

The Court Is In Session

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- [0 : 0 0] We're in Daniel chapter 7 this morning, earlier this year in the spring. We worked our way through the first six chapters of Daniel. And just to remind you, those first six chapters are typically the ones that most people are very familiar with.
- They're narrative, make for good storytelling, good children's ministry lessons. And then you get to the back half, starting in chapter 7, and things get a little bit weird.
- So the back half of Daniel, starting in chapter 7, oftentimes Christians will disagree on how to interpret these verses. Just a disclaimer, you may disagree with me in some of the things that we'll cover over the next several weeks together.
- And let me just say on the front end, that's okay. We're okay with that. And I'll be the first one to tell you that I do not fully understand everything in the book of Daniel.
- So even still, I'm excited to open it up and hear what God has to say for us this morning. So if you would, hopefully you found it by now. Daniel chapter 7. Would you stand in honor of the reading of God's word this morning?
- [1 : 0 1] Daniel chapter 7. In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed.
- Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, I saw in my vision by night and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.
- And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. And then as I looked, its wings were plucked off and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man.
- And the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth.
- And it was told, arise, devour much flesh. After this, I looked and behold, another like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads and dominion was given to it.
- [2 : 0 4] After this, I saw in the night visions and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth. It devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.
- It was different from all the beasts that were before it. And it had ten horns. I considered the horns and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots.
- And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things. As I looked, thrones were placed. And the ancient of days took his seat.
- His clothing was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames. Its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.
- A thousand thousand served him. And ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court sat in judgment and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.

[3 : 10] And as I looked, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away. But their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

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. 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. As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me.

I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever, and ever. Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, in which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.

[4 : 28] And about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up, and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions.

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

Thus he said, As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth and trample it down and break it into pieces.

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. He shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law, and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

[5 : 30] But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.

His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.

And the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Would you pray with me once more? Father, we ask now as we open up this chapter that you would make all things clear.

Father, that your spirit would empower the preaching of your word. Lord, would you help us to grow in our love for Christ? Would we submit to his reign and rule even now?

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. In my hometown, there was a cheap dollar movie theater that showed movies on their second run, and it was one of the best, cheapest ways to go out with some friends and see a movie on the weekends.

[6 : 44] And so what we would do is we would go, we would pick a movie to watch, we'd go there, pick whatever we wanted to see, and then we would leave there discussing whatever it was that we had just seen.

And depending on the movie, sometimes that conversation was quick, and the movie was simple, easy to understand. And at other times, we sat there and talked for hours and hours about what we had just seen.

Sometimes it was difficult to understand, and even sometimes we went back the following week to watch the same movie over again so that we could see those same scenes play again in front of our eyes and try as best as we could to understand what in the world we had just seen.

Daniel 7 is a little bit like that. This is a vision playing out in Daniel's mind as he dreams. He sees these scenes flashing in front of him.

What he sees is shocking to him. It's upsetting to him. It's all a lot to process. And when he's all done seeing these visions, when it's all over, he walks away asking, what in the world did I just see?

[7 : 49] And I'm guessing that as I read through Daniel 7 just now, many of us are feeling the same way. So what we're going to do before we enter back into the theater of Daniel's vision once more and see these scenes play in front of us again, I want to give us the big idea here from Daniel 7.

The big idea, the message of Daniel 7 is this. God defeats the kingdom of man by the son of man. That's the big idea. God defeats, he triumphs over the kingdom of man by giving an eternal kingdom to one like a son of man.

And we who belong to him, we get to enjoy his reign and rule forever. That's Daniel 7. So what we're going to see here this morning is two scenes and a summary.

Two scenes and a summary. First, scene number one is the scene on earth. Look there to verse one with me. Verse one says that this dream came to Daniel during the first year of Belshazzar's reign.

And so we're actually, we're going back in time here chronologically. We've already seen Belshazzar come and go. You remember the story with the writing on the wall. But we should know prophetic literature doesn't always write in a straight line.

[9 : 14] We shouldn't expect it to. And so here in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, we're told Daniel sees this vision. Verse two says, The four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

And out of this sea come four beasts. We're told in the second half of the chapter that these four beasts, they represent four kingdoms. And if that sounds familiar to you at all, that's good.

You have a better memory than I do. You're thinking back to Daniel chapter two. You remember from Daniel chapter two, it was Nebuchadnezzar who had a dream. And he was dreaming about this statue that was made up of these four parts.

And the four parts of that statue, you remember, what do they represent? Four kingdoms. What we see here in chapter seven is that Daniel chapter two and Daniel chapter seven, they sync up.

Daniel has sort of an expanded vision, an expanded view of these same four kingdoms from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What are they? The first, he says, is like a lion.

[10 : 19] It's not any ordinary lion, is it? This lion has eagle's wings. And even then, the wings are plucked off. The lion is lifted up. It's made to stand on two feet like a man.

A mind of a man is given to it. Matching it up with Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, beast number one is Babylon. Babylon. You remember what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, to Babylon.

God judged his pride. He plucked off his wings, so to speak, drove him away from his kingdom. But at the end, what happened? He was restored. And once again, he was given a mind like a man.

The first beast is Babylon. The second beast, verse five, he says, is like a bear. But again, it's not a normal looking bear, is it? This bear is raised up on one side.

He's got three ribs in its mouth, between its teeth. It looks like it just came from a kill. And it's told, again, go arise and devour much flesh.

[11 : 18] Again, if we're following the pattern from chapter two, lining up what we're seeing here, this is the kingdom of Medo-Persia, which came in after Babylon under Cyrus. And they took over, and they devoured the kingdom of Babylon.

And the third beast, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back, and four heads. And this leopard, he was given dominion. It's a beast that's quick, and it's destructive.

He can strike in all directions, with these four wings, and these four heads. And again, following the pattern of chapter two, this would be the kingdom of Greece, under Alexander the Great.

All of this is this chaotic, terrifying scene. I want you to just place yourself in this vision. Sometimes we read these accounts, and we just kind of keep it distant.

I want you to step into Daniel's mind here, and picture this sea, this tumultuous sea, being torn apart by the winds, and these four beasts coming up. This is a chaotic, terrifying scene.

[12 : 20] But even so, I want you to notice the language here. It's as powerful as these beasts are, they are all passive actors in this scene. Did you notice that?

It says dominion was given to the third beast. The second beast was commanded. Someone's commanding it. Go devour. The first beast, he was brought up. He had his wings plucked off.

He was brought back up. He was given a mind like a man. It's clear there's a greater power at work here, and soon we'll see exactly who that is. But first, Daniel shows us one final beast.

Look there to verse 7. This fourth and final beast, Daniel says, was terrifying, and dreadful, exceedingly strong, teeth of iron, and it just destroys everything in its path.

And it's clear to Daniel that as terrifying as all of these beasts are, this fourth beast is different. In fact, it doesn't even have an animal description like the other three, does it? It's as if Daniel's looking at this terrifying beast.

[13 : 22] He has nothing to compare it to. It has ten horns, and then another horn, and this other little horn has eyes and a mouth, and this little horn can talk. And if all of this sounds strange to you, you are normal, okay?

And you're in good company. This was strange to Daniel as well. He wants to know, what in the world am I looking at here? We'll see soon enough, but again, if we're following the pattern of chapter 2, we can identify this fourth beast with the Roman Empire.

But for now, for now, this first point here, we should recognize that this scene from the earth, this view from the ground, so to speak, it is a nightmare, isn't it?

This is a terrifying scene. This isn't the big, beautiful statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Daniel gets a different perspective. He sees the ugliness of these human kingdoms.

These beasts are hideous, ugly, just monstrous creatures. They're distorted images of God's good creation. And we need to just pause here just for a moment here and recognize this is how God has chosen to communicate to Daniel and to us the ugliness of the kingdoms of man.

[14 : 43] It's as if Daniel is seeing clearly the ugliness of sin. This is a picture of our depravity left to ourselves and our own natural sin nature.

Mankind is like beasts. Our sin is ugly. It deforms God's natural design. This is not a pretty picture.

The kingdom of man from Babylon to Rome to the present day, this present evil age and all who belong to it are beastly.

Daniel is looking at all of this and then all of a sudden in verse 9 the scene changes. He moves from the scene on the earth to scene number 2 which is the scene in heaven.

Look there to verse 9. Daniel says, As I looked, the thrones were placed and the ancient of days took his seat. This is a vision of God himself.

[15 : 41] Daniel looks up from the evil and the beastliness of the world and he sees God, the holy judge taking his seat. What does he say about him?

He says, His clothing is white as snow and the hair of his head is like pure wool. This judge on his throne is holy, holy, holy. His throne was fiery flames.

Its wheels were burning fire and a stream of fire issued and came out from before him. It says a thousand, thousand served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

These are numbers of perfection and completion and power. This is a vision of God the holy judge seated on his throne in glory.

And in comparison these beasts don't look so big and bad now do they? Unlike the scene on earth where the waters raged and the image was chaotic here in the throne room of God Revelation chapter 4 you can turn there another time after the service Revelation chapter 4 it says the sea around the throne of God in the throne room of the Lord the sea is calm like glass.

[16 : 55] like crystal. That's a good reminder for us isn't it that from our vantage point here on earth from our vantage point here from the ground everything seems to often look chaotic and things are often chaotic but we who know the Lord have been given another perspective haven't we?

We can look up and remember that no matter what happens here on the ground our God is on his throne reign and ruling in heaven and in heaven at his throne all is calm this totally changes Daniel's understanding of the first scene doesn't it?

Without this second scene from heaven there is no hope what hope is there? All hope is lost he would say I'm here in Babylon and you're telling me that more evil beastly kingdoms are coming after this here I am in exile in the first beast you're saying I have three more to go here and God says yes but Daniel I am holy I am good I am sovereign I am just I am God and these beasts will not have the last word the ancient of days takes his seat now it says the court sat in judgment and books were opened this chapter is a courtroom scene some of you like to watch these courtroom legal drama television shows it's too dramatic for me and if you ever watched one you know that at some point a crime is committed in that scene in that moment of the crime happening that criminal is terrifying they look dangerous they look evil they look big and bad but then when the moment comes and they have to go sit in a courtroom maybe with their hands cuffed and the judge comes and the judge takes his seat and the judge opens up his book and the judge prepares to give judgment they don't look so scary at that moment do they in fact that's a moment of terror for them it's an anxious moment what will the verdict be and we shouldn't move quickly past this scene our God is a God of infinite power he is perfect in holiness perfect in justice he is sovereignly reigning over all the earth our God is just he is the judge of all the earth no sin will go unaddressed every sin will be dealt with

Romans 14 12 it says each one of us will give an account of himself to God it's a sobering truth isn't it God the holy judge sees all and he will bring justice which is why what Daniel sees next really is no surprise at all is it Daniel shifts his eyes back to the earth for a moment and as that big bad terrifying horn is speaking look what happens it's almost like he's in mid sentence he's speaking and poof what happens when God is ready to render judgment he is done he's killed instantly the body destroyed burned with fire he doesn't stand a chance as for the rest of the beasts their dominion was taken away but their lives prolonged for how long until the judge says time is up this is a picture of a sovereign God reigning and ruling over his creation not a moment of time here in this chaotic world is outside of his control this is good news for us church this change of scenery changes everything doesn't it the view from the air is completely different from the view from the ground we have been given the gift of knowing the ancient of days

Christian we have been given the gift of knowing that God is on his throne sovereign reigning and ruling and yet far too often you and I we're we're guilty of forgetting this glorious perspective aren't we far too often we get so twisted up about what's going on here in the first scene and the chaos here in the kingdom of man that we forget we take our eyes off of the second scene we take our eyes off of the reign and rule of a sovereign God we forget to remember the perspective of God in heaven as he reigns and rules over all things which is why Paul has to remind us set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds there at the throne of heaven set your minds there don't set your minds here on the beast you'll go crazy set your minds in heaven our sovereign God sits on his throne in heaven and he will triumph over the chaos of this world and here in verses 13 and 14 he shows us exactly how he will do it how will

[22 : 04] God triumph over the kingdom of man look there to verses 13 and 14 Daniel says again 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 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 is one that shall not be destroyed see the plan now is getting clearer isn't it this this is how God wins this is how God conquers the kingdom of man all of these beasts they fade into the background the worst of them is destroyed and he brings forth his own kingdom totally unlike those four beastly kingdoms that came before it this kingdom he says is glorious it is universal all tribes and languages and nations and people it is eternal it will never pass away it is undefeatable it cannot be destroyed

God has this glorious kingdom and then he gives this kingdom to one Daniel says like a son of man he's not like the beast that came before him is he clearly he is he's human he's true humanity and yet there's clear echoes of divinity here as well aren't there he's coming with the clouds of heaven that's language that's reserved really only for God himself Psalm 104 verse 3 this king he lives forever he's able to receive this glorious eternal kingdom and out of all the beastliness of the kingdom of man this son of man just walks right up to this fiery throne of God as one who has a right to this kingdom and God the judge the ancient of days he says it's yours you are worthy to receive it all the peoples and nations and languages on the planet earth will serve you this is your kingdom that's the plan

God conquers the kingdom of man by the son of man friend I don't think I have to tell you there is no country here like that there is not a place on planet earth America or otherwise that fits this description glorious universal eternal undefeatable there's no country here like that there's no leader here like this our heart ought to leap from our chest when we read these verses and say I want to be a part of that kingdom kingdom I want to be a part of that glorious kingdom I want to serve that glorious king I want to be a part of this eternal kingdom I want to be a part of the kingdom of glory that will last forever and to that I say good if that's the inclination of your heart that's good that's what you were made for you are welcome the truth is the invitation to join the kingdom of God is cast far and wide if you want to come in you may come in how by turning and repenting of your beastliness and bowing the knee to the son of man right now but now let me tell you what that might cost you you need to understand exactly what that will mean for you because when you become a citizen of the kingdom of God you are now an exile in the kingdom of man and when you become a citizen of the kingdom of God guess what happens you now have entered into a war with the powers of darkness you have now entered into a war that has been won the outcome is decided it's a war that's worth fighting because

God himself is worthy but still church it is a war Daniel considers all of this and when he sees these things verse 15 it says that his spirit was anxious within him he walked up to one who stood there most likely this is an angel and he asks a really good question what in the world have I just seen what does all of this mean and so he gives a summary here of the vision in verses 19 through 28 the angel he summarizes all of it in two sentences verses 17 and 18 he says these four beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth we've seen this but the saints of the most high shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever forever and ever but Daniel needs a little bit more explanation than that doesn't he he keeps pressing he wants to know what we want to know he wants to know more about this fourth beast beast tell me more about these ten horns who now

Daniel fills in a little bit more of the picture here of what he saw he says they had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things and it made war with the saints and prevailed over them until the ancient of days came and judgment was given for the saints of the most high and the time came when they possessed the kingdom what does all of this mean this fourth beast again is Rome but I think that is clear it extends beyond Rome these ten horns that are coming up out of that ten beast that he says are ten kings that shall arise out of this beastly kingdom now listen I don't know who these ten kings are I don't know necessarily that they are exactly ten literal kings in fact I'm inclined to say again ten being a number of completion that this is representative of the fullness of the wicked kingdoms in between the two comings of Christ

[28 : 13] Christ enters into the world at the beginning of the Roman empire and there's evil and persecution and wickedness that extends from the first to the second coming of Christ but at the end out of that legacy of evil one will arise a little horn one final beastly king in verse 25 tells us what this little horn is like it says he will speak words against the most high and he will wear out the saints of the most high he will think to change times and the law in other words he will blaspheme God he will persecute the people of God and he will try and make himself be like God and it's my belief that this little horn is the antichrist Paul tells us in 2

Thessalonians chapter 2 he says the return of Christ will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself against every so called God or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God I believe this is the antichrist now I cannot think of many more topics that have caused more wild speculation than the topic of the antichrist but we don't need to speculate the fact is God's word does not identify this man of lawlessness God's word does not tell us who this little horn may be and so really we need to be okay not knowing with certainty what God has not revealed to us what it does say however is that his main weapons against the people of God is not physical threats they are his words do you notice what he continues to say over and over and over again about this little horn he is speaking great things you notice that he is speaking against the most high he is wearing out the saints

I believe by constant deception and pressure to compromise the truth he is aiming to lead these saints away from true worship how? by deceiving them with lies and this is Satan's playbook from the very beginning isn't it?

he is speaking against God to deceive the saints and to distort the word of God I love how Andrew Steinman puts it he says this he says the kind of persecution that is most dangerous for the saints is not some future worldwide political ruler who could deprive them of earthly goods limit commerce require a numerical mark on their bodies or even take their physical lives instead the most dangerous persecution is the insidious corruption of the gospel of justification through Christ alone and its replacement by a false gospel that mixes faith with works and false spirituality if that's true then church the best way to defend yourself against these attacks to defend yourself against him isn't to build a bunker or to avoid microchips or to make sure that your credit cards don't end in 666 but rather church to devote yourself to the truth remind yourself of the gospel build your life on the word of God meditate on God's word day and night grow up into

Christ so that you're not tossed to and fro by every wind of false doctrine be like a good bank teller they don't spot the fakes because they study the fakes they spot the fakes because they spend every day hour by hour handling the real thing church give yourself to the word of God let's spend more time delighting in what God has said than obsessing over what he's left unsaid the word of God doesn't tell us who this little horn is but what does it tell us verse 26 tells us the court shall sit in judgment and his dominion shall be taken away to be consumed and destroyed to the end and then the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey him that's what we ought to fix our minds on church these are reasonable questions that

[33 : 15] Daniel asks worthy questions questions that we all want to know the answer to who's the beast who's the horn worthy questions but you know what a better question might have been for Daniel and for us who is this son of man who is the son of man he's the focus of the passage is he not he's he's the center piece of history he's the one who's worthy of our attention he's the one who's worthy to receive this eternal kingdom he's the one that all nations and tribes and languages will serve for the rest of eternity who is this son of man we know the answer don't we this glorious son of man is king Jesus Jesus is the one who's worthy to stand before the throne of God to stand before the ancient of days as truly man and truly God and who's worthy to receive an eternal kingdom why because Jesus Christ has come and he has conquered the powers of sin and darkness

Jesus Christ has come and he is the lamb who was slain he has conquered the beast and he has risen to the right hand of God Jesus Christ reigns and rules from side of the cross is that this judgment upon the kingdom of man has already been given the cross of Christ has settled it the case is closed Christ reigns and rules right now and he will come again soon to finish what he started and because he reigns and rules and has conquered right now church we who belong to him the saints of the most high we get to enjoy the fruits of his victory right now in fact we reign with him right now I love the Heidelberg Catechism questions 31 and 32

I gotta read this to you they ask question 31 why is he called Christ meaning anointed the answer because he has been ordained by God the father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body and who continually pleads our cause with the father and our eternal king who governs us by his word and spirit and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us question 32 but why are you called Christian answer because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share his anointing I am anointed to confess his name to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks to strive with good conscience against sin and the devil in this life and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity

God has conquered the kingdom of man by the son of man and soon he will come again to finish what he started church how then should we prepare ourselves for that day three ways as we close one do not fear but hope do not fear but hope this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen do not fear but hope do not worry but trust do not worry but trust remember whatever the chaos of the moment happens to be whatever the chaos is happening in the kingdom of man remember that in the throne room of God all is calm the son of man has conquered and lastly do not wait but bow the knee to king

Jesus right now fix your eyes on Jesus right now prepare yourself for that day by turning from your sin and giving yourself completely to king Jesus right now amen come lord Jesus let's pray father we thank you for this good plan that you have put into place a plan for the fullness of time that you would send your son as king to conquer to reign and to rule to defeat the powers of darkness that are much too powerful for us and lord we praise you for this eternal kingdom that awaits us who believe we praise you lord that he reigns and rules now and we with him lord we ask now as we prepare to take communion and remember this sacrifice on our behalf lord would you fix our eyes on christ set our hope on christ help us to trust in christ we pray in jesus name amen