

Daniel 7 – Son of Man, and the Ancient of Days

Introduction

Today we are diving into Daniel chapter 7. For those who came expecting a message for Mother's Day, I apologize. I will say this up front. The role of a mother in building a stable family, stable churches, and a stable culture cannot be overstated. As you nurture, teach, and disciple children, you are doing what only you can do. It is not a job we should give to another, or to the schools, or even the church. Yes, the church is here to help families, to disciple parents and children, but the best teaching happens in moments of life between the events and the activities. I pray that God will strengthen you in your work as a parent.

Today in Daniel 7 we encounter the Son of Man, and the Ancient of Days.

Today's BLUF

- All the kingdoms of the earth will be judged
- Jesus has already received the kingdom that will never end
- God's people will both suffer AND triumph until the time of his return
- God's people will win for all eternity

Remember this slide showing what is called a **chiasm**, which is the parallel structure of Daniel chapters 2 – 7. So chapter 7 parallels 2, talking about 4 kingdoms of the earth before God's kingdom arrives. Just as chapter 6 paralleled 3, showing God's miraculous protection of his people, and chapter 5 paralleled 4, showing God rules over kings. Chapter 7 also marks a transition in the book from the events while Daniel was in Babylon/Persia, his interpretation of others' dreams and visions, to Daniel recounting the visions and dreams God showed him.

So we see this parallel structure where in chapter 2 Neb had a dream of a statue representing 4 successive kingdoms, then the coming of the eternal kingdom of God, which was shown as a rock cut out, but not by human hands, that destroys the statue and then grows to fill the whole earth. We saw that represented the coming of Christ, following the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and during the time of the Roman empire. That rock then becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth.

Now chapter 7, Daniel has a similar dream, and an angel explains things to him.

I've asked Krysti to come and read Dan 7:1-16

“Lord, transform us, your people by the renewing of our minds, according to your Word.”

Part 1 – The 4 kingdoms

There are parts of God’s Word that are difficult to understand. And we may at times be confused by it. That’s OK. There are questions we may wrestle with our whole lives and parts of scripture we may never fully understand. Recognize that it all has value, and God is speaking through it all. There’s a saying I like regarding scripture which says:

“The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.”

So, while much of Daniel, chapters 7-12, contains some difficult passages to understand, I pray we will all be encouraged by what is plain and obvious in this amazing book.

We also should always endeavor to let scripture interpret scripture. So when we see the parallel structure between Dan 2 and Dan 7, we take these together to better understand the overall story.

Dan 7:17 These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

So here is the very short summary of history from the time of Daniel until the end. The description of these 4 beasts lead most scholars to associate them with the 4 kingdoms from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the time of Christ.

Without going too deep on this, note the description of the leopard. Which is a fast animal, it now has wings also. The conquest by Greece was very rapid, so this makes sense. Also note the 4 heads. After Alexander the great completed these conquests he died a young man, and his 4 generals divided the kingdom into 4 parts. Now as we talked about when we covered Daniel 2, the entrance of the Kingdom of God came during the Roman Empire, and has grown steadily to fill the earth ever since and will continue to grow until the end.

But we know that there has often been great opposition to the church, including martyrdom even today. (You wouldn’t know it from the news, but there are Christians being killed in Nigeria by Islamic forces at an alarming rate.) But a clear point of this dream’s interpretation is this: **God will judge the nations of the earth.** We see this majestic scene of “The Ancient of Days” or “The Ancient One”, the pre-existent God coming to judge the nations.

Dan 7:9 I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like purest wool.

He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire, 10 and a river of fire was pouring out, flowing from his presence.

Millions of angels ministered to him; many millions stood to attend him.

Then the court began its session, and the books were opened.

This is intense, right? When we talk about having a reverence and holy fear of God, I think of scenes like this!

No matter what we see happening in our world today. No matter how much the rich and powerful people rage against God. In the end they will stand before this throne of judgement and answer to the Ancient of Days. And so will I, and so will you.

Part 2 – The Son of Man

Now we come to an essential part of this prophecy that points to Jesus. (The whole Bible is either pointing to Jesus or telling us about him or how to follow him.)

Dan 7:13 "I saw in the night visions, 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.

Now, the meaning of the phrase “son of man” is basically one who looks human or is human. So, in contrast to the beasts that represented the 4 empires in Daniel’s vision, the next king, the everlasting king, is human, like us. These previous kings were beastly and inhumane, but Jesus comes to us with humanity. He doesn’t conquer by force, but by righteousness. By holiness.

When Jesus spoke about himself, he most often used the phrase “the Son of Man”.

About 81 times in the gospels. I think it serves a dual purpose.

1. It clearly emphasizes his humanity, that he became one of us
2. But it also points to his claim as both Messiah and God

One of the times Jesus used this phrase was when he asked the disciples who people were saying he was.

*Luke 9:20 Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” 21 And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be***

rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

And then in a very significant moment, Jesus also refers back to Daniel while on trial before Caiaphas before he is crucified.

Mat 26:63 But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” 64 Jesus replied, “You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Jesus is about to be tortured, flogged, mocked, beaten, and crucified. He doesn’t defend himself to avoid going to the cross - remember he said about laying down his life in John 12:27 “this is the very reason I came” – but by pointing to Dan 7:13 Jesus says to his accusers, I am the messiah, I am the one Daniel foretold. And I am about to receive from God the Father, from the Ancient of Days, a kingdom which will not pass away.

Jesus also said this in

John 12:31 The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. 32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

Peter explains it on the day of Pentecost:

*Acts 2:33 Being therefore **exalted at the right hand of God**, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not **ascend into the heavens**, but he himself says,*

*“The Lord said to my Lord, “**Sit at my right hand**, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”*

*36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both **Lord and Christ**, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

So Christ is exalted and is ruling, right now! BUT the battle on earth rages on still, for now. The outcome is certain, but it is a work in progress. And in this vision Daniel sees, we see both these things going on at the same time. We see in

*Dan 7:21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against God’s holy people and was defeating them, 22 **until** the Ancient One—the Most High—came and judged in favor of his holy people. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom.*

In this verse the “horn” is one of the kings of the final earthly kingdom. We see here that God’s holy people are being defeated until the Most High comes and judges in favor of his people. Is this prophecy of the future? Or was it fulfilled when Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, or sometime in the first century?

There are bible scholars with integrity who land on both sides of this question. Perhaps we’ll do a seminar sometime to go in depth on that question, but it is more than we can get into in a Sunday sermon. But for this time we live in now, I think we see both the triumph of Christ and the struggle of the saints going on at the same time.

Jesus is reigning, AND the battle still rages.

Why does God allow this?

Part 3 – Suffering Saints, Triumphant King

I regret to inform you that suffering seems to be part of God’s purpose. Jerry spoke on this 2 weeks ago that the verse “God works all things for our good” doesn’t necessarily mean it will happen in this life, but it certainly will work out for eternity.

Now, suffering and troubles come from two primary sources:

- It can come due to reaping the consequences of our own sinful choices,
- and it can also due to the fact we live in the fallen world.

It seems there are also two primary purposes for pain and suffering:

- Sometimes it is God’s megaphone to get our attention

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”¹

- But more fundamentally, pain and suffering perform a purifying and sanctifying work as we become more like Jesus.
 - There are 317 verses in the NT alone that talk about suffering

Jesus suffered and talked about suffering. **Jesus makes a direct line connection** between the idea that he is the messiah, that he must suffer, and his followers must also suffer.

*Luke 9:22 saying, “**The Son of Man must suffer many things** and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”*

¹ C.S. Lewis, “The Problem of Pain”

*23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, **let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.** 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*

Do we have any anyones in here? Thanks be to God, that the daily crosses that we must bear are generally much less than what Jesus bore for us. But I want to say this emphatically today:

Unless you are willing to take up your cross daily, you are not really following Jesus.

Here is the good news, though – God doesn’t cause us to suffer and go through hard things for no reason. In fact, the best things in life are all forged through the hard times.

Paul talked about suffering and had intimate experience with the topic.

*2 Tim 3:11 You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—**but the Lord rescued me from all of it.** 12 Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will suffer persecution.** 13 But evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived.*

We will suffer persecution. Even while we see evil imposters flourish. That really hurts.

Peter talked about suffering (a lot!)

1 Pet 5:6-10 So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. ... Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. 10 In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

Our suffering is short-term, but we get to share in the eternal glory of Christ forever!

Part 4 - The final judgment

Finally, we must remember that if we are with Jesus, we win in the end!

Dan 7:18 But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever.”

Dan 7:22 until the Ancient One—the Most High—came and judged in favor of his holy people. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom.

Dan 7:26 “But then the court will pass judgment, and all his power will be taken away and completely destroyed. 27 Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will last forever, and all rulers will serve and obey him.”

We must be willing to follow Jesus regardless of the hardships we may face because of it.

Conclusion

Why does it seem that suffering and pain are such a part of our lives, even as believers?

This is my speculation, but I think living a life of self-sacrificial love is the very heart of God. A love so deep that it will endure pain and suffering is what God is building in us.

See the pattern we must follow?

Jesus humbled himself, submitted himself to be obedient and suffered even to the point of death on the cross. Then he rose to eternal glory and is exalted forever.

So too we must humble ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus in obedience.

To share in Christ's glory, we must travel the path of suffering.

It will be worth it!

Key Points:

- All the kingdoms of the earth will be judged
- Jesus has already received the kingdom that will never end
- God's people will both suffer AND triumph until the time of his return

Chapter Summary:

- Transition from things happening in Babylon to Daniel's visions
- Parallels Dan 2 with the 4 successive kingdoms
 - The kingdoms of the earth challenge the authority of God
 - They arise out of the sea – from chaos, the peoples of the earth
 - We see what happens in heaven this time
 - Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome?
- Daniel 7 gives more detail than Daniel 2
 - It sets up the rest of the book which gives deeper views
 - About Persia and Greece
 - About Israel
 - About the end of time
- The Ancient of Days Convenes court
 - There is a day of judgment coming
 - The kingdoms of the earth will be thrown down
 - The kingdom of “the son of man” will be exalted forever
- The son of man is ushered into His presence
- Details about the fourth Kingdom

Principles of Biblical interpretation.

- Focus on the plain things
- Let scripture interpret scripture
- Remember the chiasm of Daniel