



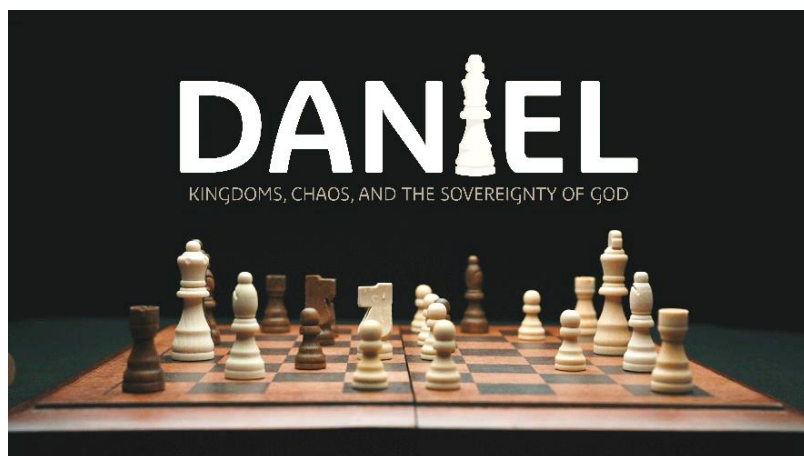
# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## The Choice for the Ages: Earthly Kingdoms or an Eternal One?

### DANIEL: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 7:1-28

Tim Badal | March 3, 2024



Turn in your Bible to Daniel 7 as we continue in our series titled “Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God.” We’ve been looking at the life and times of Daniel. We learned that at a young age Daniel was taken into captivity by the Babylonians, losing his homeland, family, and friends. He learned to live as a righteous God-follower amidst kings and rulers who at times made following God and His commands very, very difficult. In the first six chapters of the book of Daniel we’ve seen how he navigated that and navigated it well. It gives us hope that we can also do that, even in the difficult and dark days we find ourselves in, as we are called to live out our faith.

Last week we took a break because the first six chapters of Daniel are very different from the last six chapters. In Daniel 7 we move away from biography and narrative—that is, the telling of a story of a person’s life—to what we call apocalyptic literature, which is characterized by prophecies about the future. Some of what was future in Daniel’s time is already in our past, but some of what he saw in visions and dreams has a fulfillment in our future as well. As a result, some of what we’re going to read about in Daniel 7 is difficult to understand. It will be the beginning of a lot of figurative language. We’ll see words such as “like” and “as,” where Daniel will say something “is like this” or “is as that.” That’s because Daniel has a hard time describing what he’s seeing. He will try to put into human words what he sees in visions and dreams, because these could be things he’s never seen before.

Maybe this has happened to you as well. You’ve come to a beautiful vista, maybe a grand waterfall or another aspect of God’s creation. You know you’ve really seen it but how to describe it to someone else is the challenge. Even when you take pictures, you might say, “The picture really doesn’t do this justice.”

That’s what Daniel saw and felt. He saw creatures. Some of them he could describe by drawing from his own encyclopedia of creatures he was familiar with. But some of the creatures were so hard to describe he simply called them terrifying and dreadful. This is what is in store for us in the coming weeks: difficult passage upon difficult passage, ones that will take a lot of work to understand.

However, just as Daniel wasn’t quite sure about what he saw, we too won’t be sure of how we should interpret the text as well. Great scholars differ on how to understand these passages and what the various creatures represent. My hope and prayer is that despite these difficulties, we will grow in our faith and be drawn to worship Jesus all the more. This will be important, because at the end of our service, we’ll spend time remembering the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

What we’ll see in Daniel 7 is the rise and fall of kingdoms. Since the genesis of mankind, we have seen kingdoms come and go. We’ve seen armies raised up, territories conquered, and populations moved from one ruler to another. Most of the many empires across history actually conquered very little territory. Some of these empires exist in our day, whereas others are very ancient. Some you will recognize the names of, while others are ones you’ve never heard of. This reflects what’s going on in Daniel’s day, which is that kingdoms don’t last. They come on the scene, seemingly to be there forever, then they disappear in

the blink of an eye. You might think they rule the entire globe, but actually they only got a small piece of the pie. What we'll come to see today is that in the midst of earthly kingdoms that rise and fall, there is a Kingdom that does last forever. So the question we face is will we surrender and submit to the Kingdom of God, or will we continue to build our own kingdoms?

To that end, let's go now to Daniel 7, looking at it under three headings. Just to let you know, my first two points will be longer and the third will be very short. We'll get it all done on time.

## Kingdoms have come and gone and will until the end.

Here's Daniel 7, beginning in verse one: *"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon..."* So here's the time stamp. Daniel is probably 60 or 70 years old at this point and he has dreams and visions. Dreams happen at night, whereas visions of course come when a person is awake. *"Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, 'I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.'"* The first thing Daniel sees in his vision is the tumult of the great sea. He sees winds churning up waves in a large body of water. Later in the text we're told this brings him great anxiety. If you've ever been out on an ocean, you understand this.

My family has been on some cruises, and one of the things I love to do at night is go to the top of the ship and look out at the great expanse of water around me. If you have visions of grandeur, if you think you're larger than life or the big kahuna, try standing on the top of a ship and look around. You'll feel really, really small and insignificant. For me, that was something I did when the sea was relatively calm. Imagine seeing this when the storms are churning up the water. This is the great chaos Daniel sees in his vision. Whenever we encounter stories in Scripture that involve the tossing of great waves, there is always a sense of chaos. So in this vision, the high waves may represent the general chaos in our world. Daniel is seeing humanity as churning chaos. Maybe this morning you are filled with anxiety and fear, because when you look at the headlines, you realize our world is in chaos. There are empires warring against one another.

Daniel continues in verse three, *"And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another."* We'll start with the lion, then another dreadful beast, then we'll hear about another beast who comes off a fourth beast. Now if you're confused already, so am I. We'll just hammer down on these things, some of which we'll deal with this week. In chapter eight, there is an expansion on the vision in chapter seven. So if you think I'm leaving things out, you're right, but we have next week to look at this further.



Here's how Daniel describes the beasts he sees. Verse four: *"The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings."* This was a great creature who had been given even greater power. Lions represent kings, so this would be a king who gained even more power. *"Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it."* Then we're told about the second beast Daniel saw:

<sup>5</sup> And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' <sup>6</sup> After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. <sup>7</sup> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.

This fourth beast is something Daniel can't even compare to an animal. It does three things: it devours, it breaks into pieces and it stamps on whatever is left with its feet.

<sup>7c</sup>It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

What Daniel is seeing are kingdoms. Let's drop down to verse 15:

<sup>15</sup>'As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of those [angels] who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. <sup>17</sup>'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

<sup>19</sup>'Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, <sup>20</sup>and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. <sup>21</sup>As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them.

We have the blessing of hindsight which makes us Monday morning quarterbacks. These kingdoms are those that will arise between Daniel's day and the coming of Jesus Christ. There will be four of them. This vision depicts the events of the 600 years following Daniel's time up until Christ comes.

Here's the amazing thing about Daniel 7. It contains some of the most-quoted verses from the Old Testament. The New Testament writers cite parts of this chapter 58 times. This is evidence that kingdoms will come and kingdoms will go, right up to the end of time. I think what Daniel sees is something like waves in the sea. In a tumultuous sea, one wave will temporarily rise above the others. So we can think of that as the king wave, the kingdom that is in charge. But just as it rises up, the sea is already bringing up another wave. Daniel sees a representation of the rise and fall of kingdoms, but based on what the angel tells Daniel, there will continue to be kingdoms rising and falling after Jesus' time on earth.



The first creature, we are told, was like a lion with wings. It was ferocious and strong and ruled over all the creatures; its wings indicate that it was even greater than the usual lion king. Looking back in human history, we know that the Babylonians had a symbol representing their rule: a winged lion. This was found to be the case in various artifacts from that time and place. They got this image from Daniel's vision. But then the wings of the lion were clipped, referring back to the story of Nebuchadnezzar who had become so puffed up that God chose to humble him, making him like an animal for a season. After that, God restored his kingdom to him.

We also know that the Babylonian Empire eventually fell. We read in Daniel 5 about the party that Belshazzar held, which resulted in the handwriting on the wall and the beginning of the end of the Babylonian rule. Daniel knew the first creature represented Babylon itself.

Then the second beast was like a bear. A bear is very different from a lion. A bear uses brute force. It's not very fast, but rather is a big lumbering creature. The Medo-Persian Empire that took over after Babylon was known for its sheer size. In fact, it was two empires in one. It had a standing army of 2.5 million soldiers, so it would take a long time to move that army even a mile. So like a bear, it was slow in comparison to the other creatures in Daniel's vision and it gained their empire over a period of time. Also we're told that one side of the bear was higher than the other. All of us have heard of the Persian Empire, but very few of us know anything about the Median Empire, because they were a smaller part of that kingdom. Thus the bear, and the kingdom it represented, was lopsided.



Notice it says there were three ribs in its mouth. History tells us the Medo-Persian Empire had three illustrious victories: the victory at Lydia, the victory in Egypt and Babylon. Those were the three secondary kingdoms the Medo-Persian Empire took over, the three “ribs” it devoured. There’s nothing left of them except their skeletal remains— the land they were on.

Then Daniel describes a third animal that rose up from the sea. This one was like a leopard and again it had wings. A leopard is fast, so wings would make it even faster. We’re also told it had four heads.



History records that the Medes and Persians were overtaken very quickly by the Greeks. You will have heard of their ruler in movies— Alexander the Great. He was around 22 years old when he came to power. Who’s a 22-year-old here? Al, you’re not 22. Who’s in their early 20s? Stand up, Avery. This is what Alexander the Great was like: a young, good-looking guy. How many of you would be scared to death if he took over the world? He makes older people who think they’re 22 years old, like Al, not want to live there.

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in about ten years’ time. By the time he was 32, he owned it all. His conquest was so rapid it made people’s heads spin. He did it because he was one of the first generals to come up with the concept of a cavalry and what

were essentially special forces. So the 2.5 million soldiers in the Medo-Persian army were often destroyed in battle by armies a tenth of their size. Then when Alexander was 33 years old, he became sick and died quite suddenly. They weren’t quite sure if it was an illness or the result of being poisoned. Because he was so busy conquering the world, he hadn’t had time for love, so there was no heir to take over his rule. While he was on his deathbed, it was determined that the four highest generals were to take over his kingdom. They were given provinces in the north, south, east and west—thus the four heads of the leopard in Daniel’s vision. It’s amazing how the details worked out in actual history. This also encourages us to believe that the visions and dreams regarding our own future will be as accurate as this first vision of what transpired in the 600 years before Christ came.

Finally, the fourth beast scared the daylights out of Daniel. He could not compare it to any animal in his experience. It was immense and ferocious beyond description. He describes it as having horns and iron teeth. It was so big that after it had devoured something with its teeth and ripped it from limb to limb, it then crushes the carcass and pushes it into the earth.

History records that Alexander the Great’s empire was taken over by what we know as the Roman Empire which was in power when Jesus lived on the earth. Caesar Augustus, who was the Roman ruler in that day, can be described as having iron teeth that crushes everything. This beast was also great in size, as was the Roman Empire. In fact, it became the largest of all the ancient empires. Their armies were also notorious for being brutal.



Daniel 7 is the last chapter that Daniel wrote in Aramaic, then in chapter 8 he began writing in Hebrew instead. In Aramaic, the expression Verse seven says the beast “*stamped what was left with its feet.*” In Aramaic, this is a picture of something being shoved into the ground. That’s how Rome ruled. It would beat its victims into submission. If you did not follow their orders, they invented new ways to kill you. Killing people was sport to them. They would beat a person to a bloody pulp and then hang them on a cross, watching that person die and mocking them during that time. They were ferocious and vicious barbarians who had no fear of reprisal.



It might seem easy to talk next about the little horn that popped out of the beast's head, but we need to slow down. If we jump too quickly to that discussion, we'll miss what I believe to be the entire meaning of this passage, this is that kingdoms have come and gone and will to the end. We need to be okay with that. We need to understand that will be the case and realize that our country has a part in this tumultuous history of the world we live in.

So let's talk about kingdoms for a moment. Before we go into the future next week, we have to understand what Daniel is telling us about the present. God is teaching Daniel that humanity has been on a perpetual mission to build kingdoms for itself. That isn't just true for the great rulers of the empires; it's also true for you and me. I want to build a kingdom; you want to build a kingdom. The way we do this may be different for each of us. The kind of kingdoms we want to build may be different. The expanse of our kingdoms may be different. But the reason why nations war against one another—why we fight and bicker among ourselves—is because we are all on a path to building some kind of empire for ourselves. These kingdoms might be personal, vocational, political, technological, national, and yes, even global. We've talked about these global empires of the past.

Let's move down to a lower level. Have you noticed that the titans of our world today still include political leaders—which I'll get to in a moment—but in many ways the biggest influencers in our day are men named Musk, Jobs, Gates, Bezos. Why is this? It's because they have built technological empires which in some ways are even greater than national or global empires. Technology has no borders. What's going on in our world is a different sort of empire building. Some of us are enthralled by this. While of course it's okay to use this technology, for some it's all they think about and spend their time and money on.

Then let's consider political empires. We have two in our nation that are rising up right now. They're animals as well: a donkey and an elephant. A paraphrase of this passage could read like this: "And I saw out of the great sea a donkey coming out, and out of the great sea an elephant rise up." These two armies are building themselves up, trying to amass for themselves the greater empire because they know there's a battle coming on the first Tuesday in November.

Some of you are on that ride. You're rising and falling based on what your leader—your general—is saying. On that battle day, you're going to be despondent or delighted to no end. Why? Because on that day in November, either your empire will win or your empire will lose. For the next four years, you will be elated or you'll be lost, all because you're building a political empire, but those empires rise and fall.

How about vocationally? Whether you work for someone else or work for yourself, it's all about the next rung on the ladder. It's the next open office, the next title, the next promotion. You will stop at nothing to beat down and knock out anybody who stands in your way. You see anyone who gets in your way as a rival. Surely I'm speaking to someone today who is building a vocational kingdom.

What about a personal kingdom? You're thinking, "I'm not Attila the Hun. I'm not Adolf Hitler." But in your little family—in your little castle—you're building something for yourself. The reason why you buy the house you do, the reason why you buy the cars you do, the reason why you buy the clothes you wear is all to expand your kingdom. God help anybody who gets in the way of your kingdom.

I read a news article this last week with headlines I couldn't believe. "Mom beats up a cheerleading coach." I thought, "I need to read that. What in the world happened there?" It tells the story of a high school mom whose daughter was on the high school cheer team, and the cheerleaders were doing a routine during a basketball game half time. All of you have seen it, been there, done that. But what made this event different was that the mom came tumbling down the stairs of the stands and attacked the cheerleading coach. Why? Let me quote: "Because her daughter wasn't in the front of the routine; she was in the back." We laugh, but doesn't the book of James say we steal, kill and destroy because we do not have what we want? So we will devour and destroy because we are building empires for ourselves. We can look back at decisions we've made and say, "It was just about me living; it was about me building an empire."

Let me be really frank with you—this is extra credit because the other services didn't get this. I have to be really careful that I don't make this ministry an empire. I've got to break that down all the time and it's hard. It's hard in my catering business not to think I'm building an empire, because that's not what we were created for. These are idols we create in our hearts. God is saying to us, with all kinds of 3-D pictures, "If you build a kingdom apart from Me, it will come crashing down."

So how do you know if you're part of a kingdom? Let me give you a few characteristics of a kingdom.

## **Kingdoms are built to expand.**

Kingdoms are about growth. Some of us believe our lives need to get bigger and better. I was at a conference this past week and the first question pastors ask is, "What is the size of your church?" Why? Because bigger is better. So we're in bigger houses because they're better than smaller houses. We're in larger and more beautiful cars because bigger and more beautiful cars are better. We expand our closets, our portfolios, our properties because bigger is better. Our kingdom can't advance if it's not getting bigger.

## **Kingdoms are extravagant.**

The reason why people conquer other kingdoms is the other kingdom has something they don't have, things like natural resources and opportunities. So if you're all about how to make your life better and more extravagant, you may be building a kingdom. Sitting in the back of a Southwest Airline flight screams to me, "Tim, you're better than this. Fly with someone that has business class." I mean, it took three flight attendants to get me into my seat yesterday. I thought, "Surely I should have something better. I work hard." So we think, "It's got to be better. It's got to be nicer." That's what kingdoms do.

## **Kingdoms are exclusive.**

They're about eliminating the competition. I'm preaching to myself here; I don't know why I'm even talking out loud. Do you celebrate when other people have victories? Or in your mind—you don't say it out loud—do you think, "I deserve that. They don't deserve it; I do. They're not the kind of student, the kind of person; look at all I've done. Who cares about them?" You're building a kingdom because kingdoms are all about eliminating competition.

## **Kingdoms are enviable.**

Are you envious? Do you look at your neighbor's house and say, "I wish I had that"? Do you envy their car, their spouse, their children? If you're filled with envy, it's about kingdoms.

## **All kingdoms expire.**

And here's the big truth: all kingdoms expire. They all come to an end. The Hun Dynasty lasted 400 years. The Czars of Russia lasted 300 years. Nazi Germany was supposed to last for a thousand years, but it ended up being about five and a half years. This might offend some people, but we're nearing 250 years of the empire of the United States of America. All empires rise; all empires fall.

They might be national kingdoms or they might be sports kingdoms. We watched the Super Bowl and heard lots of gushing about the Kansas City Chiefs. "Are they ever going to be beatable?" The answer is yes. Someone will get better and beat them. Then there will be a new dynasty. Probably not Chicago though.

All dictators and all tyrants come to an end. So do you have the first point? If you're backing a kingdom in this world, if you're backing a kingdom of human making, you're backing the wrong kingdom.

That's a long first point to get to the second point.

## **Jesus has conquered all and been given dominion both now and for all eternity.**

So we have focused on all these kingdoms. You might ask, "Tell me more about the lion. Tell me more about the bear. Tell me more about the leopard and the beast. That's where the answer is." No. God takes Daniel's mind off the kingdoms and he says this:

<sup>9</sup> "As I looked,  
thrones were placed,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;  
his clothing was white as snow,  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames;  
its wheels were burning fire.

<sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued  
and came out from before him;  
a thousand thousands served him [angels],  
and ten thousand times ten thousand [humans] stood before him;  
the court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.

Let's forget about the creatures of the sea for now. All of a sudden, Daniel is looking at a being he calls the Ancient of Days. Literally in the Aramaic, this means the Elderly One, the One Who has been around forever, the One Who has no beginning and no end. Daniel is referring to the eternal God. He's looking at heaven.

Notice the purity of God. His robes are white. There's no blood on them, no filth on them. He's radiant. He is the Holy One. Then we see that He is majestic. He has majesty and authority. He sits on a throne. He doesn't get up. He does no manual work like we do. All of these people—ten thousand times ten thousand—stand before Him. He has the authority to judge from His throne. The book of Revelation also depicts this when it says all people great and small will stand before the great throne of God.

Finally, we see His deity. There are angels serving Him and worshiping Him. Beginning in verse 13, we learn this: *"...and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man..."* Did you know that 89 times in the New Testament Jesus is called the Son of Man? It's the title He uses most often. Daniel is seeing Jesus. We know that after Jesus ascends to heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father. But that is not what Daniel describes. He writes, *"...and he came to the Ancient of Days..."* So the Son of Man was somewhere else, then he came to the Ancient of Days. Daniel is witnessing Jesus coming to heaven after His ascension.

Then look at what he says next:

<sup>13b</sup> And he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.

## **We must choose which we will grab hold of and embrace.**

What do we learn from this? We learn that the Kingdom of Jesus is unlimited. It's unchaotic. It is universal. It is unending. It is unbeatable. Now, this is where the rubber meets the road. Our short third point is this: we have to choose which kingdom we're going to back. We have to choose which kingdom we're going to invest in and embrace. We have to choose which kingdom we're going to live under the authority of. Quite frankly, some of us talk about living in the Kingdom of Jesus, but we're nowhere near it. We're living for the kingdom of ourselves or of someone else.

Jesus is telling us in this text, "There will be a day when you will bow the knee to Me. All dominion has been given to Me. You're either going to believe it and choose it now, before it's too late, or you will believe and bow when it is too late." We have to choose which kingdom we will embrace. Jesus said in Matthew 6:19, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth..."* If I can revise His words, it means, "Don't build up kingdoms for yourself, filled with the treasures of earth, where s and vermin will destroy it, where other kingdoms will break in and steal. But store up treasure by building up the Kingdom that is in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where other kingdoms cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, that's where your kingdom is." Am I playing with His words too much? I don't think so.

Then look at what Jesus says a couple verses later: "Instead of building a kingdom for yourself, seek first My Kingdom." This is the choice of a lifetime. What kingdom are you going to back? What kingdom are you going to grab hold of? What kingdom will

you choose to live under? If it's one of your own making, it's going to come crashing down. Today, tomorrow, a hundred years from now, it's going to come crashing down.

The only Kingdom that will last forever, the only Kingdom that will save your soul, is the Kingdom of our Lord and of our Christ. We need to start living under that Kingdom. We need to start pledging allegiance to that Kingdom. We ought to be living, serving, and giving in that Kingdom, rather than in the kingdoms of our own making.

Don't allow the plain things of this text to not be the main things. Don't get enamored with all the beasts and all the future. The future is prophesied about so we can get our present in order.

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