

Reformation Fellowship Notes • June 14, 2020
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Handout #9
Daniel 7

I. Introduction

A. Listener Question:

How might the empire of Socialism differ from the empire of Democracy or a democratic republic?

1. Background / review

- a) I have argued that Daniel is about Empire.
 - (1) Empire is the tendency of sinful human beings to cooperatively provide for their own security and prosperity by granting their primary allegiance to the union.
 - (2) This is based on the assumption that Daniel intended for us to see the Neo-Babylonian Empire as the natural heir to the Tower of Babel in Genesis.
 - (3) And Babylon, in the book of Revelation, is further developing this concept.

2. Answer to question

- a) Wherever there are people, there is the tendency to develop Empire.
 - (1) It is not unique to any form of government.
 - (2) However, some forms of government offer more resistance to Empire than others.
 - (a) The kind of control that Empire seeks is best achieved through central administration.
 - (b) Socialism is based on the idea of central administration.
 - (i) Socialism offers virtually no resistance to Empire.
 - (c) A democratic republic is designed to be decentralized.
 - (i) Therefore, it provides a certain amount of resistance to Empire.
 - (3) Empire can develop out of any governmental form.
 - (a) Human beings are desperate for something to alleviate our fears and sense of insecurity.
 - (i) We will strike a devil's bargain to be safe and secure.

B. A major change in the nature of the text

- 1. The first half of book is historical narrative.
 - a) Visions were reported in the narrative—
 - (1) Visions that were given to kings.
 - b) Events are given in chronological order.
- 2. The second half of book is reports of visions given to Daniel.
 - a) Goes back in time about 13 years
- 3. This is a transitional chapter.

- a) In some ways, it is related to first half.
 - b) In some ways, it is related to second half.
 - (1) The text is still in Aramaic until the end of chapter 7.
- C. These visions are very difficult to interpret.
- 1. Many different interpretations have been offered.
 - 2. Most scholars think that they were written after the death of Antiochus Epiphanes (164 BC).
 - a) Written after the things they predict
 - b) Pseudo-prophecy
 - 3. I am assuming it was written about 500 BC.
 - a) By Daniel or by someone soon after he died
 - (1) Chapter 7 is written in third person.
 - (a) Daniel wrote a summary of the vision.
 - (b) The book of Daniel could have been written later based on the notes of Daniel.
 - b) The prophecies are truly predictive.
- D. My assumptions
- 1. All details are significant.
 - a) If it is there, it is there for a reason.
 - (1) I may not be able to identify the reason, but there is a reason.
 - b) The details help identify the meaning of the symbols.
 - 2. The visions in Daniel are all related.
 - a) They all deal with the evolution and nature of Empire.
 - b) The vision in chapter 2 overlaps with the vision in chapter 7.
 - (1) I will use the vision in chapter 2 to help interpret the vision in chapter 7.
 - 3. All prophecy is ultimately about the end.
 - a) The end helps us understand what history is all about.
 - b) Prophecy points to the end.
 - (1) Prophecy talks about interim events with an eye to the seeds of the end embedded in them.
- E. Comment: Daniel's visions change in nature over the course of the book.
- 1. The first two visions are highly symbolic.
 - 2. The last vision has very little symbolism.

II. Daniel 7:1

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

- A. The first year of Belshazzar (551 BC)
 - 1. He was a very self-serving ruler.

- a) He appears to have been the instigator of the coup that brought his father, Nabonidus, to power.
 - b) When his father went to Tema, Belshazzar became the ruler in Babylon.
 - c) Documents show that he used his position to enrich himself and his young friends.
 - d) He mocked YHWH (Chapter 5).
2. Daniel was seeing, for possibly the first time, the potential that empire has for evil.
- B. Daniel had this dream while he slept.
1. He wrote a summary.
- C. I will go through the text describing the vision.
1. I will make comments as we go through.
 2. Then I will try to pull it all together at the end.
 - a) I will assign meanings to the symbols.

III. Daniel 7:2-8

Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ² Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

⁴ "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 man, and the heart of a man was given to it.

⁵ "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!'

⁶ "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.

⁷ "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.

⁸ "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

- A. Daniel was lying in his bed when he had this vision.
- B. "Four winds of heaven"
 1. The Aramaic word (and the related Hebrew word) *ruach* can mean either wind or spirit.
 - a) It is often used in the OT to refer to the activity of God.
 - (1) In the creation narrative, it says that the earth was all chaos.
 - (2) But the spirit of God was poised to act.

- (a) Ready to bring order to the chaos
- 2. “Winds of heaven”
 - a) This underscores the notion that these winds represent the activity of God.
- 3. “Four”
 - a) The number four is used to suggest “all” or “the full complement,”
 - (1) But it has the connotation of things worldly.
 - b) Just as “seven” suggests “all” or “the full complement,”
 - (1) But it has the connotation of things holy.
- 4. “The great sea”
 - a) Common image in ANE [Ancient Near East]
 - (1) Chaos is the natural state of things.
 - (a) Chaos in nature is disease, destructive weather, floods, etc.
 - (b) Only the gods can hold chaos back.
 - (c) Worship of the gods is critical for restraining chaos.
 - (2) The gods fought chaos (*Chaoskampf*).
 - (3) The sea was symbolic of the place from which chaos emerged.
 - (a) Notice that in our account, the sea is not named; it is just a symbol.
 - b) The writers of the OT utilized this imagery.
 - (1) The creation story was written as an account of God bringing order out of chaos.
 - (2) Chaos is equated with the forces hostile to God.
 - (a) So bringing the Israelites out of Egypt is depicted as God’s fight against chaos.
 - (3) Sometimes God is depicted fighting against the sea creatures that come out of the sea.
 - (a) Psalm 74:12-14
- 5. “Four great beasts”
 - a) Beasts coming out of the sea
 - b) They are all different one from the other.
- 6. Do they come out at the same time or in succession?
 - a) This is an important question.
 - b) Not clear
 - (1) I assume they come out one after the other.
- 7. First beast
 - a) Like a lion with eagle’s wings
 - (1) Common motif in Ancient Near East
 - (a) A decoration on the walls of Babylon
 - (2) *Mischwesen*—animals with mixes of features, often with wings
 - (a) Powerful and fearsome
 - (i) Unnatural, perhaps supernatural
 - (b) Often guardian creatures
 - b) It is transformed.
 - (1) Wings removed
 - (2) Becomes somewhat man-like

- (a) It began to stand like a man.
 - (b) It was given a human mind/heart.
8. Second beast
- a) Like a bear
 - (1) Lopsided
 - (2) Three ribs in its mouth
 - (a) Like he is just finishing eating a victim
 - (b) Why three?
 - (3) “Arise, eat much meat!”
9. Third beast
- a) Like a leopard
 - (1) Four wings
 - (2) Four heads
 - b) Given authority to rule
10. Fourth beast
- a) Most striking feature—terrifying
 - (1) This image leaves the most lasting impression on Daniel.
 - b) Different from all the rest
 - (1) It can’t be likened to anything Daniel is familiar with.
 - (a) Dreadful, terrifying, and extremely strong (iron teeth)
 - (b) Far more scary than the other three
 - c) It is very destructive.
 - (1) Devours, crushes, and tramples
 - (2) The rest
 - (a) Whatever it did not devour or crush it trampled with its feet.
 - (i) Pointless destruction
 - d) One way it was different from the other beasts: it has 10 horns.
 - (1) One additional horn emerges.
 - (a) It supplants three horns.
 - (i) It uproots them (uproots is a loaded term).
 - (b) The little horn has eyes (human).
 - (i) It is a little bit human, like the first beast.
 - (ii) But it is like a human in a different sense.
 - (iii) It is a frail, mortal being making God-like boasts.
 - (c) It also has a mouth.
 - (i) It makes great boasts.

IV. Daniel 7:9-10

2 *“As I looked,
 “thrones were set in place,
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
 His clothing was as white as snow;
 the hair of his head was white like wool.
 His throne was flaming with fire,
 and its wheels were all ablaze.*

¹⁰ *A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened.*

- A. While the fourth beast is rampaging and the small horn is boasting, there is another place where activity begins to take place (change of scene).
1. Thrones are set up.
 - a) One throne is for the Ancient of Days.
 - (1) The eternal one
 - (2) He was here before the beasts and after they are destroyed.
 - b) He is getting ready to sit in judgment (verse 22).
 2. Appearance
 - a) Clothing is white
 - b) Hair is white
 3. Engulfed in fire
 - a) Fire destroys most things but refines other things.
 - (1) Throne has wheels.
 - (a) Like in Ezekiel
 - (b) It is mobile; it isn't stuck in Jerusalem.
 - b) River of fire
 - (1) The destruction from this river would be great.
 - c) Myriads of attendants
 - (1) Underscoring his majesty
 - d) The court sat.
 - (1) They are almost ready for the judgment to begin.
 - e) The books were opened.
 - (1) Probably the book of life?
 - (2) Book of history?

V. Daniel 7:11-12

"Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. ¹² (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)"

- A. Daniel's attention is shifted from the throne room scene to the little pipsqueak horn making outrageous boasts.
1. This little horn on the fourth beast gets more attention than anything else in this vision.
 - a) We learn more about this horn when the angel interprets the vision.
 2. The fourth beast was killed.

- a) It had the little horn.
- b) The corpse was burned with fire.

VI. Daniel 7:13-14

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

- A. Daniel’s attention is refocused on the throne room scene.
- B. One like the Son of Man
 - 1. Descended on the clouds of heaven
 - a) A means of divine transportation from heaven to earth
 - (1) Common image in mythology about Baal
 - (2) When God came down on Mount Sinai it was enshrouded with a cloud.
 - 2. This is the third man-like thing in this chapter.
 - a) First beast becomes man-like.
 - b) The small horn on the fourth beast had eyes like man.
 - c) Now this person, who is descending on the clouds.
 - 3. The Son of Man was presented to the Ancient of Days.
 - a) He was given power, a kingdom, and glory.
 - b) People from all ethnic groups will populate his kingdom and serve him.
 - c) His kingdom and his authority will last forever.
 - 4. This scene is less symbolic.
- C. This is the end of the vision proper
 - 1. But within the vision, Daniel receives an interpretation.

VII. Daniel 7:15-18

“I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this.

“So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ ‘The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’

- A. Having seen the vision, Daniel is disturbed.
 - 1. Distressed—he is confused and does not understand what he has seen.
 - 2. Alarmed—the vision had a big impact on him.
 - 3. It was not soothing or reassuring.
 - 4. Daniel sought out someone to explain the vision to him.
 - a) One of those standing there

- (1) One of the attendants?
 - b) The vision is clearly symbolic.
 - c) He does not know what stands for what.
- B. Here is the orientation to the symbolism.
- 1. The beasts are four kings (kingdoms).
 - 2. But the saints will receive the eternal kingdom.

VIII. Daniel 7:19-22

“Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. ²⁰ I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. ²¹ As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

- A. Daniel is particularly interested in the fourth beast.
- 1. It was different from the others.
 - a) Very dreadful
 - b) Iron teeth and bronze claws
 - 2. It devoured and crushed everything.
 - (1) What he didn’t devour and crush, he trampled.
 - (2) Very destructive
- B. Daniel is also interested in the eleventh horn.
- 1. The horn that looked the most imposing,
 - (1) And it had eyes and a mouth.
- C. Daniel adds more detail to what he saw in the vision.
- 1. That horn fought with the saints.
 - (1) And it was being victorious against them.
- D. This was the situation until the Ancient of Days came to judge.
- 1. The judgment was in favor of the saints.
 - 2. It was time for the saints to be given power over the kingdom.

IX. Daniel 7:23-28

“He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. ²⁴ 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 saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

²⁶ “ ‘But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

²⁷ Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’

- A. The interpreter explains more fully what the fourth beast is.
 - 1. The fourth beast is the fourth kingdom.
 - a) It will be different from all the others.
 - (1) Its differentness is highlighted.
 - b) It will crush the whole world.
 - c) It will have ten kings.
 - (1) The eleventh king will arise.
 - (2) He will supplant three kings.
 - 2. The horn will persecute the saints.
 - a) He will bad-mouth God.
 - b) He will oppress the saints.
 - c) He will want to change times and laws.
 - 3. Eventually, the divine court will sit in judgment.
 - a) Dominion will be taken away.
 - b) The fourth kingdom will be wiped out.
 - c) Power will be given over to the saints.
 - (1) Their reign will be eternal.
 - (2) And all powers will serve and obey God.

X. Daniel 7:28

“This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

- A. Daniel was obviously very upset.
 - 1. Too scary?
 - 2. Too confusing?
- B. He didn't tell anyone.
 - 1. But he wrote down a summary of it.

XI. Putting it all together

- A. This presents a side of Empire that has only been hinted at up to now.
 - 1. Empire is oppressive.
 - 2. It is hostile to God.
 - a) And the people of God

- B. The vision in chapter 7 builds on the vision in chapter 2.
1. Different image completely,
 - a) But deals with the trajectory of Empire.
 - (1) Charts it out with four random, earthly kingdoms
 - (a) Only the first and fourth were identifiable in chapter 2.
 - (i) The other two are just placeholders, anonymous kingdoms.
 - (b) There is more to go on for all four in chapter 7.
 - (2) Notice that in both visions, the fourth is both last and most different.
- C. Verse 12 is important for understanding the vision.
1. Option #1: The beasts were all marauding at the same time. The fourth beast was killed, and his kingdom immediately ceased to exist. The other beasts were allowed to have a continuing existence for a while after their dominion was taken away. (Chris White)
 2. Option #2: The beasts came in succession. One came out of the sea and did his thing, and after he was done, another beast came out of the sea. The last beast was destroyed, and his kingdom immediately ceased to exist, unlike the other beasts who had their power removed, but they were allowed to continue to exist in this powerless condition for a while. (Joel Richardson)
 3. I lean toward option #2.
 - a) This gives the vision short-term and long-term fulfillment.
 - (1) This is common in prophecy.
 - b) The vision in chapter 2 has the kingdoms succeeding one another.
 - (1) I think this is just a further development of the meaning of that vision.
- D. It presents the trajectory of Empire by giving us four “random” samples.
1. Three near-term
 2. One from the end of the curve
 3. Not necessarily comprehensive
 4. Not necessarily consecutive
- E. Retelling the vision
1. God’s acts to bring about turbulence in the “sea” of humanity.
 - a) Conflicting interests and desires result in dissatisfaction and restlessness.
 - b) This unrest leads to the emergence of an empire from time to time.
 - (1) The “sea” belches out a “beast” periodically.
 - c) These beasts are terrifyingly powerful and destructive (oppressive?).
 - (1) One by one, they emerge and trample.
 2. First empire: Babylon
 - a) The Gate of Ishtar in Babylon was decorated with beautiful lions with wings.
 - b) This empire was humanized by God’s humbling of Nebuchadnezzar.
 3. Second empire: Medo-Persian
 - a) This kingdom was made up of two separate kingdoms that united.
 - (1) But the Persian kingdom came to be far more dominant over time.

- b) The Medo-Persian empire incorporated three large kingdoms.
 - (1) Lydia
 - (2) Babylon
 - (3) Egypt
- c) I don't know what it means when the bear is urged to "Eat your fill of flesh!"
- 4. Third empire: Macedonian
 - a) Alexander conquered an enormous area in an amazingly short period of time (four wings connote speed).
 - b) When Alexander died, the empire was divided up among his generals.
 - (1) Four heads suggest the four parts of the empire.
 - c) I don't know what it means when it says, "it was given authority to rule."
- 5. Fourth empire: Last empire (Empire)
 - a) It is significantly different from anything Daniel could imagine.
 - (1) Particularly terrifying and destructive (oppressive)
 - b) It consists of ten kingdoms.
 - (1) A small kingdom takes over three of these ten kingdoms.
 - c) This small kingdom becomes particularly arrogant and hostile toward God and the things of God.
 - (1) He thinks he can determine what is right and wrong.
 - (2) He thinks he can dictate the timing of world events.
 - (3) He persecutes and kills the people of God.
- 6. Just when it looks like the people of God will be completely destroyed, God will come in judgment.
 - a) At just the time appointed, God will move to destroy the fourth empire.
 - b) The Messiah will be given authority over the eternal kingdom.
 - (1) All people will be united in a common effort.
 - (a) But entirely subject to God

XII. Conclusion

- A. This chapter stresses the horror of Empire.
 - 1. Chapter 2 stressed the ephemeral nature of empire.
 - a) Empires become less precious.
 - 2. Here we see that empires become more terrifying and destructive.
 - a) This is Daniel's overwhelming reaction.
 - (1) The good news about the eternal kingdom winning is not enough consolation to overcome the negative.
 - 3. Empire is also hostile to God.
 - a) This becomes clear here for the first time.
 - (1) Belshazzar was hostile to God.
 - 4. At the end of history, God will allow Empire to fully develop.
 - a) We will see the Empire reach its *telos*—
 - (1) The ultimate manifestation of human rebellion against God.
 - b) But God will bring it to an end just before it destroys everything.

5. Why would God give Daniel this vision at this time?
 - a) Under Belshazzar, Daniel got his first taste of this kind of abomination.
6. Why does God present such a negative picture?
 - a) Why doesn't He temper it with more hype about the eternal kingdom?
 - b) It will be bad.
 - (1) It is important that His people know about this in advance.
 - (a) Otherwise, people might lose faith.
 - c) I trust God will see His people through it.

[**Note:** Due to time, David did not teach through B and C of his outline below. Instead, he responded to the following questions / comments:

1. Does the number of beasts, 4, also somehow signify "all"?
2. Revelation 13:1-2 seems to relate to this vision. The description seems to suggest some kind of continuity of attributes.
3. The first three kingdoms you name are consecutive. And they all had power over Israel. Do you think the fourth kingdom will also have power over Israel especially?
4. Is Empire by definition evil? In other words, is Empire necessarily at odds with God? Is the Kingdom of God not Empire because it seeks God rather than try to replace Him?]

B. How is this a transitional chapter?

1. It ends the first part because it shows where Empire leads.
 - a) It is addressed primarily to the gentiles.
 - (1) It is in Aramaic.
 - (2) Empire is first and foremost, but not exclusively, a gentile project.
 - (3) Empire-building is an evil enterprise; repent!
 - b) But it brings the second part because it shows the implications of Empire for God's people.

C. References to Daniel, chapter 7, are particularly numerous in the NT.

1. When Jesus was being interrogated by the high priest, he refers to this passage.
 - a) He does not quote it exactly, but he is clearly referring to 7:13.
 - b) The priests would have known this reference.
2. Having read through the chapter, this passage is much more significant.

Matthew 26:57-66:

⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward ⁶¹ and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

⁶² Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

⁶⁴ "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.