

DANIEL 7:13–14. EHV

I kept watching the night visions, and there, in the clouds of heaven, I saw one like a son of man coming. He came to the Ancient of Days, and he was brought before him. To him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will worship him. His dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

If you've been following the news at all, you're well aware that President Trump is already well along in assembling his team for his second term in office—chief of staff, secretary of state, attorney general, defense secretary, secretary of homeland security, and many other positions. Political pundits, journalists, and ordinary citizens are already trying to use this and other information to predict how effective his presidency will or will not be and what he will do, whether for good or for ill.

The prophet Daniel didn't have to guess about the political future. In Chapter 7 of the book bearing his name, God gave him visions showing the rise and fall of a number of kingdoms. But God also showed him the rise of a kingdom very different from all of them.

Daniel reports that he had the visions recorded in Chapter 7 during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar king of Babylon, so around 550 BC, and at night while he was lying on his bed. Daniel was most likely in his late 60s or into his 70s by this time.

The visions Daniel had were similar to the dream another person had which Daniel had interpreted about fifty years earlier, a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had had. Both men had a dream about four great kingdoms. In King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the four kingdoms were represented by a large statue made up of four different metals. In Daniel's dream, the four kingdoms were represented by four great beasts coming up out of the sea.

The first beast was like a lion, but with the wings of an eagle, but the lion eventually morphed into an upright man. This beast represented the kingdom in which Daniel was living—the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The humanization of the lion probably represents the humbling experience that happened to King Nebuchadnezzar, when he went from being a proud, boastful ruler to going insane and living in the wild to having his sanity restored and reclaiming his former honor and glory, but now with humility and acknowledgment of the one true God.

The second beast in Daniel's dream was like a bear. The bear was not symmetrical, but uneven, with one side higher than the other, and it was holding three ribs in its teeth. This kingdom was the kingdom that would take over the Babylonian Empire, namely the Medo-Persian Empire. The one elevated side represents how the Persians were superior to the Medes, and the three ribs probably represent that empire's three principal conquests.

The third beast was like a leopard, but with four wings on its back like those of a bird, and with four heads. This kingdom was the Macedonian Empire under Alexander the Great, who was known for his swift and exhausting battle campaigns and conquests. The four heads represent the four main divisions of Alexander's empire after his untimely death.

The fourth beast was "frightening and terrifying and very strong. It had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed. With its feet it trampled whatever was left." The kingdom that took over the last vestiges of Alexander the Great's empire was the Roman Empire.

This fourth beast was especially terrifying to Daniel not just because of its power. Daniel says “it was different from all the beasts that came before it. It had ten horns.” As the time lapse proceeded, another little horn grew up and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This little horn had eyes like a man’s and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Later God explained to Daniel that this kingdom was indeed different in that it would devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns represented ten kings who would come from that kingdom, namely the Roman Empire, and the other little horn that came up later represented the Antichrist, who would oppress God’s saints until the end of the world.

As Daniel watched this scene unfold during the night, he saw that as each new beast came into focus, the previous beast did not immediately disappear, but was stripped of its authority and allowed to live for a period of time before dying off. But what about the last beast, the Roman Empire and its vestiges and especially the little boastful horn? Daniel says that the Ancient of Days suddenly appeared and took his seat on his throne, attended by thousands upon thousands. The court was seated and the books were opened. This was clearly a picture of the final judgment. Daniel says that as the court was seated and the books were opened, the little horn kept on speaking boastful words, right up until the final beast was killed and its body was destroyed and thrown into the burning fire. In other words, Judgment Day brought the vestiges of the Roman Empire, and especially the boastful little horn, to an end.

This is what happened leading up to our verses. What should we take away from this? There’s a common refrain, isn’t there? A kingdom rises, a kingdom thrives, a kingdom falls. One kingdom looks really impressive, but then another impressive kingdom comes along and subdues the first and the first kingdom doesn’t look so impressive anymore, and then the same thing happens to the kingdom that subdued the first; it’s replaced by another kingdom itself.

And if we went and zoomed in on each of those kingdoms, we would find some terrific wonders. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were not only said to be beautiful, but also a feat of engineering with the irrigation techniques that were employed. The Lighthouse of Alexandria, at 330 feet, was one of the tallest man-made structures in the world for many centuries and served as a prototype for all later lighthouses in the world. The Library of Alexandria, founded around the same time, in addition to possessing a comprehensive collection of scrolls, also became a model for the modern university campus. The Colossus in the harbor of Rhodes, a sort of precursor to the modern day Statue of Liberty, snapped at the knees and fell over as a result of an earthquake in 226 BC. The remains were still so impressive that people continued to travel to see them for the next 800 years. Few people could wrap their arms around the fallen thumb, and each of its fingers was larger than most statues. Even if you’ve never been to Rome, most of you would recognize a picture of the ancient Colosseum, and there are elements of Greek and Roman architecture used especially in impressive government buildings still today, including our own courthouse. Even their languages were structurally sound and continue to impact us today; anyone who has ever seriously studied Greek or Latin will still tell you that they never truly understood how English worked until they studied those ancient languages.

But what happened and continues to happen to all of these kingdoms? What will happen to even the most long-lasting vestiges of them? They all perish.

But here is a different kingdom entirely: “I kept watching the night visions, and there, in the clouds of heaven, I saw one like a son of man coming. He came to the Ancient of Days, and

he was brought before him. To him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will worship him. His dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.”

Daniel sees the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, hundreds of years before God’s Son took on human flesh. He sees his kingdom from when it really begins in earnest, namely from Jesus’s ascension when he came on the clouds of heaven and was led triumphantly into God the Father’s presence, up to the end of time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, either in ecstasy or in agony.

Notice the difference between this King and his kingdom and the previous kings and kingdoms. The other kings and kingdoms came out of the tossing and roiling sea. This king did not; he appeared on the clouds of the heavens. His kingdom is not of this world.

When the Ancient of Days took his seat, the other kings and kingdoms and their vestiges were destroyed and thrown into the burning fire, but this King and his kingdom were brought into the presence of the Ancient of Days and remained there. This King and his kingdom are holy.

The other kings and kingdoms were all their own contained entities with their own language or, at best, perhaps several languages. Aramaic and Akkadian were the languages of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Aramaic also persisted into the Medo-Persian Empire as its primary language. Greek was the primary language of the Macedonian Empire. And Latin was the primary language of the Roman Empire. But this King’s kingdom is made up of all peoples, nations, and men of every language. His kingdom spans imperial and national boundaries. His kingdom spans skin colors and cultures and traditions. His kingdom spans languages across the globe. He is truly the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords.

And the other kings and kingdoms all have their time in the sun and then die away. But the final line of this text emphasizes for us that this King and his kingdom are very different. It’s emphasized three times: “His dominion is an *eternal* dominion that *will not pass away*, and his kingdom is one that *will not be destroyed*.” There is no fall of this empire. It only waxes; it does not wane.

How is his kingdom eternal? We already noted that his kingdom is not of this world. The Son of Man said as much to Pontius Pilate, and then told him that this was how his kingdom operated: “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Jesus’s kingdom is eternal because his word of truth is eternal. “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). His word never fails. His word forgives sin and saves eternally. His word gives eternal happiness and peace that all the promises and prosperity of earthly kings and presidents and kingdoms can never give. No matter how secure you are, there is no security any earthly king can offer that will keep you from all fear and worry at night. But the word of eternal life from this King’s mouth casts out all fear.

God later expands on this for Daniel and emphasizes for him that as goes the King, so goes the kingdom. “The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom, and they will possess the kingdom forever—yes, forever and ever. . . . The court will be seated, and the [little] horn’s dominion will be taken away in order to destroy it and wipe it out forever. But the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under all the heavens will be given to the people, to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and all dominions

will worship and obey him.” The other kings dominate and oppress their subjects. This King is generous and shares his dominion, power, and greatness with his subjects.

As we walk this earth, brothers and sisters, we do have a dual citizenship—an earthly citizenship and a heavenly one. But they can’t both be equal. The question is: Which one is primary? Which is the dog and which is the tail? Which citizenship wags the other? Which citizenship are you ready and willing to forfeit if one infringes on the other? Which king do you pay reverence to and worship? Do you worship *a* king, or do you worship *the* King?

When you compare the these kingdoms and these kings, I hope you see there is no comparison. Jesus’s dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. The blessings you have through faith in him can never, ever be taken away from you, not even in death. He is *the* King. So as we pass from one church year into the next, let us renew our desire and commitment to worship *the* King, the Son of Man, and to retain our citizenship in his eternal kingdom of peace, life, joy, and salvation. Amen.