

# Explore the Bible: February 20

*Future Seen • Daniel 7:1-14*

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Daniel and his friends lived through the defeat of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar. They survived and thrived during their Babylonian exile. When Nebuchadnezzar died, they were able to adjust to the changing situation under Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar. When the Babylonian empire fell to the Medo-Persian empire, they continued to thrive.

What is the secret to thriving in an ever-changing world? Daniel and his friends focused their faith on the never-changing God in order to navigate the choppy waters of an ever-changing world. Our central truth for this lesson is, "Believers can live with confidence knowing that God's kingdom is eternal."

**The first three beasts. (Dan. 7:1-6).** The first year of King Belshazzar was around 553 BC, so Daniel would have been about 67 years old (NAC, p. 194). God chose to communicate with and through Daniel with a dream. Daniel took care to write down the dream (Dan. 7:1). Daniel used the language of chaos to convey the mood of the dream: "the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea," and "four huge beasts came up from the sea" (7:2-3).

The Hebrews viewed the sea as chaotic, bearing bad omens for the future. The chaos was created by sinful humanity. Beasts were viewed as threats to humans, often symbolizing world powers as they do in this passage.

The first beast was a winged lion (7:4). The second beast was a bear with three ribs in its mouth, caught in the midst of feasting on its prey (7:5). The third beast, a winged leopard, had four heads and was given dominion (7:6).

These beasts, including the fourth one (7:7), represent the same kingdoms viewed as various parts of a giant statue in Daniel 2. Traditionally, scholars identify these kingdoms as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Through a dream Daniel was given a predictive prophecy that would extend all the way into the time of Rome and specifically to the promised Messiah, Jesus.

**The fourth beast and the horn** (Dan. 7:7-8). The fourth beast represents the Roman Empire, noted for its size and military strength. Thus, this fourth beast was “frightening and dreadful” and “incredibly strong” (7:7). This beast had “ten horns,” or rulers/nations associated with it, which was an apocalyptic way of referring to complete control.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, “another horn, a little one, came up among them. This little horn had had “eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly” (7:8). Many scholars identify this “little horn” with the Antichrist who will appear in the last days as leader of a ten-nation confederacy aligned against God and His people (NAC, p. 203).

By this point the reader is drawn into this unfolding drama of world powers set against God and His people.

**The judgment** (Dan. 7:9-14). Then, Daniel’s dream took an unexpected turn. The Lord showed him the “Ancient of Days,” God Himself, sitting on a throne and surrounded by thrones. The whiteness of His clothes and hair represent His purity and

wisdom respectively (7:9).

His throne was “flaming fire” and its wheels were “blazing fire.” In Scripture, “fire” is used literally to refer to a flame used for cooking or warmth. “Fire” is also used metaphorically to refer to either judgment or purification.

Daniel was being shown that the “Ancient of Days” would one day judge the nations and empires of the world. In that day, God would also purify His people, a theme reflected in Malachi 3:2-4.

God’s judging/purifying fire is so massive it is a “river of fire” flowing from His presence (7:10). Accordingly, God has no shortage of faithful servants, “thousands upon thousands served Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.”

Daniel saw God’s court convened and the books opened, a reference to written evidence. Daniel witnessed the beast “killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire” (7:11). A similar description was used by John to describe God dispatching the beast, the false prophet (Rev 19:19-20), and the Devil (Rev. 20:7-10).

This prophecy served to put all ungodly rulers on notice. God is the Sovereign Ruler of all nations and will judge the nations in righteousness. The predictions serve to encourage God’s faithful people. Believers truly can live with confidence knowing that God’s kingdom is eternal.

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