

Daniel's Visions in the Night (Part 1)

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Date: 17 February 2016

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[0 : 00] Let's open our Bibles to Daniel chapter 7. We're ready to begin chapter 7. It's a good thing our prayer time is taking a while because we're just really, and this is on purpose, we're just going to barely get into the chapter.

We're kind of some introductory things to begin with, just talk about some maybe more technical things about this chapter, very key chapter in the book of Daniel, and then kind of get into the historical setting for this, which really takes up a little less than the first verse of the chapter. And I didn't want to launch out into the second major portion of the chapter because then you get into these weird visions and creatures that Daniel sees, and I'd like to kind of take all those together.

So there's no way we could do all that tonight, so I'm just going to kind of get into some introductory things as well as a little bit of information about the setting. But I do want to read the entire chapter, so at least we have this whole thing in our minds.

When I begin to read, you're going to perhaps remember some of this. Maybe you've read this before and you know a little bit about these visions. We'll say that the vision here matches really easily, and it's easy to see the comparison between this vision and the vision that Nebuchadnezzar had of the statue, the image.

[1 : 41] So we studied that already, and so when we launch out into the meaning of each of these beasts or creatures that Daniel or God really allows Daniel to see in his dream or visions, we'll see the comparison there very easily, but not tonight, okay?

But I want to read the entire thing. So chapter 7, verse 1, In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, so right off you know we're digressing a little bit in time, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed.

We'll explain that a little bit better, kind of in his mind, I guess we might say. Then he wrote down the dream. Telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And suddenly another beast, a second like a bear, it was raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth.

[3 : 10] And they said, And thus it arise, devour much flesh. After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird.

The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful, and terrible, exceedingly strong.

It had huge iron teeth. It was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots.

There in this horn were eyes, like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated, his garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool.

[4 : 26] His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire. A fiery stream issued, and came forth from before him. A thousand thousands ministered to him.

Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. I watched then, because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking.

I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him.

Then to him was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.

[5 : 31] In his kingdom, the one which shall not be destroyed. I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit, within my body, and visions of my head troubled me.

I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made known to me, the interpretation of these things.

Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.

Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron, and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet, and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes, and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows.

I was watching, and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them. Until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

[6 : 56] Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it, and break it in pieces.

The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom, and another shall rise after them. He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.

He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time, and times, and half a time.

But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.

[8 : 12] All right, so, weird, isn't it? All right? I mean, it is, isn't it? You start to try or attempt to visualize, you know, these beasts as Daniel describes his vision and so forth, and no matter how you, what you make of how he described them, you come up with some pretty strange-looking creatures.

And so, this is Daniel's dream, Daniel's vision. Now, before we delve into the text of the chapter, and again, we're just going to get into verse 1 tonight, but before we do that, let me cover just a few things by way of introduction, and some of this might be interesting, some of it you might think is boring, but, you know, just humor the teacher tonight, and just point out a few things.

The general agreement, and I looked at a lot of different commentaries, those that I had access to, and some that I could find online, really, almost to the person, that is, conservative Bible scholars, the agreement is that chapter 7 is the single most important chapter in the book of Daniel. single most important one, and we'll get to some reasons for that here in just a minute. I put down a couple of quotes there, these may be people who don't have any idea who they are, but both of these men that I've quoted here have written some pretty significant works on the book of Daniel. So, the first one was an Old Testament scholar by the name of N.W. Porteous, and he wrote chapter 7 is the heart of the book of Daniel. So, I just put that quote in there because we need to understand that this chapter is key, it's crucial to the entire prophetic book.

[10 : 15] In fact, from here on, this chapter sets the stage for much of what comes next in the book of Daniel as far as its substance and the substance of the visions that are part of the book.

Go even further than that, and I included this one, E.W. Heaton also wrote a very significant book on Daniel. He said it would be no exaggeration to say that this chapter, this chapter 7, is one of the

most important passages of the Old Testament, of the entire Old Testament.

And I think, you know, as we go along, we're going to find ourselves agreeing with this, because not only does this dream, just kind of look ahead, does this dream, these visions, speak of, very much like the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, speak of the major kingdoms of the world that are in existence at the time of Daniel and will come as time progresses, but it also speaks to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, his first one and his second one, and speaks to events that will take place in God's purposes, God's plan after the second coming.

So it really kind of encompasses a large part of eschatology, of our understanding of the end times. and so, yeah, it's no exaggeration to say that this chapter is very significant. Now the question then is, why is Daniel chapter seven so significant?

[12:04] Well, I've already given, I just gave you one, or mentioned that because of its content, but number one, Daniel seven marks a, what we call a literary transition, a literary transition from historical narratives, and that's what we had in chapters one through six.

Chapter one through six is historical. Now, it doesn't mean that what we have in chapter seven isn't real history, it is. I mean, Daniel did have this vision. We're talking about the purpose of the first six chapters is to give in chronological order historical narrative.

All right, so it shifts from historical narrative to prophetic visions. Chapters seven through 12 through to the end of the book. So, now what we have going forward is strictly prophecy.

This is the prophetic part of the book of Daniel. Now, that doesn't mean that we can't go back and look at chapters one through six and say that there's nothing prophetic there.

Well, there is. But, I guess, again, it's the literary approach. The first six chapters are historical narratives.

[13:27] The chapter seven, the rest of the book, is, well, really, the technical term is apocalyptic. We'll get to that here in just a minute. In fact, that'll be number two.

All right, so chapter seven is transitional. It's a transitional chapter. Chapter seven joins the two divisions of the book. You can neatly divide Daniel into two parts.

And, in chapter seven, joins those two parts. And, that's why the book shifts, just to point this out, it shifts from third person to first person.

Third person, that's historical narrative. You know, there's someone telling the story. So, it's all written in third person. He did this.

They. He. But, then it shifts to first person. Now, Daniel is doing the speaking. I. And, so, there is the marked difference.

[14:27] The second reason why this chapter is so significant is, and I've already mentioned it, but chapters seven, chapters seven through twelve are the apocalyptic.

Just in case you, you, you, not familiar with that word, A-P-O-C-A-L-Y-P-I-C, there you go.

Apocalyptic. All right? Now, that word is derived from the Greek. Comes right from the Greek. Apocalypse.

Apocalypse. Apocalypse. Yeah, that's right. Apocalypse. And, uh, its basic meaning is what? Revelation. I mean, that word is translated, uh, more often than not, revelation. And the word apocalypse, the Greek word appears quite often in, uh, uh, the Bible is specifically in the book of Revelation.

[15:30] So, in Revelation chapter one, verse one, the, where John writes, the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's apocalypsis. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants things which must shortly take place.

So, Revelation is one of those books that is almost totally apocalyptic. Uh, you know, the word apocalyptic is used, uh, you know, uh, in different ways.

In fact, what do you think of when someone uses the word or, or says something is apocalyptic?

You know, we usually think that it's, it's, it's, it's, uh, you know, uh, uh, cataclysmic or something like that.

You know, some, some, uh, uh, big thing, big explosion. Say, say, you know, there's apocalyptic, apocalyptic event taking place in our world, you know.

But apocalyptic or apocalypsis just simply means revelation or unveiling. Now, I grant you quite often, uh, in the Bible, uh, where we have apocalyptic literature, it is strange.

[16:42] uh, uh, not just strange, but cataclysmic, uh, events that take place. And, uh, the chapter that I just read, you'd have to say that that's pretty strange stuff, uh, these visions.

That's apocalyptic uh, uh, types of literature. And, uh, uh, you, you'll find, uh, you know, that in, uh, a lot of places in the Bible, uh, like Ezekiel, uh, be another, uh, book that is full of apocalyptic type literature.

Uh, revelation I've already mentioned, parts of Isaiah, uh, several other, the prophetic books in the, uh, uh, Old Testament, major prophets as well as minor prophets, not all, uh, of the, uh, prophetic books are considered apocalyptic, uh, though in the strictest sense, uh, in the sense of revelation or unveiling, uh, all prophecy is, is apocalyptic in that sense.

All right, so, uh, the biblical apocalyptic literature, now, this is part of your notes, you write this in if you want to, is an actual account of what the writer saw and heard.

We, we need to understand that. Apocalyptic literature is not the author, you know, just kind of making this up, uh, as kind of a community, uh, device in communication, you know, to, to really make, make, uh, a vision interesting or make, uh, some, uh, prophecy of God interesting and eye-catching.

[18:18] The author's not making any of this up. uh, apocalyptic literature is an actual account, a written account, of what that writer, that person saw and heard.

And, uh, by the way, that's why, uh, apocalyptic portions of the Bible are often strange. Uh, strange and weird at times because the author's simply writing down what he saw.

and he's writing down what he saw using human language and he's just describing it the best that he can. And, uh, now, there's an added element to that.

This writer is also under the control of the Holy Spirit of God so that what he writes down is, is inspired. It's, it's, it's God's revelation.

He's writing down exactly what God wants him to write down. But, uh, you know, to see these weird creatures or let's go to the book of Revelation and have, you know, John's description of heaven, what it looks like.

[19:24] That's, that, that's what it looked like to him. Uh, streets of gold and, you know, all of these things. Uh, he's using the language, human language to describe something that's otherworldly.

And, uh, and so in the case of Daniel, he's describing a vision of something that is symbolic of something else, like symbolic in this case of certain kingdoms.

And these visions are descriptive in some way of those kingdoms. These beasts have certain characteristics that fit with, uh, with these kingdoms that will rule on the face of the earth.

All right, so, um, apocalyptic. So this, this, uh, last part of the book of Daniel, starting with chapter 7, is the apocalyptic portion, uh, of the book.

Now, we'd add one other thing before, go to number three. Even though the key element of apocalyptic literature is symbolism, it is symbolism, even though it's symbolism, the predicted events always have a literal fulfillment.

[20:39] That's something that, uh, our liberal, uh, sorry to say brothers and sisters, I'm not so sure I can say that they're brothers, uh, our liberal friends, uh, sometimes they're not even friends.

That's why some on the liberal side, uh, uh, would, they would disagree on this. You know, we're not to take any of this literally. In fact, it's used as an argument against approaching the Bible from a literal perspective.

So the Bible, you know, has all kinds of figures of speech and all kinds of symbolism and such, and so, uh, you can't interpret it literally. Well, obviously we're not going to interpret Daniel's vision of these weird beasts and creatures, uh, and interpret it literally that these kingdoms, that these are actually kingdoms and they look like that.

Well, obviously not. They're symbol, symbolic. But the fulfillment of that vision is literal. Literal and historical, and, uh, you can, uh, really, uh, uh, take some of those prophecies, those, those, uh, visions that God, uh, has given key people in biblical times, uh, and take those that have already been fulfilled, and you know that they started out very symbolic, uh, but when they were fulfilled, they were literal.

And so if, if, uh, uh, those visions and prophecies that are already now fulfilled were fulfilled literally, then we can be sure that those prophecies that deal with yet future times for us will be fulfilled historically, literally, uh, historically.

[22:19] All right, uh, number three, what's the purpose, uh, the immediate purpose of Daniel's visions, uh, for the people of Israel was to assure them that their nation would endure?

See, that's always kind of the question, uh, you know, here's Daniel, and he has this dream, this vision, and, uh, you know, and it's interpreted for us at some point in the chapter, so we don't have to guess what, what, what it is.

Now, some of it, it's a little difficult to surmise, but, uh, we know that, uh, it's a prophecy, vision, a prophecy of future things, so why would that matter to anybody living then?

And so there's, there's always this question, you know, uh, was there some kind of immediate fulfillment, kind of a dual fulfillment, something that applied to the then and there, uh, and yet it has a dual application, it also points to the future.

Sometimes we want to look at biblical prophecy, uh, in the Old Testament and say, well, you know, it had an immediate sense, and then it also had a future sense. Well, that is true with some prophecies, but what about Daniel's?

[23 : 36] I mean, how could you look at Daniel's vision and say, well, this had some immediate fulfillment, uh, for the people of God at that time, as well as having something future.

Uh, but in this case, that's, that's not true. So what was the purpose, uh, for, uh, uh, God giving Daniel these visions at this time? Well, the purpose was to assure God's people, the Jews, the Israelites, that their nation would endure, that it would not absolutely come to an end forever. Now that's pretty important to God's people at this time. I mean, after Jerusalem fell, uh, to the conquering Babylonians, the Jews were taken into captivity, first the northern kingdom, then the southern kingdom, first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, and after the Babylonians took, conquered Jerusalem and took, uh, Israel captivity, uh, into captivity, the nation of Israel ceased to exist.

There was no nation of Israel in, in, in the strictest sense of the word and, in, in our understanding of a nation. They had no capital, they had no nation, they were all slaves.

They were in captivity. So really the nation of Israel came to an end after the Babylonians invaded and conquered Jerusalem and took them into captivity. All right, but God made it clear to his people through Daniel's prophecies that Israel would indeed continue to have a place in history.

[25 : 10] Now, we, we think about that and think, well, is that really that big of a deal? Well, it certainly was to them, uh, to their nation, to their people, their God's chosen people, and so here you are, you're in captivity, and you're thinking, well, this is just the, this is the end of us.

Uh, no more will we be a people anymore. And so God uses this prophecy. Now, this isn't his only purpose, uh, but the purpose for him giving it at this time to Daniel was to assure his people that he wasn't through with it, that, that they somehow were not going to figure into, uh, anything else in world history.

And so God did that. They have a place in history, you know, and, uh, their promised Messiah would come. That's part of this prophecy. You know, were they thinking that, well, you know, we've blown it.

Um, we went into idolatry and God judged us and, and we ceased to be a nation, ceased to be a people. And, uh, so that's, that's it.

But, but God is using this prophecy to remind them that their Messiah will come one day and he will deliver them. First from spiritual bondage and then from, uh, uh, national bondage and that he will set up his kingdom and reign over the nations of the world.

[26 : 31] That's all a part of this vision, uh, that God gave Daniel. And so the immediate purpose for that was to encourage, uh, the people of Israel that God's not finished with them.

Uh, and so Daniel's prophecy then encourages God's people then and now. I mean, it's encouraging to us too, right? There's just as much future, this prophecy, uh, that, that is the part about the Messiah, the ancient of the days and the coming of the Messiah, just as much future for us as it was for, uh, God's people then.

Now it's closer to us now, obviously. I mean, you know, several thousand years have, uh, have, have, uh, gone by. And so, yeah, even though these prophecies still point to a future event, still future for us as it was for them.

And so if it was encouraging to them, then it should be encouraging to us as well that God's plans are going to be fulfilled and, uh, all this is going to come, come about.

Number four, the visions of chapters seven through 12 are given in chronological order. Uh, just, just to make a note of this, just as the historical, uh, narratives, the accounts of chapters one through six were chronological, these visions are also chronological.

[27 : 57] In fact, the chronology kind of fits with the first six chapters. Uh, and so there's some overlapping here, uh, of the book when you get into chapter seven, for example, the visions of chapters seven and eight occurred before Belshazzar's feast.

Remember, we studied that back in chapter five. So we're kind of digressing here, uh, but it's still going to go in a chronological order. So chapter seven and eight go back to Belshazzar.

The visions of chapter nine occurred before, uh, the lion's den episode in chapter six, uh, under Darius. So, you know, it still comes in chronological succession there, but then when we get to the fourth vision detail in chapters 10 through 12, these chapters will record the very last dated event in Daniel's life, but, but so it's chronological.

All right. So now we'll get into the very first point and complete the first point of my blessing. All right. So looking at Daniel chapter seven, the first thing we want to see is the historical setting for Daniel's visions, the historical setting.

Verse one, first part of verse one says in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, there's an historical setting. So in that first year of Belshazzar, Daniel had a dream and visions on his head.

[29 : 37] Again, just simply means in his mind, had visions in his mind while on his bed. So he's on his bed sleeping and he has this vision dream. All right. So these visions would have happened just after the events recorded in chapter four.

And what was that? The humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar. Remember, he got real prideful, looked out on his great Babylon. You know, God struck him down and turned him into an animal, reduced him to an animal.

He's out there eating grass. Fingernails are growing out like claws. So, so chapter four details that event. So this event happened after that.

And then several years before the events recorded in Daniel chapter five. All right. So this vision comes between chapters four and five.

Now, there are a lot of years that have transpired there. So, you know, chapter five really between chapter four and chapter five, we have quite a few years that go by. And so this event, this, this vision that God gave Daniel happened quite a few years, several years before the events recorded in chapter five.

[30 : 55] What happened there? Belshazzar's great feast, remember? And, and then you saw the handwriting on the wall, God writing a message for him.

Then his death by the invading Persian army and the fall of the Babylonian empire. That all happens in chapter five.

In fact, that all happened in one night. Uh, pretty incredible. All right. So Nebuchadnezzar, we could all also should know, uh, he's been dead.

He died approximately nine years before this event in Daniel's life, this vision that he had. If Daniel, by the way, if Daniel was 15, did a little, little checking on this.

And many think that's pretty accurate that he was 15 when he was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, then he would have been 67 years old when God gave him these visions that are recorded in chapter seven.

[32 : 01] The Nebonidus, remember that guy, he'd become king, uh, of Babylon in, uh, 556 BC. Three years into his reign, he made his son Belshazzar co-regent.

So, uh, Nebonidus and Belshazzar's son, they were co-kings, co-regents of, of Babylon. So the date of, uh, of these visions, we can pretty much pinpoint, uh, pretty exactly, uh, would have been 553 BC.

All right. So, you know, that's worthwhile information for you. God may have had, and I've already talked a little bit about this, but may have had a two-fold reason for giving Daniel these visions at this time.

I mentioned one of them a while ago, uh, but here, here are two reasons that I think God gave Daniel these visions at this particular time. Number one, to encourage his people in captivity to the Babylonians in Babylon, to encourage them.

Belshazzar was by far the most wicked of the Babylonian kings to that date. He was not only the most wicked, he was the last one, but he was the most wicked, and, uh, the Jews may have been tempted to give up all hope of surviving their captivity.

[33 : 31] So, this was to encourage them, that this isn't the end, uh, this isn't the way it's going to be all the time. Uh, God has a plan. I've already revealed much of that plan to you, and I'm just

reassuring you that I'm going through with that plan.

You're, and you're going to be a part of it. So, as they encouraged them, and, uh, to take it a step further, uh, number two, to prepare his people, uh, for what was going to come next, and that is further captivity under the Medes and Persians, which, which would come very soon.

I mean, I think about this, to prepare them for that. Uh, you know, their hope might be, might have been that maybe any day now, this captivity will be over. And so, if that's your hope, your desire, you long for that, uh, you know, it's one thing to encourage you that God has a plan for you, so don't, don't, don't give up.

But then also to prepare you for another setback. And, uh, and that is, you know, the captivity would continue, uh, under the Medes and the Persians, and they needed to be prepared for that disappointment, uh, and they needed to be assured that God's people were secure, that they would survive their kind of protracted captivity, and they would play, in the end, play an important role in the end times.

And so, I kind of end with that, um, uh, and make the point that really this is one of the primary purposes for biblical prophecy. It's not just simply to inform us about what God is going to do.

[35 : 11] I mean, it is that. That's a major purpose, uh, for biblical prophecy. Uh, but it is to encourage us. In fact, isn't that what the point that Paul is making here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, and you have it there in your notes, but let me read it.

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren. So, biblical prophecy is to inform us, right? Paul didn't want them to be ignorant. Concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. So, he's giving prophecy. These are the things that are going to be happening, and I want you to be ignorant about this.

You need to know these things. But also, I'm giving you this information so that you won't lose heart, you know. Won't, won't, uh, get discouraged.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself would descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

[36 : 25] And the dead in Christ will rise first. These are important prophecies, aren't they? Dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

And then, how does he end it? Therefore, comfort one another with these words. So, they're meant not only to inform us so that we know what God's plan is for us.

And God is gracious to detail those things for us in Scripture. Sometimes through visions, like Daniel's vision, sometimes just clear, direct prophecy.

He wants us to be informed and know, and know what's coming. But also, it is to comfort, comfort one another with these words. And by the way, even though this is just but one, I guess, one reason why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, it's because it would be awfully hard to comfort anybody about going through the tribulation.

It would be pretty hard to comfort, you know, hey, we're going to go through tribulation, it's going to be terrible, it's going to be bad. So, I just want to share that with you so you'll be comforting. That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it?

[37 : 46] Well, anyway, next time we'll look at the hideous specifics. That's the next point in my outline. The hideous specifics of Daniel's vision and then the humbling significance of Daniel's vision.

So, we'll get to that. Probably not all of it, but we'll get to the next part of it next time. Thank you.