World Government Before the Antichrist

The Ten Kings and the Little Horn in Daniel 7

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Abstract

Daniel 7:24 places the rise of the Antichrist after the establishment of the ten-king government. The interpreting angel identifies the ten horns as ten kings and then says that "another shall rise after them." This gives the timing of the additional king's rise. His defeat of three of the ten is a subsequent act. The explanation confirms the order Daniel saw in the vision, where the fourth beast already has ten horns before the little horn appears. This paper argues that the ten are governing when the Antichrist comes to power and that his defeat of three leads the ten to surrender their authority to him at the midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week. Daniel gives no duration for their earlier rule. Christians living under an oppressive government of the ten could therefore recognize its place in prophecy and still make a serious error about who governs it. If they expect the Antichrist to have founded that government, they may take his defeat of three of the ten as evidence that he cannot be the Antichrist. Those who have prayed for relief could welcome him as their deliverer on the strength of the very victories Daniel attributes to him.

Keywords: Daniel 7; ten kings; little horn; fourth kingdom; Antichrist; world government; Revelation 17; premillennial eschatology

1 Introduction

Daniel 7 describes two accessions to power. Ten kings arise out of the fourth kingdom, and, in the words of the interpreting angel, "another shall rise after them" (7:24).[1] I understand this later king, represented in the vision by the little horn, to be the Antichrist. I argue that the ten already govern when he rises. It is their government that he comes to control.

J. Hampton Keathley III holds that the future Antichrist brings ten European powers together under his leadership. When three of them rebel, he defeats them and consolidates his rule.[2] I read Daniel 7:24 to give a different order of events. The ten are already governing when the Antichrist rises as king. His defeat of three is part of his takeover of their government.

The interval has practical consequences. If the government of the ten proves oppressive, churches in many countries could spend years praying for relief from the same authorities. They would have biblical grounds for recognizing the ten as part of the final kingdom. The further judgment that the Antichrist had already established his rule would give them a reason to trust the man who attacks it. His defeat of three of the ten could appear to answer their prayers.

There is also reason to expect these victories to be understood as a deliverance of Israel. I have argued elsewhere that Daniel 11:40–45 may describe the campaign in which the Antichrist

1 Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

2 J. Hampton Keathley III, "The Beast and the False Prophet (Rev 13:1–18)," chap. 19 in *Studies in Revelation* (Bible.org, 2004), opening chronology, items 1–3 and 6, and "The Ten Diadems." Keathley identifies the first rider in Revelation 6:2 with this early phase of the Antichrist's career.

subdues the three. The conqueror enters the land of Israel and takes control of Egypt and its wealth. The Libyans and Ethiopians follow in his steps (vv. 41–43).[3] If Israel is then subject to the ten, the defeat of hostile powers in the region could be welcomed as liberation from foreign rule. Christians who expect the Messiah to give Israel victory over its enemies (Isa. 11:10–14) would have a further reason to credit the conqueror with fulfilling that expectation.

2 The order of accession in Daniel 7:24

> And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. (Dan. 7:24)

Daniel has asked for the meaning of the fourth beast and its horns. The angel identifies the beast as a kingdom in verse 23. In verse 24 he names the ten kings who arise from it, dates the rise of another king in relation to theirs, and describes what the later king does to three. The words “after them” occur in the clause about his rise. By the time the angel reaches the words “he shall subdue three kings,” he has already told Daniel which rulers come first.

The wording bears close attention because a different placement of the time reference would yield a considerably weaker conclusion. If all the angel had said were that the little horn would subdue three kings, we could infer that those three had acquired power by the time they were attacked. The man who attacked them might himself have put them in office years before. What excludes that sequence as an account of their respective accessions is the earlier clause. *Another shall rise after them* dates the coming to power of the additional king relative to the coming to power of the ten. On this reading, Christians could see the government of the ten come to power while the ruler Daniel describes is still to come.

The Aramaic makes the comparison straightforward. The verb rendered “shall arise” occurs twice, first in the plural for the ten and then in the singular for the additional king. The plural suffix in *ʾaḥărêhôn*, “after them,” refers to the ten just mentioned.[4] It follows that the whole group precedes him. The three appear only in the last clause, where the angel identifies the powers he subdues. This distinction accounts for the two numbers in the passage. Ten have come to power before he rises. Three of those ten are subsequently brought under his authority.

Daniel uses royal language for both rulers and the kingdoms they represent. In 7:17 the four beasts are called kings, and in 7:23 the fourth beast is identified as a kingdom. Verse 24 expressly calls the ten horns kings. Their exercise of authority also has consequences for the kingdoms they govern. Whether the ten are described in terms of their rulers or of the constituent powers they represent, the timing is the same. In the vision itself, the ten horns are already on the

3 Chris White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline* (CWM Publishing, 2026), chaps. 1 and 3, especially “Isaiah 11 and the Geography of the Messianic Age” and “The Three Subdued Kings of Daniel 7.” The proposed identification rests on the timing, character, and regional setting of the campaign. Daniel leaves the three kings of chapter 7 unnamed.

4 For the Aramaic forms and clause divisions, see Dan. 7:24 in the interlinear text. The antecedent of the plural suffix in *ʾaḥărêhôn* is the ten kings.

beast when the little horn appears (7:7–8).[5] When three are subdued, three parts of an established government lose their independence.

Daniel 7:24 gives no indication of how much time passes between the two accessions. The ten kingdoms could govern for a few months before the Antichrist arises, or they could govern for a hundred years. Over so long a period, successive generations of rulers could hold office in the same ten kingdoms. The period Daniel measures in verse 25 belongs to the later persecution of the saints under the little horn.

On the prophetic timeline I have proposed, the establishment of a world government under the ten is the first event Christians can watch for.[6] Daniel's seventieth week begins with the covenant of Daniel 9:27. By then the ten are already ruling. Christians who see their government take shape have reason to expect the Antichrist to rise after them, but Daniel gives them no basis for saying he must appear in their lifetime.

2.1 Historical support for the prior rule of the ten

Irenaeus used the order of events in Daniel to address a practical question. Christians in the second century were trying to identify the Antichrist by calculating the numerical value of names. Irenaeus warned that someone who settled on the wrong name could excuse the man who actually appeared. He advised his readers to await the division of the kingdom into ten and then, "when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order," to look for the man who would claim their kingdom.[7] On his reading, Christians could recognize the ten at work in government before they knew the identity of the Antichrist.

Hippolytus also expected the ten kingdoms to be in existence when the Antichrist arose. He read the ten horns as divisions of the Roman Empire and the little horn as the ruler who would come up among them. In his account, the Antichrist defeats three in battle, brings the remaining horns under his authority, and then claims divinity.[8] In Hippolytus's account, military victory gives the Antichrist authority over kings who were already ruling when he arose.

Among modern premillennial interpreters, J. Paul Tanner reads Daniel 7:24 as the angel's explanation of verse 8. The ten kings arise first. When another king arises after them, he forces three into submission.[9] This reading supports the conclusion that the Antichrist takes power from established rulers.

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5 White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chap. 1, "World Government Before the Antichrist." See also White, *Daniel (A Commentary)*, chap. 7, comments on verse 24.

6 White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chap. 1, opening paragraphs and "Two Phases of the Same Empire." The chapter also considers the duration of the ten kings' government in its discussion of the "short space" in Rev. 17:10.

7 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1–2, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885). In 5.26.1 he expects the three kings to be slain and the remainder to submit.

8 Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist* §§25, 27–28, 52–53, trans. J. H. MacMahon, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886). Hippolytus identifies the three as Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia (§52). Daniel 7 leaves them unnamed.

9 J. Paul Tanner, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel: A Man of Faith, Integrity, and Insight*, version 1.15 (BEE World, 2015, corrected 2017), 55–56.

3 The transfer of authority in Revelation 17

Revelation 17 presents the strongest objection to any interval between the rule of the ten and the rise of the Antichrist. John is told that the ten horns are kings who "have received no kingdom as yet" and who "receive power as kings one hour with the beast" (17:12). The kings' rule still lies in John's future. The expression "with the beast" gives the ten and the beast a common period of authority. If this were their first exercise of any royal authority, the ten would begin their rule with him.

John goes on to distinguish the authority the ten possess from what the beast receives. The ten have one purpose and give him "their power and strength" (17:13). In verse 17 John calls what they give him "their kingdom." The ten also act against the woman who rides the beast and take part in the war against the Lamb (17:14, 16–17). John treats the body of rulers as a continuing participant in the events he describes. The resources placed at the beast's disposal are theirs to commit.

3.1 Why the ten surrender their authority

Daniel describes a military victory that gives the other seven kings reason to submit. Three of their number have opposed the Antichrist, and he has defeated all three (Dan. 7:24). On the reading of Daniel 11:40–45 proposed above, the seven have watched him overrun countries and seize the wealth of Egypt. They have seen what their own armies would face. I take the defeat of the three to be the reason the seven conclude that further resistance is futile. Revelation 13:4 gives that judgment a public voice when the worshippers of the beast ask, "who is able to make war with him?"[10]

This accounts for the difference between the three in Daniel 7 and the ten in Revelation 17. The Antichrist conquers three. The other seven submit after seeing the outcome. All ten kingdoms can then place their authority in his hands. Daniel's word for subduing the three means to bring them low (cf. Dan. 5:19). A defeated kingdom can supply troops and officials to its conqueror even if its former ruler has been deposed.[11] Revelation 17:17 also gives a theological reason for the ten to act together. God puts it in their hearts to give the beast their kingdom until his words are fulfilled. Daniel's account of the war explains how the rulers could reach that common decision.

3.2 The midpoint of the week and the "one hour"

I place the campaign against the three in the first half of Daniel's seventieth week and the transfer of the kingdom at the midpoint. Daniel 9:27 dates the cessation of sacrifice to the middle of the week. Jesus refers to Daniel's abomination in the holy place when he tells those in Judea to flee the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15–21). Paul describes the man who seats himself in the

10 White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chaps. 1 and 3. John F. Walvoord, "The Prophecy of the Ten-Nation Confederacy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, no. 494 (1967): 99–105, under "The Vision of Daniel 7:7–8," also infers that the seven capitulate. Revelation 13:4 attributes the question to the beast's worshippers. The seven rulers' assessment is an inference from the outcome of the war.

11 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), Aramaic lexicon, s.v. שפל, citing Dan. 5:19 and 7:24.

temple and presents himself as God (2 Thess. 2:3–4). I understand these passages to describe the public claim to deity that opens the second half of the seven years. By this point the Antichrist has already demonstrated his military superiority. John adds that the healing of the beast's deadly wound moves the world to follow him (Rev. 13:3–4).[12]

The transfer changes the government of the ten into a theocracy. The kings had exercised authority together. They now surrender sovereignty over their kingdoms to a ruler who claims to be God, and they continue to govern under him. The rulers and their officials now owe him worship themselves and use the existing government to require it of their subjects. The second beast directs the earth to worship the first, calls for the death of those who refuse to worship his image, and makes the mark a condition of buying and selling (13:12, 15–17).

The identification of the "one hour" in Revelation 17:12 follows from the words "with the beast." John has already given the length of the beast's authority as forty-two months (13:5). During that period he blasphemes God and makes war on the saints (13:5–7), the same acts that Daniel attributes to the little horn for three and a half times (Dan. 7:25). On this chronology the ten begin to rule with the beast when he claims worship, and they are still his allies when they make war on the Lamb (Rev. 17:14). I therefore take their "one hour" to be the final three and a half years of the week.[13]

Revelation 12 illustrates John's use of several expressions for this interval. He gives the duration of the woman's refuge in the wilderness as 1,260 days (12:6). When he describes her flight to the same place in verse 14, its duration is "a time, and times, and half a time." In the intervening verses the devil knows he has only "a short time" (12:12). The day count and the three and a half times measure the woman's protection. The "short time" explains the devil's haste. Likewise, "one hour" conveys the brevity of the ten kings' shared rule. Its length comes from the forty-two months assigned to the beast. Daniel gives no corresponding measure for the earlier government of the ten.

4 Conclusion

Of the two political developments at issue, Daniel places the government of the ten first. The little horn's rise follows their establishment, and his defeat of three presupposes that they still exercise power. Daniel specifies the length of the later persecution (7:25) while leaving the interval before the Antichrist's rise unmeasured. In my reading of Daniel's seventieth week, the ten are already governing when that week begins.[14]

Some Christians may have lived under the government of the ten all their lives by the time the Antichrist rises to challenge it. If they have identified it as the personal government of the

12 White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chap. 1, "Two Phases of the Same Empire" and the discussion of Rev. 17:12–13 under "Answering Some Objections."

13 Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871), on Rev. 17:12. The commentary identifies the hour as a short time and proposes the three and a half years of Rev. 11:2–3 and 13:5. See also White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chap. 1.

14 White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*, chaps. 1–2. I take the covenant in Dan. 9:27 to mark the beginning of the week and to be an early act of the ruler whose accession follows that of the ten. This identification supplies the link between the political sequence in chapter 7 and the week in chapter 9.

Antichrist, its apparent overthrow will seem to count in the conqueror's favor. A victory that frees Israel from hostile powers would give that judgment a further religious appeal. Hippolytus recognized how a promise to restore Israel's country and kingdom could help a claimant secure worship.[15] Daniel's order of events gives Christians reason to examine the claims of the victor even when they have good cause to welcome the defeat of those he has subdued.

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15 Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist* §54.