

## Heaven's Courtroom

Daniel 7:1-28

On Friday the Supreme Court of the United States overturned Roe vs Wade which legalized the killing of unborn children across this nation. This decision will not totally end abortion in this country, but it will certainly save the lives of unborn babies. The ruling, which transfers power to the State, now makes saving even more lives a State by State struggle. Praise God for the monumental progress that was made, especially considering the morally decaying age that we live in. God is on the throne.

Over the years there have been rulings by the Supreme Court that have been supportive of Christian values and others that are in direct opposition. What the future holds, only God knows. Because of the way things are going in our society there are reasons for us to be alarmed. But as Christians we can take heart knowing that no matter what decisions are made in the three branches of government there's a Supreme Court in heaven that we can look to that overrules and overturns the decisions of men.

Now it was this knowledge that God the Most High rules in the heavens that enabled Daniel to shine in Babylon. In fact, because Daniel lived under the authority of God even when it cost him, he had standing in the court room of heaven. In other words, even though he was wrongly accused on earth for obeying God and demonic forces worked against him behind the scenes, his case was being adjudicated in heaven and God overruled earthly decisions in Daniel's favor.

**Main idea:** The courtroom of heaven where the Ancient of Days presides rules over the kingdoms of earth.

This morning we are going to allow the word of God to pull back the curtain of our physical realm to learn three lessons about what's going on in the spiritual realm so that we might be encouraged to stand for God in our Babylon.

## 1. Annals of History are Written

As the book of Daniel pulls back the curtain of the physical realm, the first lesson I want us to see is that the **Annals of History are Written**. Or as someone referring to God put it, History is His story. Beginning in verse one we read:

*“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter” (Daniel 7:1).*

It's important to note here that as Daniel begins to unfold a prophetic vision of historical events, he points out that it was given to him in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon. This tells us that beginning in chapter 7 the book of Daniel is going back to the time when the Babylonian empire was still in power. Remember that chapter 6 records that Darius the Persian King, who conquered Babylon, was in power.

So, there's a shift that takes place in chapter seven. Whereas the first six chapters gives us a biographical narrative of the life of Daniel and his three friends in Babylon, chapter seven and on record the prophecies that Daniel was given through dreams and visions at different times in his life. The first six chapters record dreams that pagan Kings had, which Daniel interpreted for them. The remaining chapters record dreams that Daniel had that were meant to bring hope to his people in a time of captivity.

Interestingly, the first six chapters that deal with the godly lives of Daniel and his three friends were written primarily in Aramaic, which was the language of the Babylonians. The remaining chapters were primarily written in Hebrew because once again they were meant to encourage the people of God in a time of exile by reminding them that History is His Story. That even when evil men rule, God is still in charge and His redemptive purposes are being worked out in time and in eternity.

With this in mind, what was the meaning of Daniel's dream? Beginning in verse 2, we read:

*“Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. <sup>3</sup> And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. <sup>4</sup> The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. <sup>5</sup> And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ <sup>6</sup> After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.<sup>7</sup> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.” (Daniel 7:2-7).*

As we begin to unpack these verses, it's important to note that the meaning of the elaborate imagery of terrifying beasts and horns, along with Daniel's other prophecies, are very challenging to interpret. Biblical scholars and commentators are not always in agreement. It's clear that Daniel is using metaphoric language to describe in great detail past and future historic events. Some of the metaphoric language is easier to interpret than others.

When it comes to metaphoric portions of scriptures it's important to remember that we must allow scripture to interpret scripture. Sometimes the scriptures make very clear what the metaphors mean, but other times it's not so clear. So, when interpreting the metaphoric language of scripture, we must be very careful not to read into them something that the scriptures are not saying.

Furthermore, we must not get so lost in the details that we miss the main point and the bigger picture for why Daniel and other apocalyptic scripture are giving us a peak into the end times. So although we are going to do our best to explain what some of the elaborate imagery means, our main focus is going to be on the main point of the text,

which is not, for example, to figure out what world leader today is the anti-Christ or predict the date of the Lord's return. As Alistair Begg often says regarding understanding difficult portions of the bible: "The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things."

All that being said, notice first of all that Daniel's vision begins with these four beasts that rise up out of the sea. Now in the apocalyptic writings of the bible, like in the book of Daniel and Revelation, beasts represent various political kingdoms or governmental powers. Verse 17-18 explicitly explain that these beasts represent kings and their kingdoms. By the way, in our modern-day, beastly images are still used to symbolized various countries in the world, like the bear for Russia and the eagle for the United States.

Now in our text the first of the four beasts is described as a lion with eagles wings. It seems clear that the first beast that Daniel is describing is the kingdom of Babylon. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to the King of Babylon as a Lion and an eagle (Ezek 17:3, 11-12; Jer. 4:7; 49:19; 50:44). Notice also that the wings of the first beast were plucked off, which seems to describe how God humbled Neb who lost his mind, as described in chapter four. But then Daniel explains that he was lifted up and given the mind of a man, which appears to be describing Neb's restoration by God.

The second beast in Daniel's vision is described as a bear which was raised up on one side. With 3 ribs in its mouth, it was commanded to arise and devour much flesh. This beast describes the Medo-Persian empire which conquered the Babylonian empire as we learned in chapter five. The fact that the bear was bigger on one side can be describing the triumph of the Persians over the Medes.

The third beast is described in verse 6 as a leopard with four wings on its back and four heads. Daniel also emphasizes that this third beast, the leopard with four wings, was given dominance. This third beast, as one bible teacher explained, "represents Greece, under the leadership of Alexander the Great. The fact that it's a 'leopard with wings,' com-

municates the speed at which Greece overtook the world. Alexander did it all by the time he was 30. He was an incredible warrior, maybe the greatest conqueror the world has ever known. In fact, in 323 BC, when Alexander conquered Persia—prophesied here—he brought with him only 35,000 soldiers to Persia’s 100,000. Yet he won magnificently. Persia in that battle lost 20,000 soldiers and Alexander lost only 100, and Persia was on their home turf! So he’s the leopard with wings. [Moreover] the 4 wings that become 4 heads prophesy that Alexander’s kingdom would be divided between 4 generals. [According to other historical and archaeological evidence, that’s exactly what happened!] After Alexander won, there was a bitter power struggle between 4 of his generals” (J.D. Greer).

Finally, the fourth beast is described by Daniel as *“terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns”* (Daniel 7:7).

Notice that the fourth beast, which Daniel emphasizes was different than all the other beasts, had ten horns and great iron teeth. The horns and iron speak of this kingdom’s incredible strength and terrifying power. Horns in the bible represent the power to conquer with great force and destruction.

As we will examine more later, this fourth beast represents the power and might of the Roman empire. This Roman empire, which conquered Alexander’s Greek empire, is the longest lasting empire in history. We know from other ancient historical sources that out of all the weapons in the Roman army’s arsenal, the short iron sword called a gladius was the one which contributed most to the ruthless expansion of the Roman empire. (<https://www.unrv.com/military/gladius.php>)

Now in the succeeding chapters we will learn more details about the rise and fall of these great empires. As we do, keep in mind that Daniel recorded these prophecies in chapter 7 some 200 years before they came to pass. These prophecies, along with hundreds more that

are found in the word of God, speak to the supernatural reliability and incredible accuracy of God's Holy Word.

But keep in mind also that Daniel wrote down his vision in the Hebrew language to convey a message to the people of God in their captivity, namely that God is on the throne, His promises are true and His judgements will not fail. That even when things seem to go from bad to worse, as a mother whose praying for a wayward son recently shared with me, God is working in ways we cannot see and He can make a way when there seems to be no way.

Furthermore, the prophecies of these four beasts were written down to do more than predict the future, but to demonstrate a pattern of evil that will exist throughout the history of humanity until the time of the end. Although the prophecies of the rise and fall of these beastly kingdoms happened in history, Daniel's vision teaches us that until Christ Himself comes to physically reign on the earth, the rise and fall of corrupt kingdoms will continue.

One commentator observed: "It is striking that the superpowers of our own age still customarily represent themselves by predatory animals, such as the Russian bear, the Chinese dragon, and the American Eagle. The beasts of the present world order may change their shape as the centuries pass, but their violence and lust for power continues. In the last century, we have seen further manifestations of the beast in the persons of Hitler, Stalin, and Kim Jong-un. The frightening beasts of this age were present at the gas chambers of [Nazi concentration camps] and on the killing fields of Cambodia and Rwanda, and they are still tormenting the saints in Sudan and China, and in other parts of our modern world.

This continual presence of the beasts in our world ought not to surprise us because every human manifestation of evil is simply a reflection of the work of the Great Dragon, Satan himself. In Revelation 13, we see a beast rising from the sea representing the persecuting power of the anti-Christ, a beast that combines aspects of each of Daniel's creatures into one, a lion-bear-leopard with ten horns. Whatever our

location in space and time, frightening monsters array themselves against the Lord and his anointed. We inhabit a world in which there is good reason to have trouble sleeping at night. As Paul reminds us in Ephesian 6, we wrestle not with flesh and blood but against the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Iain M. Duguid).

Remember the vision of Daniel speaks both prophetically about the rise and fall of kingdoms in history, and also demonstrate a pattern of what is yet to come. Although we can take heart in knowing that nothing catches God by surprise and that history is his story, like Daniel at the end of the chapter, we must be sober to the reality that the adversary, like a roaring lion, is at work seeking whom he may devour. How many of you know, there is a spirit of anti-Christ at work today and in every age?

This leads us to a second lesson.

## 2. Adversary from Hell is Working

As we look behind the curtain of the physical realm in Daniel’s vision, we not only learn that the annals of history are written, but that the **adversary from hell is working**. While describing the fourth beast with the ten horns, Daniel continues: *“I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things”* (Daniel 7:8).

We know from the interpretation that Daniel was given in verse 21 that this little horn, before which three of the first horns were plucked up, is an anti-Christ figure who makes war against the saints. Concerning this anti-christ figure, we read in verse 25: *“He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”*

It's important to note that some bible commentators suggest that much of Daniel's prophecies, like this anti-christ figure, have already been fulfilled. Others teach that they are yet future. But as we will see more clearly next week in chapter 8, a key to interpreting bible prophecy is to understand that they often contain a pattern that has significance in the immediate future and in a more distant future. One bible teacher explains it this way: "For many prophecies, there is both a near fulfillment and a far one, and the near fulfillment gives you a picture of the far one. And a lot of times OT prophets talk about both fulfillments as if they are one. But they are separate." JD Greer

With this in mind, the antichrist figure, referred to as a little horn arising from the ten horns connected to the fourth beast representing the Roman Empire, can have a near fulfillment and a distant one. Sinclair Ferguson's explanation is very helpful: "Earlier Protestant commentators often saw a reflection of the little horn in the power of the papacy. [Others] saw its fulfillment in the Roman Empire itself. In Daniel's vision, however, the little horn represents the final days. Therefore, it ought not be given a specific identification in any historical figure. Notice, however, that the little horn emerges in the context of the beast and the ten horns. It should not surprise us that there will be continual expressions of the characteristics of the little horn that will reach their apex in appearances of the little horn in the last days as described in Daniel's conclusion. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that many dictators and empire-builders have been identified with the little horn and have shared some of its worse features. We have been told that the AntiChrist will come in the final days, but that does not preclude our recognizing that many antichrists have already strutted across the pages of history (1 John 2:18)."

Now thankfully the story doesn't end there. Although it is true that the adversary is at work through human agency to oppose the people of God in every age and that a fiercer and even more dreadful AntiChrist will rise in the final days, Daniel saw another vision of a courtroom in heaven. He writes:



<sup>9</sup> *“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened”* (Daniel 7:9-10).

Also, after giving us more interpretative details about the work of the AntiChrist, who speaks blasphemous words against God and persecutes His people, Daniel writes: *“But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end”* (Daniel 7:26).

O brothers and sisters, as Daniel pulls back the curtain of this physical world where evil men rule with the power of the devil behind them, what he is conveying to us today is that in this antichrist age that we live in, God, the Ancient of Days still reigns supreme. There will be a final judgement that we read about in the book Revelation. But what Daniel is conveying is not only that the Beastly Antichrist of the final days will be judged, but that God is ruling and judging over the Nations at all times. As Neb had to learn the hard way, *“...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”* (Daniel 4:25).

Notice also that the vision that Daniel is given is both a throne room and a courtroom (v. 9-10, 26). And in this throne room/courtroom, God, the Ancient of Days took His seat. Interestingly, there are other thrones pictured in Daniel’s vision, but the Ancient of Days presides over this heavenly courtroom. The description that Daniel gives of the Ancient of Days makes this abundantly clear.

First of all, the name that Daniel calls Him, the Ancient of Days, speaks of His eternality and infinite wisdom. His white clothing and hair like pure wool speaks of His holiness and righteousness. The flames of fire streaming out from His throne speaks of His purifying power and righteous judgement. The fiery wheels of His throne speak to the fact that God’s Holy presence is not stationary or limited to

space and time. God is active in the world and moves in power on behalf of His praying people.

Do you know that the book of Daniel records that when Daniel prayed in the physical realm, things began to happen in the spiritual realm? Demonic forces were at work opposing Daniel's service for God. But when Daniel, who lived under the Lordship of God, prayed and served God, high ranking angelic beings were dispatched from the throne room and courtroom of the Ancient of Days on his behalf. They protected Him and gave Him spiritual insight (Daniel 9:20-23). Daniel's faith in God gave him standing in the courtroom of Heaven. Although earthly rulers inspired by the devil opposed and accused him and sometimes even prevailed against him, they did not have the final word.

Let me ask you, do you have standing or authority in the courtroom of heaven? If you have standing (position, status, reputation) in the courtroom of the Ancient of Days, you can bring your case to God and you can trust that He will act on your behalf, judge righteously and do what His infinite wisdom knows is best for you.

The courtroom of heaven operates under kingdom principles of authority and is subject to The Book of books. Daniel had standing in the courtroom of heaven because He trusted in God as both His merciful deliver and His sovereign Lord. And because he trusted in God's mercy to deliver Him, and submitted Himself under the authority of God, he not only had standing in the court of heaven, but he had an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. This leads us to our final lesson.

### **3. Advocate of Heaven is Worthy**

From behind the curtain of history we not only learn that the annals of history are written, and that the adversary of hell is working, we also see that the advocate of heaven is worthy. After demonstrating how God rules over all and overturns the beastly kingdoms that oppose His righteous reign, Daniel continues in verse 13: *"I saw in the night vi-*

*sions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).*

As Daniel gives his captive people a glimpse behind the curtain of their physical world, he not only shows them that God rules over the kingdoms of men, but that there’s coming a day when His eternal kingdom will be established on this earth. And not only will it be established on the earth, but verse 27 adds that it will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. In other words, the saints, those who belong to God, will inherit an eternal kingdom that will never come to an end and where we will worship and serve our Savior King forever and ever.

And more importantly, the people of the saints of the Most High will inherit an eternal kingdom because *with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (v.13).*

Who is this person that comes *with the clouds of heaven* who Daniel says is *like the son of man*? Some have suggested that Daniel could be referring to an angel. Others surmise that he could be referring to faithful Israel. But the fact that He’s given the eternal kingdom and dominion over all the redeemed and that He is said to be *like the son of man*, leaves no doubt that He is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. In the gospels, son of man was the title that Jesus used most to refer to Himself.

Concerning this designation, Son of Man, one commentator quoting Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The expression ‘Son of Man’ appears to be equivalent of ‘man’ but when ‘*One like the son of man*’ appears the title has a particular rather than a general significance. This is the True Man in contrast to the man-become beast in the earlier elements of the vision. This is the one who is able to stand in the presence of the

God whose throne is made of the fire of His judgement. This is the one who is worthy to receive 'dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion' (v.14). This True Man is all that humans as God's image [bearers] were meant to be but failed to be.'

[Moreover] Christ was given this glorious kingdom following his work of [redemption on the cross] when he ascended back to heaven. However, Jesus himself declares in Matthew 24:29-31 that the full manifestation and realization of this kingdom will occur when he comes again 'on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' A vision 'that began like a nightmare with monsters coming out of the sea, ends happily and hopefully with a Man coming out of heaven whom God crowns sovereign over the world (Duncan)' (Daniel Akin)."

Earlier I explained that Daniel had standing in the courtroom of heaven—in the spiritual realm that enabled him to overcome demonic opposition in the physical realm and shine in the darkness of Babylon. As believers, we too can have standing in the courtroom of heaven because although we fall short and we have an enemy that accuses us before God, as the Apostles John wrote, "*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:1-2).

## **Conclusion**

May this glimpse behind the curtain of history into the courtroom of heaven where the Ancient of Days presides with the armies of heaven at His disposal, encourage us, especially in our darkest hour, to fight the good fight of faith. To not grow weary in well doing knowing that in due season we will reap if we don't lose heart. As the hymn writer declared:

**GOD IS STILL ON THE THRONE, AND HE WILL REMEMBER HIS OWN; HIS PROMISE IS TRUE, HE WILL NOT FORGET YOU, GOD IS STILL ON THE THRONE.**