

Daniel 7

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[0 : 0 0] There's many names, but there's names such as Alexander the Great, Nero, Genghis Khan, Vlad the Impaler, Hitler or Mao, fearful leaders and heads of great kingdoms, names that still strike fear. And you might add to that list, you might add new lists, you might add the ones that today even make people quake, such as Vladimir Putin or Kim Jong-un.

Or other leaders that make the lives of Christians and all people in this world difficult. And it unsettles us. And we here in the United Kingdom only feel it a little.

We have rulers that may be many things, but they don't sit on that list. Sadly, this is the nature of the world that we live in, as we see it all over the news.

And we also see it's how the Bible describes things. The rage of kings, the distortion of humanity, and the constant rise, the wars of these wars, and the fall of kingdoms. We have leaders who extort power with cruelty, who shake their fists to God and seek to crush His people who stand in their way. We're often surprised because this cycle keeps repeating itself. We thought we'd be past this by now, but it just keeps coming up over and over again. Rulers against rulers, seeking power, wealth, and their own everlasting kingdom. And rather than peace being the norm, the world is kind of being in constant disarray. Human power rages and distorts and destroys. And for most of us, we've just been in a strange period of peace. And I don't know what you think about that. You might disagree, and that's okay.

But I ask you, do you ever look at the world and wonder what is going on? Do you ever think this isn't how it should be? Why can't powerful people just stop dominating others?

[2 : 1 6] Times like this and seeing things in the news might make us question, who really is in control? You may be tempted to ask, even if there is a God, where is He?

But I would ask, in this world that is in turmoil, in uproar, what is our answer? What will be able to deal with these kingdoms and these rulers, these evil leaders who look to oppress?

What will actually be able to bring lasting peace? And this is where we begin in Daniel 7. The book of Daniel is in the Old Testament, the part of the Bible that comes before Jesus.

And it's about the people of God who are in exile. They've been captured and taken to the land of Babylon. And they've been told to trust in God and to seek the good of the people around them, the people who have captured them, who've destroyed their homeland.

And they're told to await the promised rescue that God is going to send. And if you were to read through the book of Daniel, you would see that in the beginning, he starts as a young boy, taken from his home in this hostile country.

[3 : 3 7] And he's mistreated and despised for his faith. But yet, under God's hand, he begins to gain influence. And God uses him to bring about good and uses other of God's people to bring good to the nation that is over them, to the people of Babylon.

And Daniel's honored by the king for it. King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of this evil empire, even comes and put his trust in God. This evil king who controls vast amounts of territory, comes and says, it is the God of the Bible who really rules.

It's the God of the Bible who really is in control. But we are told at the beginning of our passage, there's a new king in Babylon.

In verse 1, we see that there's this new king. And in this part of Daniel, we're taken back a few chapters. We're taken back before the reign of Darius in chapter 6 to the reign of Belshazzar.

But if we were to turn to chapter 5, we would see that he is the king who has no time for the God of Daniel, who turns away from his own nation who had turned to God under his grandfather.

[5 : 01] And he holds a big feast. He decides, I'm going to hold a big feast. And he brings in the goblets from the temple. And he goes in outright a rebellion to God.

And it's a sad tale. Because in all his pomp and all his power, he's judged by God. And he loses his kingdom. He loses his life.

All in one night, this night at this feast. But that is many years away. And it's important as this vision in Daniel comes at the beginning of the reign of this cruel king who has no time for God and no time for God's people.

It comes at one of the hardest times of the exile. Daniel, who was once honored, is now rejected and relegated out of society. He loses his influence.

And God's rescue seems even further away. And this is a time of discouragement. And into this time of discouragement, Daniel receives this vision.

[6 : 09] It's a vision of beasts and of God and of a king, God's king. But these first seven chapters of Daniel, they are written in Aramaic.

And that's important because Aramaic was the universal language of the day. It's the equivalent of what you might call English now. It was used in many different countries. And the first seven chapters are written in a universal language for all people.

The last chapters are written in Hebrew. And this isn't just an encouraging message for us today. This message and these chapters in Daniel are written for all people.

It's a warning for the whole world. It's a warning for a world where there's arrogance and rebellion against God. It's a warning against these leaders. But it's also an open invitation.

It's an open invitation for everyone in the world to come and receive from God. For these kings and these rulers to tremble. And in our short time this morning, after a bit of an extended introduction, we're going to look at this vision Daniel gets under three headings.

[7 : 25] We're going to look at the beasts who destroy, God and his son the king, and the kingdom of his son. And you'll have them on your sheets and they'll be on the screen. And our first point is the beasts who destroy.

This vision opens up with a picture of the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. This is a great wind blowing in from the north, the south, the east and the west and whipping up this great tumultuous sea.

And it's a terrifying picture. It's a chaotic picture. And the Bible uses the sea as a place of disorder and a place of evil.

And it's out of this tumultuous sea that comes four beasts. And we're told a number of things about them. The first being verse three, that each beast is presented differently, with different characteristics.

But then the fourth beast is especially singled out. But before we look at these beasts, again, I want us to remember that this is picture language.

[8 : 29] This was often done. It seems a bit foreign maybe to us. But this was quite common in other forms of literature. But remember, we are given a clear description of what these beasts mean.

Daniel is told what they mean. We're not left to speculate. So we look at the first three beasts. If you look at me at verse four, the first beast is described as a lion with eagle wings.

But the wings are torn off before it's lifted up and made to walk on two legs like a man. And the mind of a human is given to it. A second beast rises in verse five, this time a bear, like a bear, a bear on its side with three ribs in its teeth.

And it's told to get up and to eat its fill of flesh. Then the fourth beast in verse six is seen as a leopard. And this leopard has four wings in its back and has four heads.

And the beast is given authority to rule. And the fourth beast in verse seven is given an extended introduction. It's even more terrifying. It's even more frightening.

[9 : 29] And it's dreadfully powerful. And this beast, we're told, is iron teeth. It's a beast that uses to crush its victims, to break them into pieces. And then it tramples what's left.

This is military language. It's quite horrible. And if you haven't imagined, your mind might be running wild with these pictures. Remember, we're not left to guess in the dark what these mean.

If you look down with me at verse 17, These four beasts are four kings, or more specifically kingdoms who shall arise out of the earth. These are human kingdoms.

All four beasts are described with human characteristics, but also the characteristics that are distorted, beastly. These are human kingdoms, but distorted.

They're kingdoms of power and destruction. You ask, what kingdoms do they represent? Well, fortunately for us, Daniel 7 is a parallel passage to chapter 2.

[10 : 32] They're very similar, and they use similar ideas. And in chapter 2, you're given this picture of a statue, a four-part statue with head, chest, thighs, and feet that represented four kingdoms.

And the head of gold was Babylon, but this kingdom would fall, followed by a lesser kingdom, the Medo-Persian kingdom, and then so on. You have the Greek kingdom and the Roman Empire. And this is history.

This is kingdoms that rose, kingdoms that caused fear and power. And this is what we see in Daniel with the death of Belshazzar in chapter 5.

The fall of the Babylonian Empire, an empire that no one thought would fall, and then the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire. And this is history. And this great city of Babylon that Daniel walked through as a boy, as an exile and a refugee who'd been dragged there, with its hanging gardens and its Ishtar gates that now sit either in a museum or under the desert in Iraq.

And this is what we see throughout history. These kingdoms that rise. No one thinks they'll ever be defeated. And yet, they crumble and fall.

[11 : 53] And this is what's promised in the vision of Daniel 7, and what came to pass. But it's also reasonable and fair to say that these are descriptions of kingdoms everywhere, especially the last beast.

They're distorted humanity, these kingdoms that rise and cause fear. And we're told in verse 7, 19, and 23 that this fourth beast is different from all that came before.

And we're shown why. It has ten horns. And these horns are symbols in the Bible of power and of kingship. And these ten kings, in verse 19, that arise out of the great fourth beast, and then there's another king that comes.

And this small horn rises, and it has a mouth and eyes, and it utters great things. And this fourth beast is different because it specifically identifies God as the target of this beast, God and its people.

He speaks against the Most High and makes the life miserable and unbearable for his people. It's described that he'll wear them out with war and making life so hard for him than many of God's people will think to give up.

[13 : 13] They speak words of blasphemy against God. They're boastful. And we're told in the New Testament that this kind of behavior, this setting themselves up as God over people, this Antichrist, those who are against God and against his people are in place of God, is something we're warned about, something Jesus himself warns about, that many will come, many will come in his name to lead people astray.

And this is evil. This is evil powers that are at work against God. They will be empowered by Satan, be incredibly convincing, speaking lies.

And we're told about it in the first letter of John, that there will be this one ultimate opponent who will rise, who will come and set himself against God.

But what we need to know is that these beasts represent kingdoms. These horns represent human rulers and leaders and also evil powers who speak against God and his people.

They do not point people to God, but away from him and seek to lead people astray to their own power. And we see that in verse 25, the people of God are given into the hands of these enemies of God for a time, time, and half a time.

[14 : 43] And this phrase, time, times, and half a time, is just used in apocalyptic languages so it's a defined period. It will come to an end, but it will happen for a period. It's a limited thing.

We're not told how long, but God knows. And God allows this to happen, but sets a limit. For all of us, we can feel this.

We can feel worn out. We can feel another conflict, more suffering, more images on the news, whether it's another bit of legislation that's passed, another memo from head office that seeks to drive against what you believe, TV shows pushing something, or whether it's Christianity portrayed unfairly.

We also see it in churches that often don't just muddle the message, they change it. And we feel it on top of the busy struggles of human life in a fallen world.

We see it if you look at Putin and you think, clearly, this isn't right. This passage is here to remind us this isn't something to be surprised about. This isn't something that the Bible's surprised about.

[15 : 54] And if you think the world is hostile, then this is the exact same world that the Bible tells us about. It's a world in turmoil. But what is our answer?

Or more specifically, who will be able to deal with these kingdoms and finally bring the lasting peace that all of us, that humanity as a whole, longs for?

Which helps us when we turn to our second point. We see God and His Son, the King. See, Daniel sees this world. He sees its faults.

He sees it at its worst. And we're portrayed it at its worst. But he's also given a glimpse into beholding God. He's shown a heaven reality of God who reigns supreme.

And if you look at me at verse 19, Daniel says, as I looked. And what we see here is if you look at it in your Bible, you'll see that it's set differently.

[16 : 57] It's set as poetry. It's set, it's what we see often in the Bible when it changes the text like that. It is poetry. It's beautiful. It's poetic. And it's set against the chaos and the destruction of these beasts that we've had described.

But a few things to notice about what we read in that section. Daniel sees God is in heaven reigning. So while we've seen this power of these nations and their might, we're shown that there's 10,000 times 10,000 people serving this God.

He is called the Ancient of Days who has been and always will be. He is shown in a picture of light rather than the darkness. We see that God is worshipped.

He is attended and not opposed. And he is way bigger, has way more power than even the greatest of these evil empires. He is pure and holy.

We see fire and judgment and justice done in his courts. And we see in verse 10 that the books of account are open, the account of the nations and how they respond to God and their hostility towards him and all that he made.

[18 : 10] And we'll see that they'll also the judgment of how they treat humans everywhere. These humans that God loves and the world he made for them. But this book also has the names of the people of God in it, the names of those who are secure with him forever.

But having seen a picture of a God like this, you might be asking, if God is like that, then why doesn't he do something now? Why isn't he taking this perfect rule and reign down now and defeating these beasts?

Why isn't he judging these evil kingdoms today? And the answer is found in this passage. We see that he has done something and is doing something.

In verse 13, you see another glimpse into this heavenly reality, to a coronation event. Not these kings who assert their power, but a coronation where power is given.

It's a heavenly coronation. We see someone called the Son of Man as King. You see this in verse 13. There came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and he was presented before him, and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve him.

[19 : 35] His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Notice that God entrusts to the Son of Man his eternal rule.

He is the one who's given authority, glory, sovereign power, power, power, power, and the kingdom. And this figure, as we can see, is painted in a picture that he is going to be vital.

He is going to be key to all of history. It is to this one that God is going to give his everlasting kingdom. All people, all nations, and all tongues will serve him.

And it's to him that every knee will bow. See, this is the incredible statement of this vision. The one whom God appoints, the one who is king over all history, is this Son of Man.

How do we know who this Son of Man is? Well, this is, this title of the Son of Man is used by Jesus himself repeatedly in the New Testament.

[20 : 43] No one else uses it there. No one else calls him it. And we could have a whole sermon series just on the titles and how Jesus uses the Son of Man. Maybe you might want to suggest that to Joe and just give him more to do when he comes back.

But there are 51 separate occasions where Jesus uses this. And it's the most common title Jesus uses about himself. Jesus uses this title to show why he has come.

And Jesus says in John chapter 9 to a blind man that he heals, Do you believe in the Son of Man? He answered, And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.

If you were to go to Luke 19, you would see, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. And in Mark 10, For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

We see that Jesus also uses this title because it speaks to him being the one who fulfills Daniel 7. His hearers would have got this reference immediately.

[21 : 54] Jesus refers to Daniel as a prophet, a prophet who speaks on God's behalf about things to come. And what we have here in Daniel is one of the creepiest presentations in the Bible of the coronation of Jesus, written 600 years before he came.

We get a glimpse into the mind and the plan of God to send one to redeem humanity. That Jesus will identify himself and says, This is me.

I am the Son of Man. I have come to seek and to save. Tell everyone about my kingdom. And then he gives his life.

And he goes back to his father being crowned as king with a promise to come and return and to judge. You might be asking, When will this prophecy in Daniel be fulfilled?

Well, we have an answer to this. If you look with me, you'll see the direction of travel. The Son of Man comes to the ancient days. He goes to heaven. And this is speaking about the ascension of Jesus when following when he rose from the dead, he returns to his father.

[23 : 03] And you see this in Acts chapter 1. We see that Jesus goes up into a cloud into heaven. And we are told and the disciples are told that this same Jesus will return in the same way he left.

Jesus came the first time to declare himself to be the Son of Man. who did things only God can, who is worshipped as God and reflects perfectly this image of God, who is absolutely everything that these beasts and these rulers are not.

He embodies everything that it means to be truly human, but also is fully God. He's not just a distorted, sinful human, but he is what humanity is made to be.

See, Jesus is crowned as king on the throne and he will return as triumphant king. But he has not left the world without witnesses to this because Jesus' rule and reign is worked out through his people, the saints of the Most High.

And in a world in turmoil, what is your answer to be what will or who will be able to deal with these kingdoms and bring lasting peace?

[24 : 21] Is it this king? Which takes us to our final part, the kingdom of this son. See, having seen the power of these beasts and the absolute sovereign rule of God and his son, the king, we have one last kingdom to look at.

This one is not beastly but the beginning of an eventual whole world kingdom and a restored humanity. And this kingdom is Jesus' church.

And if you are to read through the accounts of Jesus' life, you will see him continually talking about his kingdom, this new kingdom which we made up of people. And his followers struggle with this.

They want a powerful king. They want a king more like these beasts who will dominate and who will rule. They want someone who will defeat these rulers in a way like them. And they were so focused on that that they missed the glorious realities of what Jesus was offering.

And Daniel is writing about the future that when God will come and establish a lasting universal kingdom where people from every nation and tongue will come and be under this king. This is a prophecy about this coming kingdom and the defeat of evil and all of those evil leaders who oppose God.

[25 : 44] And it's a prophecy about the people of God who are referred to as the saints of the Most High who will inherit it. And we see that the kingdoms and the world will be given to you.

All dominion will come to the people of God under this king. And if you want you look with me at verse 27. Then sovereignty the power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to who?

The holy people of the Most High. It is given to God's people. This kingdom his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey him.

And what Jesus has won what this son of man has done will be given with joy to his people to share in.

His people will rule with him in peace in a kingdom that will be an everlasting kingdom given to them. So there's assurance of in this world of beasts in a world that seems unsteady that whatever tomorrow or next year may bring Christians have an everlasting hope.

[26 : 59] And see what these evil leaders what these beasts fight to attain they kill and they destroy to achieve what they lie and they cheat and they oppress we and God's people are given freely by him and we're given it abundantly more.

they seek an everlasting kingdom and they go out of their way to get it and yet God's people are given it freely. And so for those who like Daniel lose their home to these evil powers and who trust in this son of man they will be given something that no one will be able to take away.

See God's kingdom and his church and what we see here will be an everlasting dominion no matter what comes against it. There's nothing that can defeat it. And even though we may get weary even though as we saw in the beasts their goal is to wear out the saints of the most high with war and evil they cannot take it from you.

And this is what the people of God are called to go and do to go and welcome people into this kingdom and we're called so as you see in verse 27 his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey him.

We're called to go to all peoples all nations and our church is to welcome them all in. and we await this day because the hard reality is we we're not there yet.

[28 : 44] We haven't received this peace. This kingdom hasn't come yet. We're still in the days of these beasts the days of these rulers and these kings but yet Jesus has come has told us that he will come again.

And we wait and we long and the more this evil world wages its war against us and his people and against God the more we long for the return of Jesus.

But we we are left with the spirit we're left with the power of his Holy Spirit living within us as we go out and speak into this world. through Daniel we have you see if you read through it there's a calling for God's people to live godly distinctive lives humbly serving God in the midst of a hostile world which may look like an invasion of another country or it may just look like an important figure laughing at God and you.

So how are we to face tomorrow? We long for this day but we're also realistic about the world we live in. The Bible doesn't try and hide the realism from us and we see in verse 28 if you look down once more with me we see that Daniel's thoughts were troubled.

You see his face turns pale as he sees this but he keeps the matter to himself though he's terrified he thinks on this he thinks on all that is going on in the world but as he does that he remembers this picture that he sees into a heavenly throne of a God who rules a God who reigns a God who is bigger and who really is in control not all these evil rulers should pretend to.

[30 : 42] My hope is that we would rest on that hope that we would remind ourselves like Daniel go back and remember over and over again that God is in control even as the world does not seem to be.

That we would encourage our brothers and sisters across the world as they face pressure to submit and to conform and speak words of hope and life and the promise that we have.

The world is longing for peace. The world is longing for a day when all that is wrong with this world will be taken care of. And we have an answer.

We have a God who offers it freely to them to your neighbors to everyone. And is this what we have in a world in turmoil?

Is Jesus your answer to the one who will finally bring peace to deal with these kingdoms and to bring about his kingdom? So let us pray.

[31 : 44] Lord we thank you that you are ruling that you are the ancient of days. That though people try and set themselves against you, though rulers and nations oppress many, you are the one who will bring justice, bring judgment and bring peace.

Lord we thank you that all evil will be judged and yet all who rest and take refuge in your son are safe. Lord we pray for all our brothers and sisters across the world in Ukraine, in Korea and in many other nations who are suffering at this moment.

We pray that they would be sustained. We pray that all your people throughout this world would know your goodness and your sustaining power. We pray that all people who do not yet know you would come and receive your peace.

But Lord we pray as we face tomorrow we would know that you do rule and you do reign and you are in control of this world that we are so afraid of.

Help us to trust in you Lord we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. We are now going to sing. We're going to sing one final time. We're going to sing before the throne of God above.

[33 : 00] Thank you.