

me. (16) I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: (17) 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms\* that will rise from the earth. (18) But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever -- yes, for ever and ever.'

Except for its first four words the bystander's explanation (vv. 17-18) could just as well be a summary description of the facts already revealed in Daniel 2. It is entirely in literal terms except for one interesting phrase. The beasts that Daniel saw coming "up out of the sea" (v. 3) are said to represent four kingdoms that "will rise from the earth" (v. 17). Both sea and earth are symbols, one indicating the tumultuous nature of the human life from which human governments spring and the other pointing to their earthly nature. Here what could look like a contradiction merely indicates a second part of the same truth.

The permanence and indestructibility of the kingdom that will replace the four great kingdoms has been emphasized in Daniel 2:44 and 7:14b. In verse 18 the bystander repeats this emphasis and adds a new thought: God will give His saints a vital place in the rule of the everlasting kingdom.

This is the first mention of "saints" in Daniel's prophecy. The Aramaic word used here occurred several times earlier in the book, but probably did not refer to human beings in any of those occurrences. It was translated "holy" in the phrase "holy gods" as used by Nebuchadnezzar in 4:8, 9 and 18 and by Belshazzar's mother in 5:11. It was translated "a holy one", referring to a divine messenger, in 4:13 and 23, and "holy ones" in a similar usage in 4:17. In this chapter it is applied to God's holy people six times (vv. 18, 21, 22 (twice), 25 and 27), telling of their persecution by the

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*\*The Aramaic word means "kings," but it is obvious that here they represent kingdoms or dynasties.*