

Daniel's Vision of Change

Bible Background • DANIEL 7

Printed Text • DANIEL 7:9–14 | Devotional Reading • DANIEL 6:25–28

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE the importance of spiritual disciplines in maintaining a Christian life; REFLECT on people in our lives who mentor us in faith; and ACCEPT the role of mentor for new Christians we may encounter.

In Focus

Felicia had been a believer most of her adult life. For the first few years of her Christian walk, she made a point to pray every day and to live and speak in a manner that reflected Christ. However, after taking on more responsibility at work, Felicia began to waver in her faith. Instead of maintaining her prayer life, she would often procrastinate and sometimes forget to pray altogether. Her attitude and actions began to change as well. Felicia would get angry quickly when things did not go her way.

She became short with people if they disagreed with her. She was often bitter because she began to focus on what she considered broken dreams. The worst of all was that Felicia began to feel that God had abandoned her. One morning, she felt so depressed that she called her former Sunday School teacher to talk. After relaying to him how she had been feeling, he asked her how often she prayed. In that moment, Felicia realized that it was almost never. Her teacher reiterated that she must pray and be mindful of how she spoke and lived to continue to grow in the Lord.

Practicing spiritual discipline is vital to our walk with Christ. Apostle Paul emphasize that it is a lesson we should never forget.

Keep In Mind

“And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” (Colossians 4:17, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Horn (Daniel 7:11) qeren (Heb.)—Of an animal; metaphorically signifies strength and honor; symbolic use in visions for kings and kingdoms.

B. Beheld (vv. 9, 11) chaza' (Heb.)—Saw; or in a vision or dream, it means to witness.

Say It Correctly

Yahweh. YAH-weh

Nebuchadnezzar. neh-byoo-kuhd-NEHZ-er

Belshazzar. Behl-SHAZ-er

KJV

Daniel 7:9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

NLT

Daniel 7:9 I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge.

His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like purest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire,

10 and a river of fire was pouring out, flowing from his presence. Millions of angels ministered to him; many millions stood to attend him. Then the court began its session, and the books were opened.

11 I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn's boastful speech. I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire.

12 The other three beasts had their authority taken from them, but they were allowed to live a while longer.

13 As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence.

14 He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

The People, Places, and Times

Daniel. He is the fourth of the “greater prophets.” His name means “judgment of God.” Nothing is known about his parents, but he appears to have been of royal descent (Daniel 1:3). He was kidnapped by the Babylonians and trained for the king's service. When he refused to defile himself with the king's foods, the king's men divinely supported him—Daniel only ate fruits and vegetables, commonly known today as “the Daniel fast.” He was gifted to interpret dreams and visions and was miraculously delivered from the lions' den for his faithfulness. His career spanned about 70 years, giving a time frame for the book of 605-537 B.C.

The Ancient of Days. The Aramaic words for “ancient” and “days” are `attiyq and yowm, respectively, and are translated as “aged” and “time.” Together, they mean “lifetime,” or “eternity.” God, as judge, is called “the Ancient of days” or “the Ancient One” because He is God from everlasting to everlasting, and His reign is forever. The title is listed only three times in the Bible (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22). This same vision of God as judge was also given to the apostle John (Revelation 20:11–15).

Background

What do you do when your faith promotes you and then casts you headlong into trouble? If you asked Daniel, he'd tell you to keep being faithful. Because of his faithfulness and excellent character, Daniel was promoted in King Darius' court. Then his enemies devised a plan to get Daniel into trouble. When

he chose to serve God anyway, he was thrown into a den with hungry and ferocious lions. His faith prevailed when God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths.

Right before our lesson text, we find Daniel trying to rest after a draining night in the lions' den. He tossed and turned all evening with God-given dreams. In the lesson, we learn of these visions that speak of the Ancient of Days sitting on a throne, ruling eternally, and giving dominion and power to the Messiah.

In the verses following our lesson text, the vision is explained (Daniel 7:21–27). The horn of the beast that made war against the saints was one of 10 kings who prevailed until the Ancient of days came and judged against him in favor of the saints. Daniel's prophecy was one of hope.

At-A-Glance

1. A Vision of Judgment (Daniel 7:9–12)
2. A Vision of Hope (vv. 13–14)

In Depth

1. A Vision of Judgment (Daniel 7:9–12)

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit" (Daniel 7:9). By the way Daniel wrote the verse, one has to wonder whether he considered turning away. Perhaps he was tired after spending the night in the lions' den, but he says he watched until all thrones were put in place. Thrones were set up for everyone in power—the four beasts, men in opposition to God's kingdom, Christ, and God the father. Daniel continued to watch until the Ancient of days sat down. The Ancient of days is a name that characterizes God as a judge whose reign is eternal.

Obviously, the Ancient of days' appearance set Him apart from the others, as Daniel described His brilliant attire, woolly hair, throne of fire, and the thousands of thousands of people who stood before Him. Then court opened and while in session, two books were opened (one a book of life and the other a book of judgment). The deeds of the dead were recorded in the books, and they would be judged according to the contents.

Daniel wrote that the fourth beast was "terrible, powerful and dreadful, and ... strong ... with great iron teeth" (7:7, AMP). The beast had 10 horns. While Daniel was watching the court proceedings, a sound captured his attention. It was one of the beast's horns "boasting arrogantly" (7:8, NLT). The beast was destroyed for its defiance of heaven and burned in the burning flame of God's throne. Dominion was taken away from the other three beasts, but their lives were spared.

Matthew Henry states, "Perhaps (Daniel's vision) points at the destruction brought by the providence of God upon the empire of Syria, or that of Rome, for their tyrannizing over the people of God" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. IV—Isaiah to Malachi, 1072). Further, the fourth beast is likened to the Roman Empire's destruction after it began to persecute Christianity.

2. A Vision of Hope (vv. 13–14)

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him" (Daniel 7:13). Daniel continues to watch the vision unfold and saw the Messiah, who in the text was called "one like the Son of man" because He was made in the likeness of a human (Romans 8:3) and was found in appearance as a man (Philippians 2:8). Seeing Christ as man suggests His rulership on earth where He was given glory, dominion, and a kingdom (Daniel 7:14).

This vision brings comfort to Daniel and his friends, as it foreshadows the stripping away of power from the church's enemies and reveals that Jesus' dominion shall never pass away. The church will forever be victorious to the end of time.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was the beast slain (Daniel 7:11)?
2. What happened to the other beasts (v. 12)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What is the significance of God being called "the Ancient of days" in the text?

Liberating Lesson

No matter how long, vivid, and disturbing Daniel's vision was, he refused to turn away. He later wrote, "the visions of my head troubled me" (Daniel 7:15). Why do you think Daniel kept watching? Was it nosiness, conviction, or compulsion? What can we learn from Daniel, as many of us find it hard to watch our own lives unfold? We've closed our eyes to our country's ongoing wars. We've refused to watch the downward spiral of our families, marriages, and economy. First Peter 4:7 advises us, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." How can we take heed to his warning?

Application for Activation

Is there something God has been trying to get you to see? This question is not hard to answer. Perhaps He's trying to bring your attention to your children, finances, relationships, community, and your emotions. Your frustration about it won't end unless you deal with it. God wants to bring you victory in the matter, but He can't if you're pretending to be blind. This week, challenge yourself to take a good look at a situation that's troubling you, and ask God to help you deal with it.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Daniel 7:9–14

Not only is the book of Daniel referred to in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament book, it also has more fulfilled prophecy than any other. Daniel wrote at the worst time in Israel's history. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, had taken the Israelites into captivity and now considered their gods superior because they had been able to bring down Yahweh's famous Temple. Because of Daniel, however, all that soon would change. Daniel's words stand as a timeless beacon of God's sovereign justice that offers hope to all.

Daniel was taken hostage in 605 B.C., during the first of three major invasions of Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He was held captive until the first year of King Cyrus the Persian in 537 B.C. (1:21). His prophetic ministry continued until the third year of Cyrus, in 535 BCE (10:1). God gave Daniel favor with the kings through his ability to interpret dreams. This happened first with Nebuchadnezzar and then with his conqueror, Darius. The latter is the king who was tricked into throwing Daniel into the lions' den. His supernatural wisdom continued to earn him good fortune through the reign of Cyrus (6:28). In the first year of King Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had a dream that he wrote down when he awoke (7:1). Daniel himself interpreted the dream later (7:16–27). The tone of the dream is typical of apocalyptic literature similar to the book of Revelation (e.g. Revelation 14:1–15).

In Daniel 7:2–8, his dream consisted of four winds and four beasts. Three of the beasts were like a lion, a bear, and a leopard. The fourth was a special beast with iron teeth and ten horns. A new horn grew that uprooted three others, a horn with a man's eyes and a boasting mouth. In 7:17, Daniel calls these horns "kings" (also "beasts") that were overpowered or "cast down" in verse 9. But commentators agree it was only their authority that was removed (see v. 12).

9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

Into Daniel's vision comes a great, flaming throne on flaming wheels—the judgment throne of God Himself, "the Ancient of days," which in Aramaic is literally the "advanced of days" (ʿattiyq yowm, at-TEEK YOME). God sitting in judgment is a familiar Old Testament theme (see 1 Kings 22:19). The phrase "Ancient of days" is only used three times in the Old Testament, all in the seventh chapter of Daniel (7:9, 13, 22).

Fire is often used to symbolize God in the Old Testament (e.g., the burning bush, Exodus 3:2; the pillar of fire, Exodus 13:21). Fire "not only represents the blindingly brilliant manifestation of God's splendor but also the fierce heart of his judgment on sin and on all those opposed to his supreme authority" in the words of Gleason Archer (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 89). See also "a fire shall devour before him" (Psalm 50:3); "a fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about" (Psalm 97:3); and "God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29), which clearly implies judgment. Similarly, a "chariot of fire" came from heaven to pick up Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), and Ezekiel sees a type of chariot throne (Ezekiel 1:15–21; 10:9–17). Just as fire represents God's judgment, pure white hair and garments represent purity, wisdom, righteous judgment, or all three. Louis Hartman describes it as "symbolizing unsullied majesty" (Anchor Bible, The Book of Daniel, 218).

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

A thousand thousands is a million, made plural, and 10,000 times 10,000 is 100 million, which represents an overwhelming number of celestial beings gathered to witness the events. For the Israelites, witnesses were required for a court to render judgment, and that requirement was covered by a crowd that Daniel saw. Archer writes, "This scene is a court of judgment ... for bringing the wicked and unrepentant to justice" (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 89). W. Sibley Towner describes the public trial scene as a "universally visible theodicy or divine self-vindication," which Daniel writes in the "most sweeping, cosmic context possible" (Daniel, 98, 102).

Books of record are another familiar motif throughout Scripture, but with different uses, even in Daniel. For example, the "Book of Truth" (10:21, NLT)—and the ones who will be delivered "shall be found written in the book" (12:1). This reference uses similar language to that of the "Book of Life" mentioned six times in Revelation (see also Psalm 69:28, NLT; Philippians 4:3, NLT). In Revelation 20:12, two types of books are opened, one a book of life and one a book of judgment. Such images most likely gave rise to the popular Western notion of God as a heavenly scorekeeper; this thinking puts people in charge of their own destiny, if only they can do enough good deeds to outnumber their bad deeds. The hope of Christ exists in spite of the futility of such works (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 4:6; Philippians 3:9), and in Him no works are necessary or even possible, for He alone paid the price (Romans 4:25; Hebrews 9:12; Titus 2:14).

11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

The boasting mouth of the horn (7:8) represents the last of earth's evil rulers, called "the beast," who even though he was meeting his doom, continued his arrogant defiance of God to the bitter end. Death alone stops the mouth of the boasting beast. Daniel is privileged to foresee God's triumph over the epitome of evil.

The "rest of the beasts" (7:12), the remaining world rulers, are next to be judged, although commentators speculate about the reason their "lives were prolonged." The consensus seems to fall on the side of believing this means their judgment simply is postponed. In addition, one might speculate that these are the world's remaining superpowers, subject to the fourth horn or beast that uprooted them (7:19–21).

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

Next, Daniel sees Jesus in His glorified state, described in a verse quoted frequently in the New Testament. W. Sibley Towner calls verses 13 and 14 "the very heart of the book of Daniel itself" (Towner, 102). Unlike the beasts or horns representing earth's rulers, the heavenly ruler appears as a man, "as the heavenly Sovereign incarnate" in Archer's words. In the Aramaic, the phrase "Son of man" (bar 'enash, BAR en-AWSH) refers prophetically to Jesus. Jesus confirmed this phrase as a description of Himself, personally claiming Daniel's words (see Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). Archer writes that Jesus regarded Daniel 7:13 as an early indication of who He was (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 90). Jesus also used the exact same language as Daniel for His future return to earth: "they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory" (Matthew 24:30); "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64); "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). As well, the apostle John wrote in Revelation 1:7, "Behold, he cometh

with clouds.” The Old Testament uses similar language with God having “appeared in the cloud” on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 16:10), and He “maketh the clouds his chariot” (Psalm 104:3). Also, “the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud” (Isaiah 19:1), and “the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3).

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Many question why parts of Daniel are in Aramaic. C. Hassell Bullock writes that it was “the language of the Medo-Persian Empire,” and also that this part of Daniel was “the ... most germane to non-Jews. Thus it was written in the language of the empire for their consumption” (Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books, 285, 286).

Gleason Archer writes: “The messianic Son of Man is brought before the throne of the Ancient of Days” as the supreme, sovereign ruler of the Earth, and possesses “the crown of universal dominion ... (He is) ... absolute Lord and Judge by virtue of his atoning ministry as God incarnate” (Daniel – Minor Prophets, 91). Jesus is given authority, glory, and sovereign power, similar to His own final words on earth just preceding the Great Commission, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). These three terms in Aramaic are sholtan (shol-TAWN), meaning dominion or sovereignty (see Daniel 4:3, 22; 6:26; 7:27); yeqar (yek-AWR), meaning honor or esteem (used only here in the sense of heavenly glory, not humankind’s glory); and malkuw (mal-KOO), meaning royalty, reign, kingship, or kingdom (see Daniel 2:44; 4:34; 6:26). Here Jesus begins His earthly kingdom and all people will worship and serve Him “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (confess),” as prophesied by Isaiah (45:23; see also New Testament references to the same, Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10). Unlike every man-made kingdom and empire, Jesus’ kingdom and His dominion will be eternal, never to be destroyed.

When seen through the lens of New Testament eschatology (end-time prophesies), the little horn of Daniel’s vision is commonly understood to be the “son of perdition” or the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, who will appear just prior to the return of Christ. Thankfully, we have the comforting words of a prophet in exile, blessed and prospered by God to a position of great influence, similar to Joseph in ancient Egypt, whom God used to speak to all future generations of believers. Through His messenger, Daniel, God delivers a word of comfort and hope to all who have known affliction, to all who have been oppressed, and to all who have wondered if there is any justice in the world. To all who have labored tirelessly in the Lord, to all who have shed blood, sweat, and tears in service of the Kingdom, Daniel reminds us that our God is still on the throne; He will judge the wicked, and the enemy will be destroyed, never to rise again.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Lord Deals with the Mighty
(Daniel 5:13–21)

TUESDAY

The Lord Judges the Powerful
(Daniel 5:22–31)

WEDNESDAY

The Plot to Undermine Daniel
(Daniel 6:1–10)

THURSDAY

The Plot Fails
(Daniel 6:11–23)

FRIDAY

Daniel's God Is Exalted
(Daniel 6:24–28)

SATURDAY

Daniel's Vision
(Daniel 7:1–8)

SUNDAY

The Exaltation of the Coming One
(Daniel 7:9–14)