

Daniel 7: Symbols and Interpretations

The “Four Beasts” of Daniel 7:4-7

Passage	Empire Represented & Rationale
<p>First Beast: A Lion with the Wings of an Eagle (7:4) <i>“The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.” (Daniel 7:4)</i></p>	<p>The Babylonian Empire (ca. 612 BC–539 BC) Babylon is identified with both a lion and eagle in Scripture (4:7, 13; 48:40; 49:19-22; 50:17; Ezek 17:3, 12). The description of the lion being lifted up to stand like a man, and given a man’s heart, reminds us of how God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar and made him live like a beast for seven years (<i>Daniel</i> 4:17, 28-34).</p>
<p>Second Beast: A Bear with Three Ribs in Its Mouth (7:5) <i>“And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’” (Daniel 7:5)</i></p>	<p>The Medo-Persian Empire (ca. 539 BC–330 BC) The bear was raised up on one side because the Persians were stronger than the Medes when these two empires were combined. The three ribs likely refer to Lydia, Egypt, and Babylon—three nations that the Medo-Persian Empire conquered. The armies of the Medo-Persian Empire did indeed eat their “fill of flesh” as they marched across battlefields.</p>
<p>Third Beast: A Leopard with Four Wings (7:6) <i>“After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. (Daniel 7:6)</i></p>	<p>The Greek Empire (ca. 330 BC–146 BC) The leopard likely represents Alexander the Great and the swift conquests of his army, resulting in the incredible expansion of the kingdom of Greece. The four heads of the beast represent the four leaders that took over his kingdom after his death in 323 BC.</p>
<p>Fourth Beast: “Terrifying and Frightening and Powerful” (7:7) <i>“After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast-- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. (Daniel 7:7)</i></p>	<p>Unknown (???) <i>Though the Roman Empire is the empire that followed the Greek Empire, and thus most naturally the empire that the final beast would be identified with, this beast does not fit entirely with what we know of the Roman Empire. Further, it’s clear that this beast represents a final end-time kingdom, whose demise will bring about the end of the world as we know it and establish the Kingdom of God. Thus it is best to interpret this beast as a final kingdom that has not yet been established on this earth (though it may have some things in common with the Roman Empire of 146 BC – AD 476).</i></p>

Source: Adapted from Warren Wiersbe, Be Resolute: Determining God’s Direction.

The “Little Horn” and The “Time, Times and Half a Time” of Daniel 7:24-25

“The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:24-25).

The “Little Horn”: A Picture of the “Anti-Christ”

The “little horn” that uproots three “horns” (Daniel 7:8) is described in the interpretation of the vision as a final King who will subdue three other kings, and speak horrible things about God and persecute God’s people (Daniel 7:24b-25). This is a reference to what the New Testament calls the “Anti-Christ,” a final end-time ruler who will be heavily influenced by Satan and will accomplish Satan’s evil schemes on this earth. The reference to this final ruler trying to “change the set times and the laws” (Daniel 7:25) likely refers to the Anti-Christ’s attempt to abolish all religious holidays (“the set times”) and indeed all religion altogether (“the laws”). Other passages in the Bible which talk about the “Anti-Christ” are Daniel 11:36-37; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 and Revelation 13:1-10.

The Meaning of “Time, Times and a Half a Time”

Daniel is told that the “little horn” of the final beast (the “Anti-Christ”) will persecute God’s people for “time, times and a half a time” (Daniel 7:25). But what exactly does it mean? Many interpretations have been suggested:

- It could be a symbolic way to refer to a set period of time, meaning, that though the people of God will be persecuted, God will only allow it for a specific period of time and then put an end to it.
- Similarly, it could be symbolic of the idea that though the persecution will get off to a fast start and appear as though it will last forever, it will suddenly come to an end.
- It could refer to a specific period of time—3 ½ years. (“Time, times and half a time” could mean, “one year, two years, half a year” [see footnote on v. 25 in the NIV].) This interpretation squares with other passages of Scripture, which seem to indicate that there will be a time of persecution of God’s people by the Anti-Christ that will last 3 ½ years. Support for this interpretation include:
 - o The “seven times” of Daniel 4:16 are generally interpreted as seven years (“time” = “year”).
 - o The Hebrew equivalent of this phrase occurs in Daniel 12:7 and is taken to approximate the 1,290 days of v. 12:11 and the 1,335 days of v. 12:12, both of which are just over 3 ½ years.
 - o Revelation 13:5 says that the beast (who represents the same individual described in this chapter) will have power for 42 months, which is equal to 3 ½ years.
 - o Revelation 11:2 relates that Jerusalem will be trampled for 42 months, which is the time of the persecution of the “Anti-Christ.”
 - o The same phrase is found in Revelation 12:14; and the duration of this period is explained in Revelation 12:6 to be 1,260 days, which is again 3 ½ years.
 - o The period of 3 ½ years is referred to in Daniel 9:2, where a covenant is broken in the middle of the seventieth “seven” (or week). If the “sevens” in Daniel 9 are sevens of years, one “seven” is seven years, and the middle of that is 3 ½ years.*

Source: Taken from Stephen Miller, Daniel (New American Commentary)

* This will be discussed again in our sermon on Daniel 9.