

“DANIEL’S VISION INTERPRETED.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 7:15-28

Introduction.

You may have noticed our text begins and ends with Daniel acknowledging his fear and trepidation, he is alarmed.

Visions can be frightening, especially when they are filled with strange creatures with great power, and as great and courageous as Daniel is, he is deeply disturbed by what he has seen. His spirit is stirred up and anxious.

Even after the explanation he is still anxious. These are great things we are being shown, things that impact all of human history and will touch our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, things that carry us beyond the mundane and trivial aspects of our lives to the unseen realms of the principalities and powers. If this doesn't get our attention, we aren't paying attention.

Daniel's request for *clarity*, vss. 16-18.

While still in the vision Daniel asks one of the visionary bystanders what this all means. We are not left in the dark about this vision, it is made clear.

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

That is about as short and concise a summary as you could ask for. The vision is an overview of human history and how it ends.

Out of the turbulent seas of human history there will arise kings and kingdoms that are likened to beasts and monsters. One rises and then falls and another rises. Monsters beget more monsters. Human selfishness and pride and hatred give rise to despots and tyrants and dictators. History has never been without them.

One died this past week, Fidel Castro. He is being praised and honored by those who have either refused to learn from history or are intentionally ignoring his well-documented and horrible record of human rights abuses. He was a ruthless beast. His kind roam the earth today and will as long as sin and Satan rule.

Those who think the sea is without storms or monsters must read Daniel 7 to understand the human heart and human destiny. Men are not basically good, and the world is not progressively getting better and better.

But notice the angel doesn't say much about the four beasts, that is not the central message of this vision. The focus of this whole vision is on the victory at the end that will last forever.

The three forevers emphasize eternity. We will possess the coming kingdom to the forever of forevers. Sort of like saying to three eternities.

The severity of the things to come, vss. 19-25.

Daniel isn't satisfied with the large overview and presses for more detail about the scariest part of the vision, the fourth beast with ten horns and then another horn with eyes and a mouth.

Daniel's interpreter gives even greater detail about the fourth beast's world-wide dominion, devouring the whole earth and destroying it. And worse yet, the little horn will make war on the saints and prevail over them. The severity of this picture is sobering to say the least.

This kingdom of the fourth beast is a kingdom of immense power and influence and authority. It conquers the whole world, it has dominion over everything, it destroys everything that stands in its way.

This final kingdom is really the only true earthly universal kingdom. This is the kingdom opposed to God's kingdom. This is Satan's influence and rule on earth manifested through the evil kingdoms of men.

Remember there have always been times of persecution. There has been no time in history when there has been not been attack on the church stirred up by Satan.

But in the final stages of history there will be great persecution, worse opposition. Evil will be seen as even prevailing for a time. In fact, the saints will be *given* into their hands for a time.

Time, times and half a time. You may recall this image from Revelation (12:14).

There is a season, and then a doubling of the season, and then just when you would expect a quadrupling of the seasons, it is cut short, cut in half. The power of the horn is limited and curtailed at the will of God.

The three and a half times is symbolic of the Gospel age, the church age, the time from Christ's first coming to the time of Christ's second coming.

This is a reference to the present age, which is a time of testing and judging, but for the sake of the elect it will be cut short. It is brought to a sudden end at the return of Christ, when all who belong to Him will receive with Him His kingdom.

Who is the little horn?

Of course some try to tie this to a specific time in human history, like the Roman Empire, or Russia or China. Others thought it was the Roman Catholic Church. Countless dictators and evil empires in history and in the present have been named.

The little horn has three characteristics that are shared with other references in Scripture to the antichrist, the man of lawlessness spoken of in II Thessalonians 2.

First, it speaks pompous, arrogant, blasphemous words against the Most High.

Second, it persecutes the saints of the Most High.

Third, it intends to change the times and the law.

Blasphemy, persecution, self-deification. This is a picture of godless opposition and rebellion.

By self-deification he puts himself in the place of God and tries to do what only God does, change the times and the law.

He will change what was once condemned as wrong and praise it as right.

He will change what was once considered shameful and make it honorable.

It will be a long war, a war of attrition, a war of wearing down the opposition, slowing breaking the will of even the strongest.

So while it speaks of something future, in another sense, the world has always been and is now full of little horns, pockets of abusive power and tyranny, people using violence and authority against God's people, against Christians and the church.

Paul warns about this in Romans 1, people claiming to be wise, becoming futile in their thinking and turning the things of God upside down and worshipping what is created rather than the creator, and approving of that God calls evil and what ought not to be done.

The little horn is just the final consummation of evil in the final days.

The *victory* that will follow, vss. 26-28.

This is a difference between Biblical apocalyptic writing and ancient mythology which share some similar images. In mythology there is constant tension and chaos and conflict. In mythology the conflict never ends, there is no resolution. The struggle goes on forever.

In the Biblical story evil and chaos do not prevail, holiness and order prevail because God is ultimate and final.

We are in the time when the final victory is still in the future. Right now it doesn't look good, but our confidence isn't in the present circumstances, but in the faithful promises.

Right now the Messianic kingdom is fulfilled. It was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. But it awaits a consummation in Christ's second coming. The kingdom of God has come, but it is as a seed. The harvest is future. It is already and not yet.

First in humility and suffering, then in power and glory. First the cross and then the crown.

So we must wait patiently until the Ancient of Days comes and the kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High. The kingdom will be ruled by the king and His subjects, by the Savior and the saints. The King doesn't reign without His servants. Those who belong to the Son of Man will share His victory.

This has been the consistent testimony of Scripture from the beginning.

I Corinthians 6:2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

II Timothy 2:11-12 If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;

Is it hard to be faithful today? Was it hard for Daniel to be faithful in his day? And what will it be like for the generations to come? Endure hardship now for the sake of the one to come.

Implications and applications.

In the light of all of this there are *four things* we must remember.

First, since Genesis 3 all humanity has lived in a world thrown into a great, cosmic conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. There is no utopia, there is no paradise on earth. There is only battle. We are in a war.

Satan is real and his power is great. Daniel trembled and so should we. If we don't tremble we don't get it. On our own we are no match for Satan and the temptations to evil that surround us.

We live in a world with AIDS, child poverty, sex trafficking, slavery, abuse, hunger, cancer and death. Yes, the beasts are real.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Second, the Christian life is a life of suffering. While the gates of hell will not prevail over the church, over the saints of the Most High, there will be great suffering of all kinds. In this life we will have afflictions. Our master suffered and we are not above our master.

We who live in a place of relative peace, must remember to pray for those who are in the full grip of evil's opposition.

In our corner of the world things are pretty good, we enjoy many pleasures and we have relatively few unpleasantries. Our problems are first world problems, but we must not forget those who would give anything to trade their third world problems. For the majority of Christians this world is harsh and painful.

If we really understand this vision then we will be more vigilant over our own lives and more prayer for others in the battle.

Third, when we read the headlines and watch the images on the news we must learn to **look through them to the hand of God** and the purposes of God and the power of God. Let's not take anything at face value, but with a spiritual and eternal perspective.

Let's do what Daniel did and look beyond the vision to the meaning behind the vision.

The angel's message to Daniel is, "Yes, Daniel, the little horn is fearful and frightful, and yes, the little horn will assault the saints and there will be times of great evil and opposition and even times when all will seem lost. But you are missing the point, Daniel. The point is that times of opposition and oppression is very limited and controlled by God. Look beyond the little horn to the throne room of God and His courtroom. See the sovereignty and power and authority of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man."

The monsters and beasts are real, but they are as impotent to harm us as the lions in the lion's den. We do not fear those who can only kill our bodies (Mark 10:28). Our souls rest in God's care.

The only way we can live victoriously in this present evil age is with our eyes fixed on the joy set before us in heaven and the one who is on the throne there. We must keep our wits and our footing. Knowing this should guard us against fear and anxiety.

As one commentator put it, "The purpose of the passage is not to give us nightmares but to calm our nightmares" (Iain Duguid, *Daniel*, p. 112.).

Fourth, our hope in this life does not rest in rulers, governments, political parties, the stock market, or even the Constitution. It is in Christ and Christ alone.

Christ has faced all our beasts for us, He endured their wrath and vicious assault.

Jesus has done everything necessary to secure the victory. All that remains is for Him to triumphantly come again and lay claim to all that is His.

There awaits us a forever glory, a forever inheritance, a forever future and hope, a forever kingdom and home.