



gracefellowship

Daniel: Thriving in Exile
November 15, 2020
God: The Everlasting King

As we jump into Daniel 7 today we are going to see a shift in the book and find that things are about to get a lot more complicated! The first 6 chapters of Daniel have basically been a narrative about the life of Daniel and his friends as they learned to navigate life in Babylon. They had to figure out how to live for and follow God in a culture that did share their same values and beliefs. We saw amazing stories of faithfulness on their parts and miraculous rescues on the part of God.

Today we shift to the second half of the book and things take a different shape. The narrative is going to become mostly focused on Daniel and visions he receives from God about future events. Where the first half of the book has a flow to it and tells a story, the second half of the book is mostly apocalyptic in nature. In the first half of the book the visions and dreams that we saw were given to Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar, we will see now that Daniel has his own visions from God.

To be honest, there are some difficult things to understand as we walk through this section of the book. In fact, you might disagree with my views or interpret some things differently than I do. That's ok! There may be some things you just don't understand. That's ok, too! In fact, several times Daniel, who by the power of God interpreted dreams for the Kings of Babylon, is not able to understand and interpret his own visions in this section of the book!

Some things can be challenging to interpret. For those of you worshiping from home and watching our service on Facebook, if you have the closed caption feature on your stream there may be some things we say or sing about that don't translate very well when it comes to the closed caption feature. Let me give you a few examples from a few weeks ago.

(Images on Screen)

1. Kyle: Help me find the way; bring me back to you.
Closed Caption: You'll be fine!

2. Kyle: My sole devotion, my only focus to worship you.
Closed Caption: time in my own food to you do
3. What looks to me like weakness is a canvas for your strength
Closed Caption: to me like weakness is a cannabis for our streets

That wasn't exactly what we were trying to get across. We are not dealing cannabis on the streets outside our church. I promise.

With the visions God gives to Daniel it is easy to get caught up on the lesser important of two major ideas shared in these chapters. What I really want to do as we go through these final chapters of Daniel is keep the focus on the power of God and His ultimate purposes in history and in the future. God is the everlasting King and the focus should always be on Him and His Kingdom.

The first half of the book of Daniel all took place in a linear fashion. Daniel was a young man or teenager when he was taken into Babylonian captivity and by the time we got to chapter 6 and the story of him being thrown into the den of lions, he was an old man in his 70s-80s. As chapter 7 opens you are going to notice we are going back in time! The vision we are going to read about today happens in the time of Belshazzar's reign (he was the final king of Babylon- the one who saw the handwriting on the wall). But the vision Daniel sees is going to harken back to the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2.

:: Daniel 7:1-18

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.

3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were

uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

9 “As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

11 “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

15 “I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.

16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. “So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

17 ‘The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth.

18 But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’

The Setting: Daniel’s vision shows him the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. This is probably meant to convey the Mediterranean Sea. Geographically, everything that takes place in Daniel’s life is centered around this region. Notice the winds of heaven are stirring up the sea, which means God is in control of all that is transpiring in history that He is about to show Daniel. The sea was already considered to be dangerous and turbulent and it represents destructive evil. Now, out of the sea we are going to see 4 beasts emerge. These beasts are not natural, but are hybrids (except for the 2nd beast- a bear). This imagery is meant to spark fear in the eyes of the reader because what Daniel sees is unnatural. And we are told at the end of the section we just read, in verse 17, that the beasts are four kings that will arise to power.

The beasts: There are multiple ways people have interpreted these beasts over the years. I’m going to give you a couple ways to think about this, but we aren’t going to dwell here long, primarily because Daniel doesn’t- and even when he asks the angel about his vision the angel doesn’t give great detail here either. The reason for that is because there is a deeper meaning we will see soon.

Remember, in Daniel 2 Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue made of 4 elements: Gold, Silver, Bronze, Iron/Clay mixture and each of these represented Kingdoms that would rule the earth. Daniel is going to see these same kingdoms represented in a different way.

First way of interpreting this vision:

1. Lion/Eagle: Babylon
King Nebuchadnezzar was referred to as a Lion and an Eagle by prophets in Israel (Jeremiah 50 and Ezekiel 17)
2. Bear: Medo/Persian Empire
In this view the bear is on one side because the Persian empire is more powerful than the Medes. The bear has 3 ribs in its mouth, representing 3 kingdoms it had defeated to come to power.
3. Winged Leopard with Four Heads: Greece
Alexander the Great conquered the earth in astounding time, moving quickly like a leopard, hastened by the ability to fly! After Alexander died his kingdom was divided into four parts and given to his generals.
4. Terrifying Beast with Iron Teeth and Ten Horns: Rome
Daniel doesn't even know how to describe this beast except to say it is terrifying and crushes and tramples all it's victims.

Second way of interpreting the vision:

1. Lion/Eagle: Babylon
2. Bear: Medes
3. Winged Leopard: Persians
4. Terrifying Beast: Greece

Third way of interpreting the vision:

Daniel's vision may have dual purpose. It could both explain the four kingdoms we've been talking about while also pointing to future kingdoms. The best way to think about this is that Daniel's vision shows...

One evil power succeeds another in a cycle of oppression, which will be broken by only divine intervention.

The kingdoms of the earth are represented by these terrible creatures to show they are perversions of God's original plan. As long as sinful people rule the world there will be suffering and persecution for the people of God who are living in this world but are waiting for the arrival of King Jesus to take us to our true home. When Daniel sees all these things he is troubled. Let's pick back up with the text and hear the interpretation of the vision.

:: Daniel 7:15-28

15 “I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.

16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. “So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

17 ‘The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth.

18 But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’

19 “Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.

20 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them,

22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

23 “He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.

24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.

25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.

26 “ ‘But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’

28 “This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

Again, in verse 17 we are not given great detail, we are simply told that the beasts are four kings.

BUT...

Verse 18 tells us that no matter how gruesome these beasts and kingdoms are, the people of the Most High will receive the Kingdom and will possess it forever!

God freely gives to His people what world rulers have always tried to take by force.

The history of the world and our current reality is that there are beastly kingdoms in the earth that have dominion and rebel against the authority of God and His people. But a day is coming when God will conquer these beastly kingdoms and give His Kingdom to His people. However, before that happens we will see a final destructive king rise to power and wage war against the people of God.

Daniel's vision showed this to be one of the horns on the final beast. It began small, but grew to be the most imposing with eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. This could be one of those instances where Daniel's vision has a dual meaning. There are people who point to this horn historically as Antiochus Epiphanes, who wreaked havoc among the Jewish people in 168-165 B.C. Others would say this is a future leader we most often call the Anti-Christ.

Daniel calls God the Ancient of Days and tells us He is coming to judge this one who will oppose Him and His people. In fact, no matter how successful this king is, his time is limited.

Verse 25 "The holy people will be delivered into his hands for time, times and half a time.

Some people take this to mean 3 ½ years and apply it to the second half of the tribulation (if you hold to a literal 7 year tribulation view). But it doesn't have to mean that. Times is plural, not dual, so it could mean year, years (undisclosed) and half a year.

One commentary said this: "...the rebellion of the little horn will get off to a fast start and seem like it is going to last forever, but then is suddenly cut off."

No matter how destructive the forces of this world are against the holy people of God we know that God has a plan to bring the persecution to a close.

We could easily put all our focus on the kingdoms of this world and worry about the interpretation of this final beast. But I want you to see something that hopefully will guide our hearts in the right direction today. It's not important that we absolutely get the interpretation of these kingdoms correct. It's imperative that we have a proper view of God while living in a world opposed to His Kingdom reign.

Three times Daniel stops to give us a glimpse of God sitting in power over these events. The focus is meant to remain on God's power to judge rightly and to bring His Kingdom to play in the world. We've read these passages already this morning, but let's put them together as we make our final observations of Daniel's vision.

9 “As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them,

22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.

26 “ ‘But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’

Applications:

- 1. The vision and its interpretation are meant to encourage patience as God’s people suffer under unjust kingdoms ruled by men while we await the final judgment and rule of God.**
- 2. The vision is meant to help us find hope in every age and in every kingdom knowing God’s eternal Kingdom is coming.**

How can we have confidence and hope that Jesus will conquer all and is coming to establish His Kingdom? Because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Satan has already been defeated by the cross. He is now trying to cause as much chaos as he can as he awaits his final judgment and eternal persecution.

:: Colossians 2:13-15

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

MESSAGE

13 When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive - right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven,

14 the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross.

15 He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

In Daniel's vision it's the Son of Man who comes riding on the clouds of heaven to rescue His people. Jesus alone has been given power to bring about the end of these evil kingdoms in order to establish His everlasting Kingdom.

3. Only God is an everlasting King with an eternal Kingdom!

Evil may seem as if it has the upper hand in our world, but the comfort we find as followers of Jesus is that the kingdoms of the world will come to an end- His Kingdom is eternal! When given the choice, it is better to stay faithful to Jesus and suffer in this life than to fall in with evil and experience God's ultimate judgment when He comes again to establish His Kingdom on the earth.

When Jesus comes will he find you living faithfully for Him? Have you responded to the invitation to become part of God's family by having your sins forgiven by Jesus and planting yourself firmly in the Kingdom of God?

- Pray