

Daniel 7:4-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/dan/dan-7/daniel-74-6/>

The first beast is like a winged lion, the second is like a bear with ribs in its mouth, the third is like a leopard with four wings and four heads.

Daniel is experiencing a vision in his sleep. In his dream, he is standing before a stormy sea, and four strange beasts have risen from the water.

The *first* beast is *like a lion with eagle wings*. Daniel focuses his attention on this monster before moving on to the others. With each animal, he watches what happens to them. The lion with eagle wings has *its wings plucked*. The feathers from its wings are torn from its bones, or perhaps the wings themselves are ripped from the body of the beast. The lion is *lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man*. The animal is being changed by an external force to become a man. Now standing upright, this first beast is *given a human mind also*. It has had its wings taken from it, forced to stand like a man, and now possesses the reasoning mind of a man.

Although the dream is not explained in full detail, Daniel does learn that the four beasts represent four kings (v. 17). The sea likely represents the sea of humanity. This first beast is undoubtedly King Nebuchadnezzar. He was a powerful king whom God humbled. In Daniel 4, he was stripped of his authority and lost his sanity, symbolized by the stripping of the lion's wings. And then, when Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God was sovereign over all, he had his throne restored to him, and gave due praise to God. He went from living like a beast to becoming a man again, represented by the lion being made to stand on two feet and having a man's mind given to it.

There is other evidence that the winged lion represents Nebuchadnezzar. In the king's dream of the statue in chapter 2, the golden head of the statue is revealed to be Nebuchadnezzar (2:38). This is the first king/kingdom in the interpretation of the statue dream, and it correlates with actual earthly chronology, regarding the kingdoms that will come after Babylon. Daniel's dream of the four beasts also relates to the kingdoms on earth which will be established in the years to come. Given that the first king in the statue-dream is Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, it seems that Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon must be represented by the first beast, since Babylon was still the reigning empire at the time.

The second beast is *like a bear*. In its mouth are *three ribs*, and its body is *raised up on one side*. Daniel hears voices command the bear to "*Arise, devour much meat!*"

This bear likely represents the Medo-Persian empire. The Medes and the Persians are responsible for conquering Babylon at the end of Chapter 5 and slaying King Belshazzar (Daniel 5:30). King Darius is then given rulership of Babylon, and is central in Chapter 6, where he unintentionally sends Daniel to the lions' den. Here in Chapter 7, none of those events have occurred yet. Daniel's vision is revealing to him that the Babylonian empire (the winged lion) will fall to the Medes and the Persians (the bear with three ribs in its mouth).

The voice commanding the bear to *Arise* and to *devour much meat* is probably from God. One of the great themes of the book of Daniel is God's sovereignty over the earth, and the fact that He raises and crushes kings. God is the supreme king over all, the "ruler over the realm of mankind who sets over it whomever He wishes" (Daniel 5:21b). In this vision God tells the Medes and Persians to conquer, like telling a bear to hunt and kill many animals. The Medo-Persian empire covered more land and countries than the Babylonian empire, so indeed it did dominate and destroy many people.

But this empire too will fail.

It is not explained what the bear's meal of three ribs represent. It seems clear that this is not a bear content to eat berries. It is a vicious bear, with great power. It is, however, a bear. Bears are powerful, but prefer to lumber. The Persian Empire was renowned for its bureaucracy. This image could indicate that the empire was vast and powerful, but mired in red tape.

After the bear comes the third beast, which is *like a leopard with four wings on its back and four heads* on its shoulders. Daniel sees that *dominion was given to it*. This beast is likely the Grecian empire, established by Alexander the Great. His world conquest consumed the Medo-Persian empire. He eventually conquered the city of Babylon as well (and ultimately died there). The leopard is an animal that is both swift and vicious. The four wings would add to its swiftness. Alexander the Great established an empire from Greece to parts of India, toppling the Persian empire with lightning speed, in only a few years. He spent a mere ten years as king in conquest of the known world, moving swiftly from city to city. He was not only incredibly swift, but also vicious at making a devastating example of those who resisted him. So a winged leopard represents his kingdom well.

In the next chapter, Daniel will again see a vision about the coming kingdoms on earth. One is explained to be *the kingdom of Greece*, and after its king perishes there are *four kingdoms which will arise from his nation* (Daniel 8:21-22). The divided four kingdoms are the same as the four heads of the leopard in Daniel's current vision. These four kingdoms were set up by four generals who were the heirs to Alexander, upon his untimely death at the young age of 32.

Biblical Text

4 The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. 5 And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!' 6 After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.