Kings and Prophets 17-01-12b

Let's resume our study now in Daniel chapter 7, and our first big idea here is to recognize that Daniel is included in the story for a reason. He could have said, “I had a vision; here's what it was,” or he could have just written it down. Some of the other prophets just write down their prophecies, and they don't include their personal experience of it. And I think it's helpful to note that, in this case, Daniel is a big part of the revelation.

You have his part in receiving it, his response to it, his interaction with those who can explain it, and there's a reason for that. God puts this here for a purpose, and it is to help us to go thou and do likewise. But back to this scenario, and we'll talk about these beasts, but you'll notice just in broad strokes that four great beasts in verse 3 come up from the sea, each differing from the other.

They come up from the sea, as you know, source of the random, chaotic darkness and wickedness. It's often a picture. The first is like a lion, has eagle's wings. “I watched until its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man.” So what's going on here?

In the days of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire, you have really one of the first—the only competitor might be Egypt—but generally speaking, you have the first really great empire of history in the sense of conquering most of the known world and so on. And eagle's wings, eagles and birds in general, suggest divinity and godhood and so on. And it is at that stage in the first millennium BC, the early part of it, where civilizations began to realize that rulers were not divine. They will continue to treat them as divine and call them divine.

But everybody knew Caesar was not a god. Et tu, Brute? When they, you know, 97 stabs or whatever it is, he's not divine, or they wouldn't have been able to stab him to death—the Lord Jesus being an obvious exception. But this, the wings being plucked off, this is recognition that unlike the Egyptians considering Pharaoh to be a son of the gods and so on, this is when they really began to realize governments are practical, they're human, they are organized and founded on human effort and human achievement, human conquest. And it isn't necessarily a thing that the gods perpetrate and bring about. And so you have these wings being plucked off.

It was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man. And this is ancient Babylon. A man's heart was given to it. And so it also—this is where you really have the rise of civilization and sophistication, and detailed written records, cuneiform and so on comes into play, Aramaic starts coming in as a language. And so this is where, if you will, ancient agrarian civilizations really start to mature into what we would call modern nations, modern governments with modern systems.

Secondly, another beast, a second like a bear, raised up on one side, three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said, “Arise and devour much flesh.” Now, what's just comparing and contrasting the first two beasts? The first one is a lion and it has eagle's wings. It loses its wings. Its front is lifted up from the earth, and it stands on its hind legs and becomes a man, essentially, and it's given a man's heart.

So we've talked about the symbolism of that. It's a carnivorous beast, but you don't see it carnivorating. It hasn't eaten anything. It doesn't have any blood on its chin, or it's the roaring lion idea. But then suddenly, another beast, a second like a bear, raised up on one side—this means stronger on one half than the other, which of course is the Persian side of the Medo-Persian alliance or coalition. Ribs between its teeth, three ribs. And there's been different speculation about what those three ribs are, but we know for sure that what it has done is that it has used brute force to kill and eat something. And they said to it, “Arise and devour much flesh.”

So in the first case you have human knowledge and a human heart. So there is perception and there is thought. It's no longer a beast. Now it is a thinking man. So you have the power of thought. The human heart is unlike any animal heart. When we're talking about cognition, expression, imagination, conception, the immaterial world comes into being in that first one. This second one is all about brute force. Arise, kill, and eat. Three ribs, devour much flesh. Knock it down, tear it up, and eat it. So you have brute force idea.

After this, in verse 6, another like a leopard, which has on its back four wings of a bird, has four heads, and dominion is given to it. This is speed. This is agility. This is quickness and the ability to be somewhere that you don't expect. It's, you know, Alexander built his empire on wonderful strategic conquests, and then upon his death—what was he, 28?—when he died, his empire was divided. The four heads are your four generals who take over after Alexander. The Greek Empire winds up having those four divisions that persist for quite some

time afterward. You have the Ptolemies in Egypt. You have the Seleucids. Seleucus was one of the generals, and you have the other two.

So, again, quite a different beast with a different path to success. And this, I think, is how I would characterize the primary differences in these: the path to success, the way in which success is achieved is different. In the first, it is coming out of mythology and into practicality using human wisdom, the human heart, human cognition and expression. The second one, it's all about—it's just like the Russian bear. You know, we're going to stomp boots across territory and take it. We're going to devour it. We're going to—this is the brute force approach.

This third one is speed and quickness. When we used to watch boxing matches, sometimes you've got a real hammering pugilist who just—he's like the bear. He just stands there, he can take a punch, he's heavy, and he just keeps punching and punching and punching, and he just pulverizes anything in his midst. And when he comes up against an opponent that is light and quick and can take advantage of his slowness and his mass and wear him down, this is the way that Cassius Clay eventually won his title, was, you know, float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. That's this third beast.

Then after this—and there's a reason why I'm reviewing these characteristics—then the fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong, huge iron teeth, devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet, different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

It says later on, as I pointed out in verse 12, that the first three beasts persist after the fourth beast is destroyed. And we talked about the fact that this is—I say the fact—this is my perception, that these different beasts are walking the same ground, they are succeeding, they're coming out of the same sea, they're coming onto the same shore, and these governments have presided over largely the same surface area in the ancient Near East, right? It's the same kingdom operated by different kings.

So, what? We're people. We're not kings, we're not running armies, we're not trying to establish a hegemony, so why do we even care about this? Think about this. As we proceed through the day and through the week and through the tasks and responsibilities and course of our lives, you're going to get up tomorrow morning, it's going to be Friday morning, and you're going to immediately be thinking about, okay, what do I need to do? Where do I need to be? What needs to happen? And what is my part in it?

We keep an ear to the ground to find out what's going on in the world. We'll turn on the news or read something on the internet or keep track of it on our phones or whatever, but we're going to get up and function as American citizens doing what we do, where we do it, how we do it, why we do it, and so on, right? Our soul is in contact with all of those hard edges, all of those sharp corners, requirements, opportunities, responsibilities, spiritual and secular. Our soul is our empire.

How is the empire going to be governed? With what tools are we going to succeed? If we are the Babylonians, we forget about the divine, the wings of the eagle disappear, and we stand up on our feet like a man, and we have a heart like a man, and we use human sophistication. We'll think our way through it. We will, in some cases, emote our way through it. We will be very human. We will be open. We will be vulnerable. We'll be smart. We'll be dedicated. We'll be dutiful. We'll be whatever it is that you do when you're standing on your feet like a man and you are given a heart like a man. You do things in the human way, thoughtfully.

We're going to think our way through, plan our way through, prioritize our way through. That's the first kingdom, especially when, after doing that for a while, we don't achieve all the results we were hoping for. We then say, “I'm going to get a big hammer. I'm going to get a bigger brute-force thing going here. I will just attack this and bring to bear everything I can. I'll pile money on it. I'll pile tools on it. I'll pile people on it. I will recruit. I will devour much flesh. I'm just going to take what there is for the taking.” Right? That's another approach. That's another path to success.

You can look around and see people in all different walks of life who take these approaches. You've got guys on channel, whatever your PBS channel is, that talk and talk about the departed spirit masters. Who's that Wayne Dyer guy? I'm always amused. I never get tired of watching him because he just synthesizes so many bizarre things from so many places and he just holds captive the audience. In his latter days, he kind of looked like Mr. Clean. He ended up shaving everything off. But he'd walk around and just quoting Buddha one moment and Jesus the next. And he's on his feet with a heart like a man, keying into people's aspirations and their hopes and their dreams. And we'll think our way through. We'll aspire our way. We'll philosophize our way, if you will.

Then you've got your see the hill, take the hill. “I'm going to devour it. It's here for the taking. I'm going to take it. I'm going to acquire. I'm going to aggrandize. I'm going to amass my forces and get this.” That's the bear.

The leopard: “I'm going to be quick. I'll be sneaky. I'll be furtive. I'll show up where they're not expecting me. I'll do the unexpected. I'll exploit weaknesses. I'll find avenues. There will be an unlocked door. I'll try all the doors till one is unlocked. That's where I'm going to go. I'm the leopard. I've got little bird wings. I've got the big and the little. I've got the ground and I've got the air, but not too much air. Just enough to get me where I want to go.”

Different beast number four is something else. You get almost the idea Nebuchadnezzar is the most overtly believer-type of king out of these. He acknowledged the God of Daniel and the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Remember that? “You will eat grass like a man until you come to know.” In the ideal world, the one who stands on his feet with a heart like a man isn't just going to philosophize, but he is going to realize what Nebuchadnezzar was shown and understood.

If you see that—in other words, the eagle wings don't belong to you. They belong to God. You stand on your feet like a man and you depend on God, and you can be Yisrael. You can be Prince of God. Don't think of yourself as divine. Snip those wings off. Stand on your feet. Have a heart like a man. And your heart can go one of two ways. You can go by brute force. You can go by quickness and stratagem and craft. But on the opposite end of the spectrum perhaps is going to the dark side. Terrible. Unlike anything.

And this, of course, represents ultimately in prophecy the Antichrist, the days of the latter part of the Tribulation period. And who is running rampant at that point? It is Satan. And so instead of coming as close as you can to God the way Nebuchadnezzar does, this guy comes as close as he can to Satan. In between you have those two—it's either punch like a gorilla or float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. That's your bear and your leopard. But on one end you've got the one that is realizing that he's not divine, but there's somebody who is. And on the other you have somebody realizing that there is a dark kingdom ruled over, presided over by Satan and the rulers of the darkness of this age, and going that direction.

Why is it in verse 12 now—all of this is to answer the question in verse 12, not only to answer it, but why do we need the answer? “The rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.” A season and a time. There is a season for everything under heaven, a time for every purpose. You know, there is a—maybe they got that 12-string guitar and sang that song, right? “There is a season, turn, turn.” You know, then they go through part of that Ecclesiastes.

Here's the thing: Babylon is long gone. Medo-Persian Empire, long gone. Greek Empire is long gone. The Roman Empire is long gone in terms of hegemony and government. We've got some artifacts. We've got some heritage from those. We've got some cultural baggage from them. But they are gone. So how can he say in verse 12, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged? Dominion is taken away. Those governments and those empires are gone. But their lives—what is their life? That's the avenue that they used to succeed.

This losing the wings, realizing I'm not divine, I stand on my feet and have a heart like a man, gives me the opportunity to go to God, or I can bull my way through life and try to do it myself. Be the Jacob that I'll knock it down like a bear, I'll rip it apart with my teeth, and I'll devour much flesh. I am here to devour. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. This is the sensual life. This is the self-fulfillment approach. And even though the Persian Empire was characterized by this—you remember at the opening of the book of Esther, you're in the Persian Empire. You remember the sumptuous feast that they're having when everything goes wrong and he wants Vashti to come and she won't. They were the innovators of decadence, if you will.

And then the Greeks, you've got the Greek language that facilitates commerce and trade. You can expand. You can extend. You can, you can, you can be lightning quick, both militarily and economically, and you can get ahead. And we think of economic advancement in this life. If I buy the right stocks, if I make the right investments, if I strategize properly, I can really make a comfortable life for myself. Well, the Greek Empire is long gone, and—but the basis of its success still lives. The basis of success for the Persians still lives. The basis of success for Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, was the reason he prospered, the reason that he finally realized who God was, and he had Daniel and Hananiah and Mishael and others, and it was the key to his success.

So their lives will be prolonged because these paradigms are going to continue to and through the millennial kingdom. But there's one beast that doesn't, the fourth terrible beast. What happens to this option during the millennium? If I want to go to Satan and exploit the forces of darkness and make contact with the spirit world and just, you know, have the demons on my side, who do I go to? Satan, right? Where's he gonna be in the millennial kingdom? Bottomless pit. He's not destroyed. He's removed. He's out of the way. You don't have the satanic option for nine hundred ninety-nine point nine years of the millennial kingdom. That's why the horn is destroyed, the beast is torn apart, and his life is not prolonged. That's not an option in the millennium. God has promised the peaceable kingdom in the millennium, so you don't get the fourth beast option.

What can you do in the millennial kingdom? And by the way, what can you do now? We can rely on our own efforts. We can rely on our own smarts. We can rely on our own strategic genius, on our manipulations and machinations. We can go in like the bear in the china shop and break ribs and devour flesh. We can stand on our feet like a man with a heart, running around looking like he's winged, or we're the terrible beast bringing cursing and misery and suffering to others. And we can be all of them at the same time in different areas and with different situations.

What do we want to be? What is the fifth and final kingdom characterized by? Well, who's the king of that kingdom? Who's the king of the kingdom that is represented by the stone cut without hands? Who is the one who is going to—look at verse 13: “I was watching in night visions, and one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven, came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

And it's not just a historical kingdom or a chronological kingdom. It is a way of doing business kingdom, right? These kingdoms represent approaches and paths and philosophies of existence. So we are given here five choices. What is five? The number of five is the number of man. You get five fingers, you get five toes on your each hand and each foot, five books of the law to guide human function in Israel. We have these five choices. I'm going for the thumb, I think, the last one. I think we start with the pinky, then we move our way forward, and I think the kingdom of the Lord Jesus is the thumb.

But it's more than just the prospect or the retrospect. It is, what am I going to do now? Which of these kingdoms do I want to represent and be a part of? And so you look at this description: the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. Clouds of heaven can represent both glory and others. This can be the angels. This can be fellow saints. But He is accompanied. He's not coming down like a single meteor in a dark sky. He is coming surrounded with a lot of other stuff. It is clouds of something—clouds of saints, clouds of angels, clouds of glory. Whatever it is, He is accompanied. He is not alone. He is not solo.

And where does He go? He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. They brought Him near. Isn't that something? Why would the Lord Jesus need somebody to bring Him to God the Father, the Ancient of Days? What is this? We're about to have an inauguration. We've seen royal funerals and things in the recent past. Do they need all of the falderal, all of the troops, all of the parade, all of the—this is an indication of importance and of solemnity and of glory and so on, right? It isn't necessary. It is to emphasize how special and unique something is.

Does the president actually need a whole platoon of Marines marching? Does—you know, do you need all of these things? Why is the Lord Jesus brought before God the Father? They're Father and Son. They've known each other before any of us were even thought of. But they bring Him before Him. Why? This is the honor guard. This is a formality. This is an investment ceremony. This is something big is going to happen, and all of the participants are watching and seeing and knowing.

God the Father and Son could get together off in some corner of the dimension in which they live and nobody would even know or see, and they probably do, probably are right now, probably always have and always will. This is for the benefit of the onlookers, just like inauguration. The president is the president whether they have an inauguration or not. He's voted in. It's a done deal, right? The Electoral College voted. He's the president as of that date. So what's the ceremony for? It's to let everybody know, let everybody see, invest it with specialness and import and meaning, and remind everyone of what a big deal this is.

These bringing the Lord Jesus before God the Father on this occasion are emphasizing this is a big deal. This is the kingdom that counts. This is the kingdom that counts. This is the one you want to be in. This is the one you want to reflect. This is the one you want to embody. This is the one that you want to embody. You want to be a

part of that cloud. You want to be a saint on a white horse with the Lord Jesus in Revelation 19. This is the one that counts.

So there is pomp, there is circumstance, there is ceremony. It's the biggest deal in the universe. For all I know, the clouds may be galaxies. The whole host of heaven may accompany the Lord Jesus to the throne, the throne of God the Father. I hope we get to see it.

To Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. Notice, to Him was given. If it's good enough for the Lord Jesus to receive and to possess, shouldn't it be good enough for us? Does it say the Lord Jesus went forth conquering and to conquer, went out on a pale horse or something? He receives the kingdom. Remember what He said? He said to His own disciples, He said, "Little children, it is your Father's good pleasure to"—what?—"give you a kingdom." It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He receives it. We receive it.

So then look at verse 14: "All peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him." It's an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. His kingdom is the one which will not be destroyed. What does that mean to us? When we live in the ethos of this kingdom, when we have the priorities and subject ourselves to the government of this kingdom, the things that we do are imbued with eternity. The righteousness that we lay hold of by faith is eternal. It doesn't pass away.

The bear is eventually going to run out of flesh. The ribs are eventually going to drop from his teeth. The leopard is going to eventually be unable to run. These kingdoms will pass away. But the one, the stone cut without hands, this kingdom that is given to the Lord Jesus, when we're a part of that, everything we do—you can be folding clothes, you can be putting on your socks, you can be pulling the keys out of the ignition of your car—and you can be investing in and partaking of this kingdom. This is the kingdom that counts. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord. It's not lions and bears and leopards and iron-toothed maniacal beasts. It is waiting by the brook to receive and to possess.

That, I think, is one of the main ideas, and the reason Daniel is so personally involved in this depiction is because it is a time for personal reflection and personal application. It's the same kingdom. We're in this world regardless whether the lion is ruling, whether the bear is ruling, whether the leopard is ruling, whether the terrible-toothed monster is ruling. It's the same world. It's the same life. It's the same kingdom.

What does it say is going to happen at the end in Revelation? "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever." So this is a wonderful thing to hang on to tomorrow when we get up and face the day and say, "All right, what kingdom am I in? What kingdom do I reflect? What kind of government am I going to run here in my own life?" And with God's blessing on us and this truth from Scripture fresh in our minds, hopefully it can be that fifth and final and eternal kingdom that reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for how pertinent and meaningful it is, how wonderfully You explain to us and illustrate for us the importance of our daily decisions. What we do with the time You have allocated to us in this life—how do we invest it? How do we spend it? Does it return anything of eternal value?

We pray that, as we try to see the pertinence and applicability of these things in our own lives, that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate our path and our thinking, that we can be a blessing to each other and an encouragement to each other in becoming a part of that wonderful glory cloud that accompanies the Lord Jesus when He receives the full and final version of this kingdom from You.

We thank You so much for the privilege we have of receiving from Your hand both physical provision and the manna for our souls from Your Word. We pray that we can live in its light and that our lives will glorify the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in His name. Amen.