

# Life in a Hostile World: the real picture

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like you to open your Bibles, please, at that Old Testament reading, Daniel 7, that's page 863.

Over these past weeks, we've been looking at the life of Daniel. And now, in this chapter, there is a fundamental change in the whole character of the book. And as Mari read to us that first half of chapter 7, it's to do with this vision which Daniel had.

It all made sense, didn't it? Let's pray. Father, we do ask for your grace to be able to just understand what you are saying to us in this passage.

And we ask it in Christ's name. Amen. From this point onwards, and by the way, that vision belongs chronologically between chapters 4 and 5.

So it's inserted here as a separate thing from what we've been looking at in these past weeks. What this vision does is it broadens our perspective, or certainly broadens Daniel's perspective beyond his own time.

[ 1 : 32 ] In fact, it broadens it beyond our time. Right up to the judgment day. And it gives us an insight into what's going on behind the scenes in our human history.

And there are two things we're going to see. We're going to see the world manipulated by evil powers, but a world under the control of our sovereign and omnipotent God.

No wonder Steve has entitled this sermon, Life in a Hostile World, the Real Picture. So it begins with Daniel describing this vision dream.

Remember, he is in exile in Babylon. So verse 1. In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream.

And visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. And he wrote down the substance of his dream. I'm very glad he wrote it down.

[ 2 : 39 ] You ever had a dream and it's been really quite bizarre? But try writing it down. Well, the vision tells us a great deal about the end chapter of history.

And so the question that the Jews would have been asking in exile, where is God in all this? What's he doing? What about all those great covenant promises that he made to Abraham?

It all just seems to have fallen flat. What is happening? And as puzzling as the vision may have been, I don't doubt it was an encouragement to Daniel, even if he wasn't quite sure what it meant.

But the message is no less relevant to us as it was to him. Because we too can lose hope if we're not careful. Things can go out of focus just in the events of our own personal lives, let alone in world events.

And if we're not careful, our perspective can just become distorted. Now the thing I want to just make very clear so that we understand where we're heading is that Daniel's descriptions here in this chapter are in symbolic language.

[ 3 : 48 ] And it's the same sort of language that's used in the book of Revelation. In fact, many of the things which Daniel says here are virtually repeated in the book of Revelation by John.

So just look at verses 2 and 3. Daniel said, Remember, it's apocalyptic language.

It's symbolic of reality. There's a difference between apocalyptic language and literal language. And these descriptions are intended to convey a picture of reality, but are not literally describing that reality.

Do you follow what I'm saying? It's exactly the same in Revelation. Let me just give you a simple illustration. In Revelation, John talks about a bottomless pit. Now I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure there's no such thing as a bottomless pit.

But have you ever felt like you were in a bottomless pit? Yeah. So that's the point. It's language which is symbolic. It's describing something which in itself is not the reality, but it's telling us the

reality.

[ 5 : 12 ] Pictorial language. All right, four beasts. And we read of them there in verses 6 to 8. Horrible beasts rising from the sea. Now in both Daniel and Revelation, the sea is a metaphor for the nations.

It's the sea of restless humanity. The sea of the nations as they rise and fall. And we read in Revelation, the waters, the sea that you saw, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

Are you with me? It's out of these nations that these four beasts arise. What are they? What do they represent?

Well, Daniel was so distressed by what he saw that he prayed for understanding. Now we've only read the first half of the chapter. You turn over and look at the second half of the chapter and look at verses 15 through to 16.

Because this is the interpretation. Verse 15. I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those who was standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this.

[ 6 : 30 ] So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things. The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will arise from the earth.

But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever. Yes, forever and forever. Four beasts, four kingdoms. Now it was the fourth of these beasts that so disturbed Daniel. Remember we read in verse 7, he was terrifying and frightening and very powerful. And Daniel's description is repeated in Revelation.

John said, and I saw a beast coming out of the sea, rising out of the nations. He had ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns in his horns and on each head a blasphemous name.

Same in principle is what Daniel saw. Now what we're not told in Daniel, but which John tells us in Revelation, is that behind this fourth beast is the dragon.

[ 7 : 40 ] Satan himself giving his authority to the beast. No wonder he's incredibly powerful. Behind this beast is Satan himself, who more than anything else wants to be seen as supreme and in authority.

He wants to be God. What is this beast? What's its mission? What's it represent? Now many over the centuries have tried to work out what this beast was and what these various things represent. And so some have said, oh it's this, it was Rome or it was Greece or it was the Medes and the Persians or it was this happening or it was Hitler. And I think if we try to link it just to one particular individual or a period of time in history, then we may well just miss the whole point of what this is intended to convey.

Having said that, there are many examples of this beast operating in our world history. And we can take Hitler as an example, if you like. He was an evil man.

He epitomised the beastliness of fallen humanity, if you like. But behind all that he did and others like him is the dragon, Satan.

[ 8 : 55 ] And so it is out of man's beastliness that these tyrants are supported and given power by Satan. And my friend Jeffrey Bingham once wrote about this beast.

He said, nothing beastly arises which has not come from that which is already beastly. Beastliness we understand.

It's being animal-like in the worst forms when in fact we've been created human. No one can criticise a beast for being beastly. But humans are not essentially beasts.

The truth of history is that beasts have always arisen from the human beastliness of pride and ambition and selfishness and anger and hatred and wrath. And the principle of history found here in Daniel burgeons out into terrible ways in the dragon and his beast.

And we will miss the whole point of this prophecy if we do not recognise the elements working in the world today. Understanding the principle of beastliness, of seeming defeat of the people of God, of the ultimate triumph of God and his kingdom.

[ 10 : 07 ] We would be wrong if we linked the beast with some past kingdom, say Rome or some present kingdom, say Hitler's Germany or put it all into the future when we will not be here to see it.

Now the important thing is to step back and take the big picture. On one of my business trips in Europe I visited the Louvre.

And it was very crowded and I remember being sort of, you know, pushed along with the crowd and into one of these very big rooms. And as I turned here was this big picture and all I could see was just this section right here in front of me with very rough paintwork.

And I just kept walking. And it wasn't until I got to the end that I turned back and suddenly saw this vast canvas of this magnificent picture.

And we can look at the details and miss the big picture. Romans 13 tells us that all ruling powers are ordained by God. But Satan is forever perverting those powers.

[11:12] So he just takes what God has given and instituted for our welfare and he turns it, he twists it into an instrument of oppression.

That's what he's been doing right down through history. And that's when we see beastliness in action. Well, Daniel saw something further in his vision.

He saw the eternal kingdom of God, the ancient of days. Look at verses 9 and 10. As I looked, thrones were set in place and the ancient of days took his seat.

That's just a way of describing God, the Father. His clothing was as white as snow and 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 was seated and the books were opened.

[12:12] Now the Bible clearly speaks about the kingdom of God. And we are told unambiguously that God is in control of all things.

But history and our own experience often gives us a contrary message, doesn't it? It seems as if everything's out of control at times. And we go, well, where's God in all this? Is he really in charge? And what we forget is that there is a duplicate kingdom. A counterfeit kingdom headed up by Satan. Jesus spoke of it. Paul spoke of it.

John speaks of it many times in Revelation. Satan has a kingdom and he has a throne. Read of that in Revelation. It talks about Satan's throne and the throne of the beast.

So the purpose of these visions, both here in Daniel and in Revelation, is to show us in symbolic language that all things, including Satan and his pretend throne, are governed by our Lord, who is on the throne.

[13:16] And like John, Daniel saw the Lord God take his place on this throne, the seat of all authority and judgment. As I read, thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

But Daniel saw around this throne this vast throng. Thousands upon thousands attending him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. Remember John in Revelation said exactly the same thing.

I looked and there was a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. And then Daniel saw something even more amazing.

Verse 13. 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. And he was given authority, glory and sovereign power. And all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him.

[14:24] His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. And that's what Jesus was alluding to in that second passage that was read to us from Mark.

This is a wonderful description of the Lord Jesus Christ because he's the son of God, the son of man. And to him God has given all authority and power. We read in both Corinthians, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, that he's put all things under his feet.

John saw the same thing in Revelation. Do you remember that he saw that this scroll was brought and the question was asked, who is worthy to open up this scroll, to take up this unroll of seals and open the scroll?

And no one could be found who was worthy. Remember, and John was very distressed. And then it was said, ah, yes, no, but here is one who is worthy. The lamb that was slain.

And so we read in Revelation that he went and he took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. And he was able to open the seals.

[ 15 : 39 ] And it was as if the father was saying to him, here you are, son. Here is the scroll with the seven seals. You are to open those seals. And every seal you open will be something that happens in history that will be of enormous significance.

And it can never happen unless you control history. And then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there was loud voices in heaven saying, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever.

And so it is through Christ that God is at work in our human history to control it, to sustain it and to bring salvation to his people and the final defeat of all evil.

He's the Lord of history. He's the king of the kingdom. And he alone has the right as sovereign to rule the nations. He alone has the full authority of the father and is competent to take the whole world to its final destiny.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This is the sovereign Lord, the son of man. That's what Daniel saw in this astounding vision. Now whether we realise it or not, we're engaged in a spiritual battle every day and we're faced with a powerful enemy who was out to destroy God's people.

[ 17 : 08 ] Paul tells that to us in Ephesians, you remember? He says our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil and the heavenly places.

That's the battle we're in every day, whether we realise it or not. I think most Christians don't. And we're told this many times in scripture.

But none more clearly than here in Daniel 7. Look at verse 19. Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying.

Just go down to verse 20. I also wanted to know about the ten horns and its head and about the other horn that came up. Verse 21.

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them. Until, verse 22, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High and the time came and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

[ 18 : 29 ] Verse 23. He gave me this explanation. The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom 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.

And just skipping to verse 25. He, that's this beast, will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and laws.

Just think a moment about that verse. What's behind the beast? Who's behind the beast? Satan himself.

What is Satan trying to do all the time? He is constantly speaking blasphemies against God. We get that from both Daniel and Revelation.

Never lets up. What else is he trying to do? He's trying to oppress the saints. Never lets up. What's the third thing he's trying to do? He's trying to change history to his favour.

[ 19 : 38 ] There it is, there in verse 25. He will speak against the Most High, oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. And the saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

Now that's exactly what John saw in his revelation in that vision he had. Let me read one verse. The dragon was allowed, allowed, allowed, to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

It was given authority over the tribe and people and every tribe and people and language and nation. Job's a good illustration, isn't it?

Yes, here was Satan and he was allowed to afflict Job but only up to a certain point. We're in a monster battle. The New Testament tells us that defeated forces of evil and not yet destroyed.

They still have tremendous power to work havoc and so we must be realistic. Yes, of course, the great victory has been won on that cross. And we must never forget that, never lose sight of that.

[ 20 : 51 ] But meantime, Satan is out to destroy us and he sometimes and he sometimes is permitted to succeed as these passages tell us so clearly. Do you know that in the 20th century it's estimated that some 210 million Christians were martyred?

Yes, Satan is allowed to have authority. We must never forget it. But above him and over him is our sovereign God. Notice that Satan's power is limited.

He's not allowed to continue his war on God's people forever. Daniel is specifically told that they would suffer under Satan's hands for a time, times and half a time.

Don't worry about what that means. What it says, it is for a set period set by God. God is sovereign. John was told exactly the same in Revelation.

So Satan's days are numbered and so too are those who refuse to come under Christ's lordship. God's judgment will fall. And that's what Daniel saw this day of reckoning.

[ 22 : 02 ] Verse 10. The court was seated and the books were opened. And John wrote, I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened.

Also another book was opened, the book of life and the dead were judged according to their works as recorded in the books. So as the pages of the books are opened, so the judgment of God is issued.

And the arrogance and the pride and the power of the beast are now assigned to destruction. Look at verse 11, Daniel 7, verse 11.

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. And then just turn over to verse 26.

But the court will sit and his, that is, the beast's power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. John says exactly the same thing in Revelation 19.

[ 23 : 13 ] Well, how has this great victory been accomplished? Daniel's not told. But John knows and so do we.

Do you remember Jesus said in John 12, now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

He's talking about the cross and the great victory of the cross. And so John wrote, worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered. What for?

Well, in order to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. And then he said, I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that's in them singing to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever.

And then they cried out in a loud voice saying, salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the lamb. He is our sovereign Lord. And so God has placed a cross in the centre of history where all evil was defeated and destroyed forever.

[ 24 : 27 ] And so it is the shed blood of the lamb of God, the eternal son by whom God accomplishes this staggering victory over the beast and his cohorts.

And as men and women of faith we share now in that victory. But Daniel sees even more in his vision. Verse 18, look at verse 18.

And the saints of the most high will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever. Yes, forever and ever. And then turn to verse 27. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the most high.

His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey him. Daniel saw that the kingdom is going to belong to the people of God.

God, this staggering promise is in the process of being fulfilled right now. Here we are sitting in St. Paul's Chatsford and right now you and I are part of the fulfillment of that very promise.

[ 25 : 38 ] We're not there yet. You've probably noticed. We're on our way and the full blessing of the kingdom lies ahead and though we have all the promises the father inheritance is yet to be experienced in all its fullness and it's that for which we hope.

That's the substance of Daniel's message and his vision and indeed it's the message of the whole of scripture. We're going to reign with Christ the father. Is that an encouragement?

Are you bored? Or does this change your perspective on where you are now in your life and within the context of where we are in the world today?

None of us have got any right you know to God's grace and so our pressing need and responsibility is to repent of our obscene rebellion and sin to capitulate and to live obediently to Christ as Lord of all.

Throughout human history there's always been this ebb and flow of evil and the activity of the beast. It's always been that way but our sovereign God has the final word.

[ 26 : 55 ] Let me conclude just by quoting to you Psalm 2 the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. He who sits in the heavens laughs the Lord has them in derision.

In other words the rebellious nations and behind them Satan himself he just laughs at them. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury saying I have set my king on Zion my holy hill I have put the son of man King Jesus in the place of supreme authority and power. He says I will tell of the decree of the Lord he said to me you are my son today I have begotten you ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. The nations are going to be given to Christ to rule as their Lord. And the psalmist says you shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. This is God speaking of course though they reject the son he will be their judge. Now therefore O kings be wise be warned O rulers of the earth serve the Lord with fear with trembling kiss his feet kiss the feet of Christ or you'll be angry and you'll perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled. [ 28 : 23 ] Gentle Jesus meek and mild well we read in Revelation of the wrath of the Lamb ultimately all humans will bow before the judgment of the Son of God and have to face the wrath of the Lamb but that psalm finishes happy are all those who take refuge in him so you and I dare not reject Christ whom God has appointed as the redeemer and judge of all believe in him trust him bow before him take refuge in Christ that's the overall picture of Daniel 7 our Lord God is sovereign and even though we live in a hostile world headed up with the beastliness of Satan himself we must see the big picture the real picture and maintain an eternal perspective so verse 27 of Daniel 7 says the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the saints of the most high we're going to reign in triumph with Christ

Paul tells us in Ephesians God the Father has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things does anyone know how that verse ends God has made him head over all things for the church for us that's the perspective we need before us every day let's pray Father thank you so much for this word thank you Lord for this incredible chapter and how it opens up to us the vast panorama of history where we see that you are Lord and sovereign even over Satan and all his cohorts help us to recognise that we are in a monster battle but it's a battle where the victory has already been won on that cross may we live in the fullness and the freshness and the reality of our forgiveness and the grace that's come to us in Christ and know that at the end we're going to reign with him thank you our father in Christ's name  
Amen Amen