

Worship the Son of Man

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[0 : 00] Okay, thank you Mark for that. Why don't you turn with me to Daniel chapter 7 because that's where we're going to be looking at. That was the other reading, but I want to give some context before we look at the one in Daniel chapter 7.

So page 890 I believe it is. Well, some of you may not have been here last year, so let me, I think, begin or finish our series in Daniel chapter 7 to 12 by actually giving you a bit of a recap on the first six chapters.

And some of you will recall, if you were here last time, that what we have in Daniel's prophecy is a young nobleman from Judah, that was his name, Daniel, who with others was taken into exile in Babylon.

And so I've got a map here to show how far he traveled from one end on the left all the way to the right, which is where Babylon is. Judah, as many of you will know, was the southern kingdom of Israel.

Israel was divided after Solomon's reign into two kingdoms. The north, called Israel, was conquered earlier and scattered by the Assyrians. But Judah, too, was being punished, that's the southern kingdom, because of their idolatry.

[1 : 34] So in chapter 1, Daniel finds himself in exile in Babylon, even though he personally was a faithful Jew and refused to compromise his faith in the royal court of the king.

As a result of that, God did prosper him, despite his not wanting to do everything that the king demanded of him and his friends.

And so in chapter 2, we find that Daniel yet again shines, because he's the only one that is able to interpret the king's dream. So in this dream, King Nebuchadnezzar learns that even though he's powerful, God in heaven rules over him.

And because of Daniel's ability, he, too, is promoted even more, together with his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And then in chapter 3, it's their turn to be tested.

The king commands everyone to bow down to an image of gold that he's built. And so when Daniel's friends refuse, they are thrown in a blazing furnace. But God comes to their rescue and preserves their life.

[2 : 46] Then in chapters 4 and 5, we see how God ultimately deals with kings who defy him in their pride and arrogance. First, King Nebuchadnezzar is transformed and lives like an animal until he humbles himself while his regent, Belshazzar, profanes God's name, because remember he was having a drunken party and he called for the temple goblets of God to be brought out to show off.

God appears to him with a hand riding on the wall and that very night, Belshazzar is slain. And finally, Daniel himself is put to another test in chapter 6, when the king, this time a new king called Darius, is tricked by jealous court officials to sign an edict that commands everyone to pray to Darius.

Daniel, of course, refuses. He's thrown into the lion's den, but God again saves him and preserves his life. And so Daniel, by being faithful, prospers even beyond the fall of his captives, the Babylonians.

For we read at the end of chapter 6 that he continues until the reign of King Cyrus of Persia. So the chapters then that now follow are not in that sense historical events, but visions and dreams.

And they don't actually follow chronologically from the first six chapters and the events in them. And you can tell this because in verse 1 of chapter 7, on the slide, it occurs in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon.

[4 : 36] And that was the king we saw in chapter 5, in his first year. That is, not the year that he died. And so with all that context, what we're going to do now is look at chapter 7 itself.

And Jackson is going to come now to read that first part of it from verse 1 to 14. Okay, thank you, Jackson.

It is a very vivid vision, isn't it? A lot of detail. I don't know about you, but you can't help, when you hear it, having a mental picture of each of the beasts and then finally that scene in the throne room. Now, some of it is probably unclear as to what it means to you. And that's not surprising because even Daniel himself is confused. For we read next in verse 15 that he asked someone in the dream about it.

He said, I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all of this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things.

[5 : 50] And so thankfully, we actually don't have to guess what the vision means. It is actually going to be given to us. But firstly, just remember that this is what we are calling apocalyptic literature.

And so, some of these things that are being portrayed here needs to be understood symbolically. And we must be careful not to try and press every detail into specific historical events. Instead, what we need to do as we read the interpretation now is allow that to guide our understanding of the vision itself. And the first thing that's explained to us is the meaning of the beasts.

So verse 17 tells us, the four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. This vision then is about kings or rulers on earth.

And as we shall see, their relationship with God. What's shown here symbolically here, I think is what has already been playing out in the first six chapters of Daniel with those actual historical events.

[6 : 57] The animals here are used symbolically to bring out the aspects or the features of those kings and particularly what happened in the first six chapters. There is a general pattern that follows with kings and empires.

So it's a bit like when you watch a David Attenborough documentary, that's him on the slide there. And you know, he often describes animals imbued with human-like qualities, isn't it?

So, Sir David might say in his voice, which I try to imitate, the king of the savannah surveys his domain in pride. Right?

Now, is the lion literally ruling over the plain? Like, all the other animals actually recognize and bow to him and submit to him? No. But, Sir David is using human-like qualities to explain the dynamics of the relationships in the animal kingdom or the animals that actually live on the plain.

And so, similarly, with Daniel's vision, except I think this time it's the other way around, isn't it?

Because human kings are now given animal-like qualities to bring out certain aspects of their rule.

[8 : 12] And so, first you need to notice the choice of animals. It's a lion, a bear, a leopard, and then parts of an eagle, the wings. These are all, if you look at these animals in the wild, they are all fierce and powerful predators, aren't they?

And so, they show us what kings are really like, ruling with fear, using their power forcefully to submit. They don't rule with compassion or wisdom or sensitivity.

It's brute animalistic force that's being portrayed here. And so, in that sense, when they're described like that, they are rather unlike how God himself rules.

Yes, if you look in verse 4, the lion does stand on two feet like a human and is given a human mind. But despite this semblance of respectability, the king's rule by nature is beastly.

Likewise, in verse 5, the bear is portrayed with ribs in its teeth because it rules by devouring. You know, bears, after hibernation, are always hungry.

[9 : 26] And so, they spend all of spring and summer just eating, right? Because they need to eat enough in order to hibernate over the winter. And what they're eating is they're not snacking, are they, on their favorite trail mix of fruit and nuts.

No, a bear needs to kill in order to eat. So, four of these kings are then portrayed, therefore, with these kind of brutal animalistic qualities.

And so, here that four kings will rise from the earth. And here is where there is actually a similarity, I think, with the four kingdoms, if you remember, in chapter 2 of Daniel. Here's a slide that I showed last year where King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of that statue, isn't it?

And the four kingdoms that I said it probably aligned with was that of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, which were the empires during that time.

Now, the same could be happening here with these four beasts, although some have actually aligned it slightly differently. So, instead of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, what we have is the lion being Babylon, the bear being Medes, the leopard, Persia, and Greece, the fourth beast.

[10:44] So, it could be the one in the middle, which is based on Daniel 2, or the one on the right, which is another way of looking at it. Now, scholars have gone back and forth with all of this, but we don't need to be too fixed, I think, with what the right answer is, because the key is more, as I said already, to recognize the nature of these kings.

Their voracious appetite for power, their disregard for the people that they conquer or rule over, and the fact that, actually, even though they are fierce and powerful, they do come and go.

Also, we need to note that it's quite clear each time that this power is actually given to them. So, for example, we read that the mind of a human is given to the lion.

He doesn't have it on its own. Likewise, the leopard is given authority to rule, verse 6. And, of course, the bear is told to eat its fill.

And so, really, although they are fearsome and seemingly all-powerful, they are actually not.

Someone else actually has ultimate control over them. And we already know from verse 12 that was being read that eventually all of them are destroyed.

[12:02] By contrast, in verse 18, we read this, the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever. Yes, forever and ever.

So, in contrast to these animals that eventually are destroyed, we have the holy people of Most High who actually will possess the kingdom forever.

Now, interestingly, when you heard Jackson read the vision just now, these holy people aren't actually found in that vision, right? Neither is the Most High.

This will actually become clear soon, but for now, we need to just notice the contrast, that of the kingdoms of the beasts passing away and that of the Most High's kingdom lasting forever and the holy people possessing it for eternity.

And this is actually meant to be a word of comfort for Daniel, which we'll return to later. But now we need to focus on the fourth beast, which is the one that really perplexes Daniel.

[13:05] and its meaning is found in verse 19. For Daniel says, 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 to its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. 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. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them 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. So here actually we are not just given an interpretation, we're given a bit more detail of that vision, isn't it? We find out that the little horn is waging war against the holy people and defeating them.

And so finally we know where the holy people appear in the vision. But in the vision it says only until the ancient of days, which were described in verse 9 earlier, only until he pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

[14:31] kingdom. And so that's why verse 18 is meant to be a comfort, because it says that despite the little horn's attack, the holy people will eventually triumph under God's hand.

Now, what of this fourth beast? It's explained in verse 23. The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.

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 their three kings.

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.

So, this fourth beast is different, and I think different because it's global in nature, isn't it? It talks about devouring the whole earth. And so, if you think about those four kingdoms that I described

earlier, whether it's the Greek or the Roman empire that you go with, that's true of them, isn't it?
[15 : 45] Because they did, in the end, cover most of the ancient civilization. As for the little horn, its distinctive characteristic is that it usurps power to rule.

Can you see? Because it sort of subdues the other three kings, sort of gets rid of them in order to take over. And it goes further than the rule, even though it's bloody of the other kings, because this particular horn explicitly opposes God's people.

He opposes God because he's boastful speaking against the Most High, and then he oppresses his holy people and tries to change God's laws.

Now again, people have various views about who this particular horn is, and if you read up or just Google, some of them think this is the Greek ruler, Antiochus IV, and others think he's one of the Roman emperors, you know, Hadrian or someone like that.

Jews. And if you read their record, each of them do end up persecuting the Jews. They do come into Jerusalem to try and defile the temple.

[17 : 02] And so again, we don't really need to work out exactly who this person is, but what's more important again is to see the pattern here. For throughout history, what has happened time and time again is that empires and emperors, when they become drunk on their power, like the fourth beast, they deliberately then turn on God himself.

They arrogantly resist God directly. They become so powerful that they think, you know, I'm not just even better than all the other kings, I'm actually better than God.

I'm even more powerful than God. And, you know, even in our time, if you look at, you know, the 20th century, with the rise of some of our superpowers, that has been the case, isn't it?

And invariably, when that happens, what results is that these kings or rulers will then turn on God's people, those who live under their rule.

And, you know, when we look at Daniel chapter 1 to verse 6, we've already been given examples of that, haven't we? With Daniel, with his friends. And here, I have to say that when we hear God's holy people, we're not just to hear the nation of Israel, or the Jews in exile, rather, when we hear God's holy people, it's a specific reference to those who remain faithful as God's people.

[18 : 32] Yes, they may be Jews, they may be people from Israel, but they're actually the ones that remain faithful. So, that describes Daniel and his friends, doesn't it? Who refuse to bow down to earthly rulers or their gods.

And so, as a result, they incur the wrath of these kings. Because when you fail to bow down to a king, it threatens their authority, doesn't it? And it's something that we see in history time and time again.

And that is why, often, the church is persecuted. Because our brothers and sisters refuse to bow down and say that you, a human ruler, are the ultimate authority in our lives.

No, we serve someone bigger. We serve God and we serve his son, the Lord Jesus. But despite this persecution, the prophecy provides comfort because, as it says right there, it's only for a limited time.

The reference in verse 25 is time, times, and half a time. So, times is two, right? So, time, times, and half a time, that's three and a half.

[19 : 39] And three and a half times is half of seven. And symbolically, seven is the number for completion. Just like, you know, seven days to a week, a complete week.

So, when it says three and a half times, that's the period, it's showing that this time of persecution is limited. Because when that time arrives, or elapses, verse 26, the court will sit.

And this court is really a reference back to that vision in verse 9. Let's look at that again, because it's important. So, verse 9 says that Daniel looked, and 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 as wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and his wheels were all ablaze. 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, this is the reference to the court, the court was seated, and the books were opened.

[20 : 49] That is, judgment is about to begin. Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and his body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

The other beasts had been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time. friends, verse 9 to verse 12 or thereabouts, what we are seeing here, yes, it's a vision, but actually we are meant to also understand this to be a reality.

That is, even as history is taking place on earth with the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, there is simultaneously another reality that's happening in heaven.

That is just as real, even though it cannot be seen with the human eye, it's just as real as the events that are happening in the world. And that's true today as well.

Even as we have the superpowers, China, Russia, the US, the European Union, whatever, even as they are ruling on earth, the reality is that God is also ruling from heaven.

[22 : 03] and his rule, what's happening as the court sits, impacts the events on earth. It's not a perfect analogy, but it's a bit like, you know, Melbourne has this central city, central traffic control center, I don't know whether you, you know, sometimes you see it on the news, and you see people in there, right, they're monitoring the traffic to see which jams are, you know, the eastern traffic jam, or the west gate has a traffic jam, and then they're able to, you know, I don't know how they do it, but they have this remote control where they can change the traffic lights, Sammy knows, I think, right, you can change the traffic lights so as to keep the traffic flowing kind of thing, and that's a bit like how God is, isn't it, pulling the levers in heaven.

As the ancient of days is ruling from his throne, things happen in history. God is judged in time and space, he's above time and space, but what he says, and what he does, seated on the throne, is impacting even the course of events that's happening today.

And while there may be chaos on earth, because notice at the very start, you know, the beasts come from the sea, which is a picture of chaos, there is actually, as you see this vision in verse 9, absolute calm and order in heaven.

Glory and honor surround him. Tens of thousands are gathered in praise to him, in awe of him. And then notice, which is a really sort of a peculiar picture, sort of almost out of sync with everything that's happening in heaven, we have this little horn, right?

Mouthing away, boasting away. The ancient of days, he does not utter a single word, does he? And then you have this puny, tinpot ruler, you know, I don't know what he's doing, saying how good he is, you know, how bad God is, and all the time, without realizing that actually, because this horn is on earth, right, he does not realize that his rule, let alone his very life, is only possible by the will of the ancient of days.

[24 : 25] that's the contrast we're meant to see, right? This so-called horn, which is so fearsome on earth, in the presence of God, it's just kind of, you know, one, and he's gone.

And so when we return to verse 26, we need to realize that what we're reading here is nothing is happening outside God's control, because just at the right time, verse 26, the cord will sit and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

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.

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. Now, it is understandable that Daniel is troubled because what he sees is God's holy people suffering greatly for a time.

But in another sense, it's also greatly comforting because God's promise, if we read there at the end, God doesn't just promise that his holy people will be rescued.

[25 : 43] Can you see what he has promised? He has promised that they will have power over all kingdoms forever as well. But notice here something a bit peculiar because there is a change in there from the plural to the singular.

In verse 27, the holy people, plural, as in many people, becomes he. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will obey, worship, and obey him.

Well, what's going on here? Well, I think it ties in with verse 13. We saw one like a son of man, didn't we?

In verse 13, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and powers of every language worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So, you can see, isn't it, the correspondence of verse 13 and 14 with the end of

chapter 7 of Daniel.

[26 : 54] So, the question then, is this kingdom being described that of the Son of Man, singular, or is it of the holy people of the Most High, plural? Well, the answer is both, because the Son of Man is a representative for the holy people.

The holy people will inherit the kingdom through him, but he, this Son of Man, approaches God's throne on their behalf. But again, notice the contrast of the Son of Man with the little horn, because the Son of Man arrives with clouds on heaven.

He's a man, not a beast. He's a heavenly figure, but nothing is beastly about him. He is what perfect humanity ought to be, made in God's image, not evolving from an animal and standing up like a man, but proceeding from heaven, coming from heaven on the clouds.

And instead of the horn, like a little pestering pest in God's sight, the approach of the Son of Man is dignified, isn't he? He's led, he's welcomed into the presence of the Ancient of Days.

And instead of devouring and trampling to subdue the kingdoms, all the kingdoms are bestowed, served, presented to him.

[28 : 18] And now, we Christians know exactly who this Son of Man is, don't we? And that is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. But if you read through all the Gospels, when he walked on earth, isn't it not true that he carried himself just like this Son of Man in Daniel 7?

Because he never uttered a boastful word, did he? He did not rule with cruel or bloody armies. He inherited the kingdoms of the world, not by ascending on a war horse to conquer the nations, but by being lifted onto a cross to conquer sin.

He did not trample others, but he himself was trampled to death, wasn't he? And even now, when he draws people into his kingdom, he doesn't do that by force, does he?

Rather, he does that by faith, through faith, from us, and in love. Very, very different kind of rule, isn't it, to all the beasts and all the other rulers that we have on earth.

Thus, when the high priest asked him in Mark chapter 14, verse 61, which Mark read, Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One? Jesus said this, I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.

[29 : 45] He was describing himself. But even as he faced his impending death, cruel and dehumanizing, he had a vision, didn't he?

Not of the things that was going on on earth and how they threatened him, but instead, he had a clear vision of heaven, of Daniel 7, verse 13 and 14.

He knew that he wasn't standing before the high priest or Pilate as his ultimate judge, but rather that he was standing before the Ancient of Days.

He knew he is the Son of Man in Daniel 7, standing before his Father in heaven, that ultimately God the Father will judge him, righteous.

Jesus. And so all these other rulers on earth, physically though they are, that he was before, did not matter to him. And so friends, I want to encourage us to have that same vision of heavenly reality that's constantly before us.

[30 : 52] Because firstly, it is a great comfort to know that even as we figuratively may have beasts and little horns cruelly and arrogantly throwing their weight around, perhaps directly at us, little bosses, or more generally around the world, waging war against God's holy people, including persecuting the church, that actually there is a reality, a more powerful reality that God is still ruling in heaven.

any suffering that we go through, that our brothers and sisters around the world go through, is only for a time, times and half a time.

And if we and they hold fast to our worship of Jesus, trusting in the Son of Man who gave his life for us, then one day we'll join him too to possess all the kingdoms forever.

forever. That's us possessing all the nations, the kingdoms, forever. That's the comforting picture, but there is also a warning for us, isn't there, in Daniel 7, because individually, or as a church, we need to know that we will one day stand before the Ancient of Days in Judgment.

And so we may not be like this little horn, waging war against God's holy people, drunk on world domination, but you know, we need to be careful not to resist God, not to tell him to butt out of our lives, not to think that we rule our own lives and he can just, you know, get lost.

[32 : 36] Let's not think we're the master of our own universe, but instead let's be thankful that despite in the past having been proud, having resisted his will, that actually in his Son, in the Son of

Man, God is gracious enough to provide for us forgiveness because the Son of Man has gone before us to the very throne of the Ancient of Days, on our behalf, interceding for us, having laid down his life for us, so that the kingdoms of the world, having been given to him, will also be ours to possess.

What we need to do now in our lives is bow down and worship him and serve him as we await this everlasting kingdom. Let's pray. Father, comfort us with this vision of heaven, to know there is a reality far more glorious and assured, that as we just sung before, that there is a higher throne, more glorious, more real than the troubles and turmoil we see in this world.

Help us to cling in trust to your Son, the victorious Son of Man, and teach us to faithfully endure until the fullness of his kingdom is revealed and until we too are invited, given the honour, not because of ourselves, but only because of Jesus, to rule and reign with him.

In his mighty name we pray. Amen.