

Daniel 7:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth.

Analysis

These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth (אֵלֵּין חִיּוֹתָא רַבִּיבָתָא דִּי אַנִּין אַרְבַּע אַרְבָּעָה מַלְכִין יְקוּמוּן מִן-אַרְעָא)—The Aramaic *chewata ravrevata* (חִיּוֹתָא רַבִּיבָתָא, "great beasts") identifies the terrifying creatures from Daniel's vision (7:3-7) as symbolic representations of earthly kingdoms. The interpretation that these are **four kings** (*arba'ah malkhin*, אַרְבָּעָה מַלְכִין) uses "kings" to represent kingdoms or empires—a common biblical usage where ruler and realm merge (Daniel 2:38; 8:20-21).

The phrase **which shall arise out of the earth** (yequmun min-ar'a, יְקוּמוּן מִן-אַרְעָא) emphasizes these empires' earthly, human origin in contrast to God's eternal kingdom. They emerge from the "great sea" (7:2-3), symbolizing chaotic humanity and turbulent nations (Revelation 17:15). Though powerful and terrifying, these beasts are creaturely—temporal, limited, and ultimately subject to divine judgment. The four kingdoms traditionally identified are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, matching the statue's metals in Daniel 2.

The vision's apocalyptic imagery—beasts representing empires—introduces a prophetic genre developed extensively in later Scripture, particularly Revelation. The succession of earthly kingdoms, however impressive, leads to divine intervention when "one like the Son of man" (7:13) receives eternal dominion. This pattern assures persecuted believers that human empires, no matter how brutal, are temporary. God's kingdom alone endures. Christ's identification as "Son of

man" (used 80+ times in the Gospels) connects Him to this Danielic vision of divine sovereignty and eschatological judgment.

Historical Context

Daniel received this vision around 553 BC, during Belshazzar's first year (7:1), roughly 14 years before Babylon's fall. The beasts' terrifying features—lion with eagle's wings (7:4), bear with ribs in mouth (7:5), four-headed leopard (7:6), and the dreadful fourth beast with iron teeth and ten horns (7:7)—symbolize successive empires' military might and brutality. Apocalyptic literature flourished during persecution, encoding political critique in symbolic visions. This genre encouraged Jewish communities facing Hellenistic oppression and later Christian communities under Roman persecution.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing earthly empires as temporary 'beasts' change your perspective on political power and cultural dominance?
2. In what ways does the Son of Man's eternal kingdom (7:13-14) provide hope when earthly authorities seem overwhelmingly powerful?

Interlinear Text

מֶלֶךְ יֵן	אַרְבַּעַ הֶ	אַרְבַּעַ הֶ	אֲנִי יֵן	דִּי רַבְרַבַּת אֶ	חַיֹּת אֶ	אֵלֵין
kings	are four	are four	which	great	beasts	These
H4430	H703	H703	H581	H7260	H2423	H459
אַרְעָא:	מִן	יִקוּם וִן				
the earth	out of	which shall arise				
H772	H4481	H6966				

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