

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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February 2, 2025

Sermon Title: Daniel 7:1-28

Sermon Text: Jesus' Favorite Chapter in the Bible

Dan. 7:1 ¶ 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.

Dan. 7:2 Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

Dan. 7:3 And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.

Dan. 7:4 The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. 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.

Dan. 7:5 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.'

Dan. 7:6 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.

Dan. 7:7 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.

Dan. 7:8 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.

Dan. 7:9 ¶ “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.

Dan. 7:10 A stream of fire issued
and came out from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.

Dan. 7:11 ¶ “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

Dan. 7:12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

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.

Dan. 7:14 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.

Dan. 7:15 ¶ “As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me.

Dan. 7:16 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.

Dan. 7:17 ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

Dan. 7:18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

Dan. 7:19 ¶ “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, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet,

Dan. 7:20 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.

Dan. 7:21 As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them,

Dan. 7:22 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.

Dan. 7:23 ¶ “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 to pieces.

Dan. 7:24 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.

Dan. 7:25 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.

Dan. 7:26 But the court shall sit in judgment,
and his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

Dan. 7:27 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.'

Dan. 7:28 ¶ "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."

Main Point: Jesus Christ has absolute dominion, power, and glory.

Outline:

1. The Four Beasts (7:1-8)
2. The Authority of the Son of Man (7:9-14)
3. The Triumph over the Beasts (7:15-28)

Introduction

When I was in seminary, my Hebrew professor told me about when he was a member of a Baptist church back when he was a new Christian, and he told me that the pastor at this church was preaching through the book of Daniel, and just stopped after he preached Daniel chapter 6, which we finished of course last week.

Why did he do this? Well, because the story of chapters 1-6 are fairly straightforward, and things are less so after that. For some, chapters 7 onward are

just weird and intimidating. Instead of the *narrative* of Daniel's time in Babylon, we are now being treated to the *visions* of Daniel.

There is also a genre change. Before we were reading a fairly straightforward prose narrative, but now the genre is apocalyptic.

What does "apocalyptic" mean? The Greek meaning of the word is "to uncover," or perhaps "to reveal." One commentator gives a good definition of apocalyptic literature. Here it is:

Apocalypse is a genre of...literature, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal...and spatial ...[An apocalypse is] intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority. (John J. Collins; *Apocalypse*, 1979, pg. 9)

That is what happens here, because Daniel is being treated to these transcendent visions that are meant to reveal important events, but in a way that helps him to live in his moment with understanding that God is up to something.

So there's a genre shift here that's challenging. There's imagery that's challenging. There is also the reality that the imagery here tells us things about history, which many in our own day are ignorant of.

Sarah Irving-Stonebraker, in her recent book *Priests of History*, argues that we now live in an ahistorical age. What does she mean by that phrase? Well she says that living in an ahistoric age means that we no longer think of ourselves as part of historical communities. It means we are increasingly ignorant of history, and do not believe that history has a narrative, or a purpose, or value. It also means that if history is useful, it's largely useful to settle political or ethical arguments in the present-day.

We've lost our connection to history, as a people. More than ever, we are a people who embody this sort of ignorance and disconnection with the past, and so for us, to read Daniel is to engage with history when we are probably not well-equipped

to do so. This is another reason that rather than learning and becoming less ignorant, people might steer clear of the latter parts of Daniel. Who wants to learn, after all, who the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, or the Romans really were, when we're more occupied with the mistakes of the previous Presidential administration that we can rattle off to someone to win an argument against?

But here's the truth: we *might* be inclined to move quickly past these chapters, but these also seem to have been among Jesus' favorite chapters in the Bible. 78 times Jesus uses the phrase "son of man" (which he gets from today's passage) when referring to himself! This is by *far* his favorite self-designation, and it is interesting that the early church and the rest of church history tend *not* to use it.

After all, when was the last time you ever called Jesus "son of man" in a conversation or in your prayers, even? We call him son of God, we call him Messiah, but it's rare for *us* to call him "son of man."

Jesus loved this chapter of the Bible, even if we sometimes want to run from it.

My goal for us today is to understand the gist of this vision and then rejoice in this passage, so that *when* we see Jesus call himself "son of man" we get what he's saying about himself.

So let's look at this passage, see what it's saying, and seek to understand whom Jesus is telling us that he is by calling himself the Son of Man. Here are the three points I'd like us to look at first: the four beasts (verses 1-8); second, the authority of the son of man (verses 9-14); third, the triumph over the beasts (verses 15-28).

1. The Four Beasts (7:1-8)

First, we have the four beasts in verses 1-8.

In one sense this passage seems to give us new light on Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter 2. If you remember, that was when he had the troubling dream that dealt with the four kingdoms, and the stone not made by human hands who crushed all the other kingdoms.

Well this vision isn't given to Nebuchadnezzar like it was in chapter 2. This is now *Daniel's* vision. But it's almost as though the four kingdoms that the king saw in his dream still needed more explanation. So here Daniel is, almost 50 years later... Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and now his son is king, and what does Daniel see in the vision?

Well the four kingdoms are back, but this time not part of a statue, but as four beasts coming up out of this churning, roaring sea. I'm going to identify the nations that I believe each beast represents, but I also want you to know, please don't lose too much sleep over making sure we get these right; and I'll explain why by the end.

I am under an assumption that this vision of these four kingdoms lines up with the vision of the four kingdoms back in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. If that is correct, then we know that the head of gold, which was Babylon in chapter 2, is likely also the first beast here in verse 4.

That would make the beast like a lion to be Babylon. Lions were an important image in the way that Babylon portrayed itself. Notice that this lion has eagle's wings. In Jeremiah Babylon is compared to a lion and an eagle.

This first beast has its wings plucked off. This is Nebuchadnezzar when he spent years in an animal-like state being humbled by God. Notice also in verse 4 that after its wings were plucked off it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man. So you can see that rather than some prediction of the future, we're seeing a narrative of God's humbling of Nebuchadnezzar since his mind did eventually return to him by God's grace.

The second beast here that is like a bear is probably the kingdom of the Medes and Persians that ruled over Babylon and took over in 539 BC. This is a meat-eating kingdom that is predatory and violent, hence the ribs in its mouth.

The third beast here is leopard-like and seems to represent Alexander the Great, who conquered the Medo-Persian empire in 334. The wings of this leopard show that it is fast moving, which he was. Alexander tore through the Persian empire like a winged leopard. He moved so fast that many have observed he was a better

conqueror than he was a ruler. Alexander died young, and when that happened, his kingdom entered into a prolonged and complicated civil war.

But in the end,

Ptolemy I took over Egypt,

Seleucus I took over the eastern empire, including Babylon,

Cassander gained control of Greece and Macedonia, and

Lysimachus came to rule over Asia minor.

Though there are other possibilities, I'm the most convinced by this interpretation of the four heads, and it lines up very well with Alexander as the third beast here.

The fourth beast in verses 7-8 is the most dreadful, and the one that has the most prominence in the vision. Because we know from history that Rome succeeded Greece in its rule over Jerusalem and Judea, this beast is likely Rome. But there is one caveat we need to make: the judgment of this beast still has a future element to it, from what we can see in verse 13. But we know that Rome has ceased to exist. So what gives?

Well notice that the fourth beast, according to Daniel, is "different." It doesn't have an animal that it is like. It is its own thing. It is unique. In light of these things, Rome is accurate, but Rome is really just a picture of all these other successive worldly kingdoms that are part of the world order and cycle of nations. Rome collapses, slowly giving way to a broken up empire, but eventually other powers rise up after them. It's a cycle that has never really yet been broken, and so in some ways we need to see the fourth beast as a picture of *Rome and beyond*.

I won't dwell much on the horns here. The best commentators think these horns represent various kings that rule, sort of like the toes of the statue in the vision of Daniel chapter 2. If that's accurate then the little horn here in this vision is one king who subdues three of the ten previous kings in verse 24. There are plenty of commentators who are willing to tell you who these ten horns are, but I won't take us that deep down the rabbit hole today.

So what happens here in the first 8 verses of Daniel's vision is that the problem is set before us: what, if anything, will God do about these empires and civilizations and opponents and kings – each seemingly worse than the last? Well, we continue with the vision.

2. The Authority of the Son of Man (7:9-14)

Second, we witness the authority of the Son of Man in verses 9-14.

These four beasts are presented in all their intimidating glory and power. But will anything be done with them? That's sort of the question that we're meant to be asking as we see the vision. And the answer is Yes! But how does that happen?

First, the Ancient of Days takes his throne. Ancient of Days is another name for God. But what Daniel is seeing here is the Lord in his judicial capacity, ready to evaluate these beasts – nations, kings, worldly systems – and to give to each as they deserve. Notice how the picture is of people standing before him, and in verse 10 it says, "the books were opened." In other words, It's time for judgment.

If you were Daniel, or one of Daniel's readers, one of your immediate reactions here, I think, would be relief. These beasts can't just do what they want. They will be accountable. They will give an answer to the one on the throne.

That should be the first reaction: relief. God is still here. They will answer to him.

And if you look at the world today and feel frustration or despair or even anger at the sort of things that are spoken against God and his people, then here is a reminder I want you to carry with you: God is on his throne. God is on his throne. The books are open. He sees.

I want you to notice the throne here. It is a glorious throne. Notice that the Ancient of Days sits on a fiery throne with wheels. Meaning that God's throne is not only greater and more glorious and intimidating than these earthly kings and their thrones, but also that he is active. These wheels tell us that God is not static and watching from afar, but that he is a ruling and active God. He's not stationary, inert, unmoving. Instead, His throne gives us a picture of God's sovereignty: he commands and it happens. He rules and no one can stay his hand.

We also see here that not only is he on his judgment throne, but God also has the *ability* to execute his judgments. Do you ever see something so blatantly wrong that you can't imagine that this person got away with it?

One time I was going north on Murray, and as Murray crosses Cornell, there was a car also going north. Instead of stopping at the intersection because there was a red light, this car didn't even slow down, moved into the turn lane, went around the car in front of him, and then swerved back into the lane and kept going north. He just ran the red without even touching its brakes. It was insane. It's moments like that where you wish there was a policeman there. But instead we just sort of stand by helpless.

God is not like you and I sitting in traffic wondering whether anyone can do anything about it. He's not helpless.

Notice the stream of fire coming out from him. God is not just a God of empty threats. He possesses the means to punish. When he is ready, he will do what he says.

The scene moves back to earth, where we see that the loudmouth horn keeps speaking and spouting off with its blasphemies, but in verse 11 we see that the fourth beast is eventually judged with burning fire, so what we're seeing here is the threat of judgment before God's throne, along with the fact that God will actually do it.

Then in verse 13 we're *back* to the heavenly throne room, and here we are introduced to this one that Daniel says is "like a son of man" who came "with the clouds of heaven" and is presented before the Ancient of Days.

We should just have no doubt, Jesus says that this is him. But what we actually see in verse 14 is that he is "given dominion and glory and a kingdom." So what we've got here is an image of heavenly exaltation. This mysterious son of man figure shares the authority of God and is served by the nations just as God is.

Now, here's one more very important truth: it's the nature of his kingdom. First, his kingdom isn't just regional like the other kingdoms. Instead, verse 14 says that "all peoples, nations, and languages" will serve him. His kingdom isn't

geographically constrained. It transcends the kingdoms of this world. It crosses boundaries and is bigger than human boundaries.

We already saw that the other kingdoms fail, they fall, they're thrown down. But the Son of Man's kingdom is "everlasting." There's a contrast happening here. We're told that unlike the other kingdoms, the Son of Man's kingdom shall "not pass away," and it "shall not be destroyed." So his kingdom isn't vulnerable. The Son of Man is not just the fifth in a long line of beasts.

Not only that, but though he appears to be a man, notice that he has divine characteristics: his abode is portrayed as being in heaven. But also he is worshiped and served by every people, just like the Most High is worshiped by all rulers in verse 24. So even though the son of man can be distinguished from the Most High, he is also identified with him. Reading this in light of the new testament makes clearer to us that this is the second person of the Trinity.

The Son of man has other divine traits. For example, his kingdom, which is eternal.

And then there is of course what I think is the most important thing in helping us read this, which is simply that Jesus himself called himself this son of man repeatedly. When Jesus was questioned, he claimed, "You will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).

3. The Triumph over the Beasts (7:15-28)

Third, we see really the interpretation of what happens in the first two points, which is in verses 15-28, and that is the triumph over the beasts.

Talking about the fourth beast that is different from the others, verse 25 tells us that things go from bad to worse: "he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and they shall think to change the times and the law." These are cultural and political forms of opposition against God's people. We've already seen glimpses of that in Daniel.

But here's what happens: just when we might be tempted to think, "Well this is it. I guess the world swallows up God's people," Daniel instead takes us back to the

Ancient of Days and the Son of Man in their regal judicial capacity. Remember: he's opened the books. The actions of the beast aren't forgotten. They don't disappear in the sands of time. What happens?

Verse 26 says, the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

If you think about a lot of what's in this book, there's a lot to leave you feeling shaken. In fact, that's how Daniel feels after he sees it himself. But that point of this vision wasn't to freak us out.

Ian Duguid makes this point: "the purpose of the passage is not to give us nightmares but to *calm* our nightmares. The focus of Daniel 7 is rather on the coming day of divine judgment, when these monsters will finally receive justice and God will win the final victory" (112). The point here isn't to terrify you, it's to comfort you, and to shake awake who want to trust in earthly kingdoms.

There's a nebulous phrase: "trusting in earthly kingdoms." What might it actually look like to do that sort of thing? It might not mean what you think. You might think that here's the part where I go on and on about making sure we don't make an idol of politics. I'd like to think bigger than that for a moment.

For Daniel, the temptation to trust in earthly kingdoms might start out looking like believing the press of the Babylonians. Maybe Belshazzar really is the king of kings and lord of lords. Maybe his kingdom really is just this eternally standing edifice that can never be overcome. It's tempting to believe. *That's* trusting in earthly kingdoms: thinking that deep down maybe they are all there is or will be.

And in our day, trusting in earthly kingdoms might look like seeing those things about our culture that are very opposite to God's will and believing that this is just how things will always be. It might mean seeing a bad political situation and turning to despair. We were all treated to tik toks of people for some reason recording themselves screaming and crying into their phone cameras after the election results back in November. I would say that's definitely a picture of trusting in earthly kingdoms, too.

If I could put it another way, to trust in earthly kingdoms looks like hopelessness.

We all cope with hopelessness in different ways. But if you become hopeless then you'll settle for what you can see in the world around you and you'll think like they think, live like they live, and love what they love. That's capitulation.

But hopelessness might not look like capitulation. Maybe we're too stubborn for that. But in our case the temptation might simply turn into escapism. We'll be tempted to go up on a hill and stare at the city waiting for fire to come down on it like Jonah. Or we'll learn to hate the city where God has sent us to. That's another form of hopelessness. All these things are just different forms of faithlessness and hopelessness.

The point of this vision is to *build* hope.

Think of how fortifying this vision must have been. It may be that this vision came to Daniel at just the right time when he may have been tempted to indulge in hopelessness. Or at the very least Daniel wrote these things down, as we see in the first verse, because he knew that God's people would be tempted to hopelessness.

This is what apocalyptic literature is doing. It's happening here in Daniel. It's happening in Revelation, as well: it's getting us to look past our frustrations with the here and now to see not what we can see is happening, but what God is up to. It's letting us see the transcendent realities that are true whether we feel them or see them right now or not.

How can we believe it when the world just looks like it's sinking?

There is always a temptation to despair and believe that God's kingdom is in some kind of permanent decline. Back in the 1800s, Matthew Arnold wrote a well-known poem called *Dover Beach*, in which he expresses a sad fear that the tide of faith has gone out forever. Listen to this. Are you tempted to feel the same way as Matthew Arnold here:

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

*Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

And in the poem Arnold expresses this deep sadness that perhaps the era of faith is gone, and now he fears that *“the world which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams...hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.”*

It's tempting follow him in that hopelessness right? It's tempting to think, “well the tide of Christ has gone out forever.” But remember: the tide does go out, only to return eventually again.

My argument is not that it necessarily has to be that way because this is just the way the world is. I think there's a better reason for hope than that. Daniel's argument is that because we live in God's world, we have every reason for hope. That's why he sees God on the throne, and the books opened.

Why? Well, because we've seen things from God's perspective here today, haven't we? Unlike the world's kingdoms, “his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” He makes that happen, not us.

We have every reason for hope. Because the Son of Man has come. Jesus Christ has come. He died for our sins, was raised for our justification if we trust in him, and now he has been seated at the father's right hand. There you will find all the hope that anyone could ever need.

Let's pray.