

# "The Ancient One"

Daniel 7

September 2, 2007

Read Daniel 7.

Ok. What?

Obviously, we have moved into a new part of the book of Daniel. For the next several weeks, we are going to be looking at dreams and visions Daniel had.

If any of you have ever listened to someone else's dreams, you know that there are all sorts of things that go on that just do not make rational sense. There is a lot of action, weird characters, vaguely familiar yet unfamiliar people, and urgency – most memorable dreams are vivid because of something urgent going on within the dream.

So it is with biblical dreams; there are all sorts of things we will simply not understand. When you listen to someone else's dream, you are more in tune with trying to figure out what is being said underneath – what were they feeling, why is this dream important. With Daniel, we are going to do a little more than dream interpretation. We are going to look at what the dreams are saying.

Having said that, let me also point out we will be painting with a broad brush. There are literally volumes written about interpretations of these dreams. Which kingdoms are meant? Which leaders were meant? Have these things already happened or are they still yet to come? As we touch on these questions, it will be only in brief. Our main focus will be on what these apocalyptic writings reveal to us about God and reveal to us about who we are to be as children of God.

There are two sections to chapter 7, each divided into two parts. The two sections are: the dream and its interpretation. The first part of each section – both the dream and the interpretation – describes the horror of human society in rebellion against God. The second part of each section describes God's judgment on that society; strangely, this is supposed to provide comfort.

## **Human Rebellion Against God is Horrible.**

Verses 2-8 describe four spectacularly gruesome beasts. The interpretation is found in the second section. They all come out of the sea; the sea that is being whipped up by the four winds of heaven. If the "perfect storm" grew out of the combination of three separate low pressure systems, creating one massive destructive hurricane; imagine what the four winds of heaven would whip up. It would be chaotic and scary.

The four beasts that are created are unnatural combinations. The first was a lion with eagles' wings. The second was a bear with three tusks. The third was a leopard with

wings; and the fourth was made of iron and had horns. Thus far, combined with the raging sea, this begins to look like the trailer of a terribly frightening horror movie.

To the Old Testament audience, the visions were terrifying. Daniel himself talks about how scared he was. “His spirit was troubled within him and the visions of his head terrified him.” The unnatural combinations of animal parts were an offense against God. The first one was fairly clearly described Nebuchadnezzar – including his time of insanity and restoration – but the rest are arguable.

So let’s take a step back and consider what Daniel’s dream is revealing to us. The first thing we have to notice is that the four beasts are unnatural. In other words, it is *unnatural* to rebel against God. Each one of the beasts Daniel described were part of a bad scene, or series of scenes. But, as the attendant in the dream reveals, each of these kings and each of these kingdoms is temporary. “But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever.” (Verse 18).

The message for Daniel’s readers – people living in exile from the Promised Land, who wondered if God had abandoned them and forgotten his covenant with his people – is that God is still sovereign despite what they see. God is still in control. The struggles they are going through feel like they are taking an eternity, but those struggles are only temporary.

Do you know anyone struggling with faith – either to come to faith or keep their faith? There are people all around this community who are struggling with their circumstances. There are people with financial issues like the loss of a job, the mortgage foreclosures, just paying the basic bills in life. There are people with relational issues like divorce, the death of a loved one, children who are ignored or are all-but-abandoned because their single parent has to work multiple jobs. There are people with individual problems like those who are struggling with their health, with trying to sort out insurance, with a myriad of other problems: the question they ask, “Where is God?”

Many of you were very kind and wished me a happy birthday last Sunday. My actual birthday was Tuesday and a number of people asked what I was going to do. The truth of the matter is that Jen and I went out to try to get some reading glasses for me – and they are on the way. However, it was not the original plan. We tried to go out the day before based upon the information available on our insurer’s website about a participating provider. The optical services at WalMart were apparently part of our plan. So we went. “No,” we were told, “we are not affiliated with your insurance.” We called. We got a second address over here on Broadway. We went to the WalMart over by the Costco; “No,” we were told, “We are not affiliated with your insurance either.” I was a little steamed until they pointed out that the address they had given us was *another* WalMart on Broadway, over by the 54 on the way into National City. So we went there and, sure enough, it was the right one.

It is a silly little example. I was expecting a happy, carefree day and watched it turn into a bureaucratic, red-tape nightmare. Jen chuckled at me as I was muttering, “There has got to be an easier way.” In other words, the world is not right for me and God ought to do

something to make it right for me. Such is the spiritual maturity of a pastor. I can only empathize with people who have real insurance issues and real medical problems; it must be extraordinarily frustrating.

The problems can pile up and seem insurmountable. Either suddenly or slowly, the notion of praising God in the face of the adversity seems like too much work. It can seem like a waste of time. When going through the pain of a broken relationship, when trying to figure out how to make ends meet, when dealing with injustice or being wronged, God seems very far away and does not seem to be concerned for us at all.

The reality is that for many people, the frustrations in life are a barrier to trusting in the sovereignty of God. A god not bigger than the frustrations in life is no god at all; and the God of Scripture is clear that he is definitely bigger than all of the temporary frustrations and problems.

If you know someone who says their problems keep them from believing in God, think about what a difference it might make to say, “Come to worship on Sunday with me.” God may be using you to save someone by inviting someone who has been beaten down – literally or figuratively – to come and hear some good news. The invitation is a ministry. It says to the lonely person, “You are not alone. I am with you.” It says to the hurting person, “Let me share your burden.” It says to the lost one, “Come home.” It says, “Come hear about the one who is sovereign, who knows our suffering and our sorrows, and who promises that these things are only temporary.”

No matter the size or scariness of the beast, their time is temporary. The “holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever – forever and ever.”

### **The Sovereign God Will Judge Humans and Human Societies.**

If all of those scary beasts are only temporary, what will prevail? This brings us to the second part of the dream. The scene is the throne room of heaven. There are three pieces of this to touch upon: the Ancient One, the judgment, the presentation of the kingship to one like a “Son of Man.”

Remember, this is a dream – it is a divinely inspired dream meant to provide comfort for those who have wondered where is God.

The Ancient One on the throne – anyone? – would be God. The symbolism of pure white is holiness; the white hair showing age. Fire signifies judgment.

Then comes the judgment. There is the description in the initial dream, a summary statement in the attendant’s first interpretation; then a more complete analysis given in the longer explanation. In the dream, the beast speaks arrogantly – in defiance of God; something like, “I don’t need you,” or, “You are not real,” or, “I will not bow down to you” – until the arrival of the Ancient One, who orders that the beast be put to death and its body burned. Then comes the one like a son of man, who is presented the kingdom

over all of the earth, forever and ever. The summary interpretation (in verse 17-18) – and easiest to remember – is, “As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever – forever and ever.” Then, the more complete explanation (in verses 23 – 27) details more about how the rebellion against the Ancient of Days -- God – will take place and then the Most High will put an end to them.

Daniel remains scared by seeing the spiritual battle come to its conclusion. The images are overwhelming.

Again, let’s take a step back.

The judgment is coming. There will be a clear, decisive winner and a clear, decisive loser. The “holy ones of the Most High” will not fight the battle, they will reap the rewards of the battle won by the Ancient of Days.

Let me say that again. The “holy ones of the Most High” will not fight the battle, they will reap the rewards of the battle won by the Ancient of Days. The beast will wear them out, the beast will attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law, the beast shall have power over the holy ones – for a time, two times, and half a time – but that power will be temporary.

Friends, hear that. It is good news. The job of the holy ones is to trust the Ancient of Days, to be faithful. We are to trust the one who can win the battle by uttering a word, by judging evil, and purifying by fire.

Even the most permanent things from our perspective are temporary. I read in the news this week that the Great Wall of China is crumbling under dust storms. The Berlin Wall, which was such a powerful symbol of the Iron Curtain when I was growing up, fell quickly. My generation is the first one to grow up knowing that we put a man on the moon – not that we wanted to, hoped to, or were working towards – it had been done. I remember in my teens and twenties wondering if I would ever know what I was supposed to do with my life; now I marvel at the adventure I have been given. Things that feel permanent often are temporary.

But the judgment and sovereignty of God is eternal. And after the judgment of God on sin is proclaimed, God receives the one “like a Son of Man” – the title Jesus claimed for himself – and “to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”

And for us? “The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them.”

How does that happen? Remember, Daniel’s dream was more than five hundred years before Jesus’ birth. Daniel’s dream does not reveal specifics, but you know anyway. The

judgment against evil is effected in the life and death of Jesus Christ; up on the cross. The presentation of eternal kingdom to the Son of Man begins with the resurrection, marking the defeat of death. We are joined by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and joining in with him in his death and resurrection.

That's this table. Victory is celebrated, we are fed and strengthened – overcoming efforts of the beast to wear us out – through the Lord's Supper. “This is my body, broken for you.” “This is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins.” No earthly power, no created thing, is more powerful than this victory won by the Ancient of Days through the Son of Man.

It is a great comfort because we know how the story concludes. It is a great comfort because we are invited to come to this table – invited by the one who is victorious, the one who is sovereign, the one who is the judge, the one who has adopted children and co-heirs of the eternal kingdom of heaven. It is a great comfort because we can share the invitation with those who are lost, lonely, scared, tired, oppressed, and downtrodden. It is good news.

God is sovereign. God does reign. God will judge. And the promises of God are true, now and forevermore.

Look again at the table. It is the table the Lord set promising the victory that Daniel saw hundreds of years before Jesus' birth; it is the table the Lord set promising the victory to which we cling.

Let us prepare our hearts to come to this table.

8:30 communion

10:00 hymn