revolution.

In order to identify the little horn power of Daniel 7 it can be helpful to list some of the key characteristics which are listed in Daniel 7:

1. It came up among the ten horns (Daniel 7:8,20,24). This was during the time of the divided nations--after Rome had lost its monopoly on power.
2. It would arise after the ten horns (Daniel 7:24). This means that chronologically it would arise after Rome fell in A.D. 476.
3. It was different from the former [ten kings] (Daniel 7:24). Papal Rome was different in character. It was not merely a political power. It was a religio-political power. It would claim God-like authority.
4. Three of the ten kingdoms would be displaced by his rise to power (Daniel 7:8,20,24). See the following notes concerning these kingdoms (below).
5. It would have eyes like a man (Daniel 7:8,20).
6. It would have a mouth speaking great things and would speak great words against the Most High (Daniel 7:25).
7. It would last for a time, times, and half a time. See above for details explaining this.
8. It would think to change times and laws (Daniel 7:25). The Aramaic word for time used here is ܕܝܢ [z^eman] the same word used in Daniel 2:21 where it is said that God is the One to make such a change. But it also changes laws. There is one law listed among the ten commandments which includes something about time. It is the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). This commandment sets aside the seventh day of each week as the Sabbath. This is holy time for God.

The ten kingdoms in existence at that time were:

1. Franks (French)
2. Visigoths
3. Lombards
4. Suevi
5. Alemanni (Germans)
6. Anglo-Saxons (British)
7. Bergundians
8. Heruli
9. Vandals
10. Ostrogoths

Of these ten kingdoms, the last three: Heruli, Vandals, and Ostrogoths were uprooted by the power of Rome.

Daniel 7:13,14 describes the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of days. During the time of the divided kingdoms but after the 1260 days (i.e. after A.D. 1798) Jesus would come. But this was not a coming to the earth. It was a coming to the Father. This marked a change in the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

Daniel 7:22 says that "judgment was given to the saints of the Most High". (KJV). The phrase, *to the saints* can actually be translated in two different ways. It translates the Aramaic phrase, לְקַדְדִישֵׁי [l^eqaddishei]. The לְ [l^e] in the Aramaic is a preposition which can be translated as *to* or *for*. The KJV understands the meaning to be that the saints will be the ones doing the judging. This would be understanding the phrase to be translated, *judgment is given TO the saints*. It fits the picture of Revelation 20:4. It also fits the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:2. But the phrase can also be translated, *judgment was given FOR the saints*. This would show that God was making judgment in favor of His people. This would fit the message so prevalent throughout the Bible. For examples, see Psalm 7:6-9; and Psalm 96:10.

I believe that the meaning may lie in both directions. The people of God are being persecuted by this power represented by the little horn. The time comes when God judges this power and gives them rest from the persecution. This happens as the little horn power comes to an end in 1798. But that is not the end of the story. Judgment FOR the people of God is not only against the little horn. It is also in favor of God's people. In 1844, the judgment in heaven brings new hope for the people of God. He is dealing with the sin problem.

But the judgment which begins in A.D. 1844 does not end in that year. It is fulfilling as an antitype what happened on the great day of atonement in the ancient Hebrew sanctuary service. This is not dealt with finally until sin is completely removed from the earth. Revelation 20:4 indicates that there is a period of time when the people of God themselves will do the judging. As we move from Daniel 2 to Daniel 7, there are more and more details in the information. As we move from the book of Daniel to the book of Revelation, again we see some added details. And so it is true that judgment was given *FOR* or *in favor of* the saints in ending the persecution in 1798 and in moving into another judgment phase in 1844. But it is also true that judgment is given *TO* the saints as the day comes that they will judge the world.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Daniel's dream in Daniel 7 covers much of the same ground as Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. But there is more information. This illustrates a spiritual law. When a person is willing to follow God, more and more knowledge will be given to him or to her by God. When a person puts a limit on what he or she will follow from the revealed will of God, there will also be a limit on what God will reveal to the person. I can have an influence on what kinds of knowledge will even become possible for me to understand. If I follow all that I know to be right, I can open myself up to find out even more than

what God has already revealed in the past.

As we compare Daniel's dream in Daniel chapter 7 with Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter 2 we can notice something. Both dreams cover similar material. But they portray it in a different manner.⁴²

Daniel 2 displays a summary of history through the dream of a large statue or idol. Daniel 7 portrays these same events through the dream of wild animals coming up out of the water. What does this tell me about Bible prophecy? I believe that there are at least five important things we can learn from this comparison.

FIRST, who was receiving each dream? A pagan king was shown a dream based on a very large idol. He worshipped idols. He was comfortable with idols. When he saw things happening to an idol, it could give him an idea about the power of the true God.

Daniel was not pagan. He was not comfortable with idols. He was a Hebrew young man who spent time studying the Bible as it existed in his day. When he saw things happening with animals and water, it would make his mind go back to other events controlled by God. The king had a dream with an idol. The prophet had a dream with animals.

And so God presented the message to each person in a way that would be best understood by that person. The first principle of Bible interpretation is this: God speaks to people in the language that best makes sense to their time, place, culture, and understanding. This is a very important rule which many Christians don't understand.

Too many Christians read the Bible as if it were written directly for today. If we read the Bible that way, we will misunderstand it. In order to understand the Bible, it is important to understand its language. What would these words mean to the people who received them? In Daniel 2, what did those words mean to the king? In Daniel 7, what did the words mean to the prophet?

Even today there are different meanings for the same word.⁴³ If there are so many differences of meaning for words in modern speech, wouldn't we be wise to look for the same in ancient speech? And so, the first rule of understanding the Bible is this: God

⁴²These insights are developed in a much more interesting manner in the sermon notes in the appendix (for the section on Daniel 7). It would be worth looking over that section.

⁴³Several examples are cited in the appendix (the sermon on Daniel 7).

speaks to people in the language that best makes sense to their time, place, culture, and understanding.

This leads us to the **SECOND** rule: The language of the Bible is the language of the past. In order to understand the language, we must look back at how it was used before. The words of the Bible do not stand alone. They normally point back to previous experiences or stories.

Let's look at a few examples. How does the Bible start out? In the beginning we see the Spirit or Wind of God moving on the water. Out of the waters of chaos, God creates our world. This creation includes dividing water. Water is divided below and above. It is also divided from the land.

If you read the story about the flood, you will see some of the same language. This is more obvious if you read these stories in the Hebrew language (which Daniel spoke and read). But the story is turned around. The water which had been divided comes back together. Everything moves back toward chaos. And yet, the ark is seen as parting, or dividing, the water. And, once again, dry land appears for the people of God.

The story of the Exodus also moves along these points. In order for the people of God to come out, they must pass through the water. Once again, God divides the water and dry land appears. There are many, many more details which flow through these stories. If you take the time to read them again, you will see a lot of overlapping details.

For Daniel, the dream did not stand alone. He was a Hebrew and he read in Hebrew. When he saw animals coming up out of the water, I'm sure that it led his mind back to the stories of creation, the flood, and the exodus from Egypt. He could already see that this dream had to do with deliverance. It would include the power of God. It would portray God acting to preserve and protect His people.

The king could never have known those things. So God only showed the king the things which he could understand. The more time we spend with God, the more He can share with us.

There was a preacher in America named Charles Wheeling. He used to really help people to understand the Bible better. But then something went wrong. Among other things, he stopped following the second rule of Bible interpretation. He no longer recognized that the language of the Bible was the language of the past. He tried to read it as if it had been written in our language. He looked at Daniel 7 and reinterpreted it. "What is the symbolism of the animals?", he thought. In our society, the eagle is a symbol of the United States. The lion with an eagle's wings must represent USA. The bear is a symbol of Russia. This bear must represent Russia. The four-headed leopard represented a four part coalition of Asian nations including Korea and Japan.

His idea was fascinating. But he was dead wrong. He had failed to apply the second rule of Bible interpretation. The language of the Bible is the language of the past.⁴⁴

The **THIRD** rule of Bible interpretation is related to the first two rules. It seems like it should be obvious, but many people miss it. If I am trying to understand a sentence in Korean, I would need to use a Korean dictionary. A German dictionary won't help me understand a Korean sentence. The same is true of the Bible. If I want to understand something in the Bible, I need to search for answers in the Bible. I need to let the Bible interpret itself.

As I read the Bible day by day, I will gain a better understanding of the more difficult portions. So the third rule is this: Let the Bible be its own interpreter. If one part does not make sense, read other parts in order to find meaning.

This brings us to the **FOURTH** rule of Bible understanding. We have an old saying in English: "He couldn't see the forest for the trees." It means that someone is spending so much time with the small details that he can't see how the parts fit together. Many people are so busy looking at the little pieces that they can never understand how the pieces fit together. We need to spend the majority of our time reading the clear parts of the Bible. The more time we spend reading clear sections, the better will be our ability to understand the more difficult sections. Take time to read the gospel stories. Read the stories of creation, the flood, and the experiences of Israel. These stories will build a foundation which will help in understanding the more difficult portions of scripture.

The **FIFTH** rule is very basic, but many people miss it. Daniel wasn't too proud to ask for help. Read Daniel 7:16

In the vision or dream, Daniel didn't understand the meaning. He didn't pretend to understand. He asked for help. If we want to understand the Bible, we need to ask for help. We need to pray that God will enlighten our understanding.

The fifth rule is very important. I must ask God to help me understand His Word.

Following these five rules, Daniel was able to find understanding about these prophecies.

FIRST, he accepted the message in its time, place and culture. This, of course, was easier for him than it is for us. It was given in his time, place and culture.

⁴⁴The sermon on Daniel 7 in the appendix shares a story of a big misunderstanding of prophecy relating to the Korean military and the biblical number 666 (see appendix).

SECOND, he recognized that the language of the Bible was the language of the past. He recognized the hand of God working through created beings. He recognized the power of God working as it had in the past.

THIRD, he let the Bible be its own interpreter. He took time to compare scripture with scripture (see Daniel 9:2).

FOURTH, Daniel spent the majority of his time reading the clear parts of the Bible. Because he already knew so much of the Bible, the new information could begin to make sense.

FIFTH, he asked God to help him understand.

If I really want to understand Bible prophecy, I will follow these five rules of interpretation. And then, I might just be surprised at what God will reveal to me. I challenge you to apply these rules to your study. You may be amazed at the results.