

## A history of the world. Perverted Power and a Secure Kingdom. Daniel 7

We all have dreams, and at times our dreams can be pretty weird and disturbing.

And as we have seen already in Daniel sometimes God can communicate in dreams.

Daniel, having been the interpreter of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in chapters 2 and 4, dreams that taught that the Lord would one day establish an eternal kingdom for his people that will never be destroyed [2:44] and that the LORD, the Most High, is ruler over human kingdoms and give them to anyone He wants [4:17, 32], now at 7:1 begins to recount his own dream.

This is the first of four visions that make up the second part of his book, a series of visions that start sometime before the action of Daniel 5 and continues until the third year of Cyrus.

These visions address the future history of his people and the world from Daniel's present to the end of time when, as he records in chapter 12, those who sleep in the dust will awake either to eternal life or disgrace [12:2-3].

And that is why they are relevant to us.

Daniel speaks of a future that will embrace us in the Son of Man, introduced here in chapter 7. And he will give us a way on understanding our own times, and good encouragement to persevere in faithfulness to God through them to come to the end he speaks of.

Well, I said dreams could be weird, and Daniel's starts weird, but not so weird to the first hearers as it is to us.

*Daniel 7: In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream with visions in his mind as he was lying in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and here is the summary of his account.*

<sup>2</sup>*Daniel said, "In my vision at night I was watching, and suddenly the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. <sup>3</sup>Four huge beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.*

It is dark. The sea is very choppy, stirred up winds from each point of the compass.

This is an anticipation of evil, for the sea was a symbol of chaos and destructive evil that always threatened creation, only restrained by the boundaries God had set for it.

And out of the sea come four mighty beasts –

*Daniel 7:<sup>4</sup> "The first was like a lion but had eagle's wings. I continued watching until its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground, set on its feet like a man, and given a human mind.*

<sup>5</sup>*"Suddenly, another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, with three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up! Gorge yourself on flesh.'*

<sup>6</sup>*"After this, while I was watching, suddenly another beast appeared. It was like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. It had four heads, and it was given dominion.*

<sup>7</sup>*"After this, while I was watching in the night visions, suddenly a fourth beast appeared, frightening and dreadful, and incredibly strong, with large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and it trampled with its feet whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts before it, and it had ten horns.*

They are all pretty gruesome, the first and third being hybrid creatures, the second seen as devouring flesh, and the last the most terrifying in its destructive power.

We will come back to these beasts when Daniel is given the interpretation of his dream, but the focus is on the fourth and its ruthless destructiveness. Its description is expanded

<sup>8</sup> *“While I was considering the horns, suddenly another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. And suddenly in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly.*

To draw our attention to the little horn and its arrogant speech. Horns were symbols of power. Being told this little horn has human eyes is already alerting us to the fact it stands for a human king.

But as we are processing what is a vision of terror Daniel’s and our attention shifts. We leave the shore of the turbulent sea to another location. It is not specified but it seems to embrace heaven as well as earth.

*Daniel 7: “As I kept watching,*

*thrones were set in place,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.  
His clothing was white like snow,  
and the hair of his head like whitest wool.  
His throne was flaming fire;  
its wheels were blazing fire.  
<sup>10</sup> A river of fire was flowing,  
coming out from his presence.  
Thousands upon thousands served him;  
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.  
The court was convened,  
and the books were opened.*

Daniel is using pictures to describe the rule of God.

God is seen to reign – thrones are set in place.

And in pictures He is portrayed as righteous – His clothing is white as snow

As wise – with the white hair of an elder

And Mighty – fire issuing from His presence

And He is surrounded by innumerable attendants, there to do His will

And He has come to exercise His rule in judgment, judgment based on what people had done, what was recorded in the books, the records of their dealings

And then we are again focused on that little horn and its proud words – and their outcome.

*Daniel 7: <sup>11</sup> “I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire.*

<sup>12</sup> *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time.*

The court hasn’t sat in vain. Sentence is carried out on the arrogant, though the other beasts continue for a while.

And then another character is introduced.

*Daniel 7: <sup>13</sup> I continued watching in the night visions,*

*and suddenly one like a son of man  
was coming with the clouds of heaven.  
He approached the Ancient of Days  
and was escorted before him.*

*<sup>14</sup> He was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
so that those of every people,  
nation, and language  
should serve him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that will not pass away,  
and his kingdom is one  
that will not be destroyed.*

One 'like a son of man' who comes on the clouds of heaven.

In the Old Testament it is God who rides on the clouds, not humans.

*Psalms 68:4 Sing to God! Sing praises to his name.  
Exalt him who rides on the clouds—  
his name is the LORD—and celebrate before him.*

*Psalms 104: <sup>3</sup> laying the beams of his palace  
on the waters above,  
making the clouds his chariot,  
walking on the wings of the wind,  
<sup>4</sup> and making the winds his messengers,  
flames of fire his servants.*

This is a divine figure, but he is described as 'son of man'

Sometimes the phrase 'son of man' just means a man, as it does in 8:17 or in the prophet Ezekiel. Often there are overtones of frailty, of being of the dust like Adam.

But here it is different. Human kings, as we are told in v. 17, have been pictured as beasts, their reign less than fully human. The divine king is pictured as human, one whose reign will embody humanity as it is meant to be, in whom human rule is restored from its bestial corruption.

And look at the scope of his reign

*<sup>14</sup> He was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
so that those of every people,  
nation, and language  
should serve him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that will not pass away,*

*and his kingdom is one  
that will not be destroyed.*

All people serve him. None are excluded, none will live independent of his sovereign rule.

And unlike the reign of the other kings pictured in the beasts, His is an eternal kingdom.

In this heavenly figure what should have been the reign of Adam over the world at creation will find fulfilment.

And in the description of his eternal reign we also have a picture of the reign promised to David's son

*Isaiah 9:<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

This divine figure who will embody the rule of humanity over creation intended from the beginning is also a royal figure, and as king with eternal dominion it is implied judgment is entrusted to him.

And there the first part of the vision ends, and Daniel is left disturbed – and curious.

He wants to know what it means and so seeks out an interpreter who obliges with a very brief summation of the vision.

*Daniel 7:<sup>15</sup> "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was deeply distressed within me, and the visions in my mind terrified me. <sup>16</sup> I approached one of those who were standing by and asked him to clarify all this. So he let me know the interpretation of these things: <sup>17</sup> 'These huge beasts, four in number, are four kings who will rise from the earth. <sup>18</sup> But the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes, forever and ever.'*

The four beasts are four kings, later identified with kingdoms v. 23, who arise now from the earth – that is they are human, mortal.

And for the first audience, familiar with the symbolism and imagery, many of the features they had pictured for them would fall into place.

All the beasts are images of power – the lion and the eagle of royal power and might, the bear of ferocious strength, the leopard, especially given wings, of speed, and with its four heads seeking world wide empire, considering the four points of the compass.

And they would probably locate the first king, considering what is recounted in chapter 4, as the king Nebuchadnezzar, the king to whom a human mind had been given.

And they would observe that these kings, while mighty, are still subject to God – the first beast is lifted up by another, the second is commanded to get up and gorge, the third is given dominion.

The rule of these human kings is God's gift, and under His rule. And these first three, though falling short of full humanity, still terrifying hybrids, are not necessarily anti-god I explaining why even after their dominion has been superseded in v. 12 they are given and extension of life.

But before attention is again given to the fourth beast we are told

*<sup>18</sup> But the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes, forever and ever.'*

The reigns of these kings are temporary. The end is clear, the goal of this summary of history plain.

The holy ones of the most high, called in v. 27 the people of the most High, God's people, will receive an eternal kingdom.

And a question is raised – what is the relationship of one like a son of man and the kingdom he receives to the people of the most high and the kingdom they will possess?

Daniel doesn't pursue that question. It is about the fourth beast that he wants clarity.

*Daniel 7:<sup>19</sup> "Then I wanted to be clear about the fourth beast, the one different from all the others, extremely terrifying, with iron teeth and bronze claws, devouring, crushing, and trampling with its feet whatever was left. <sup>20</sup> I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three fell—the horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke arrogantly, and that looked bigger than the others. <sup>21</sup> As I was watching, this horn waged war against the holy ones and was prevailing over them <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days arrived and a judgment was given in favor of the holy ones of the Most High, for the time had come, and the holy ones took possession of the kingdom.*

Even as he is formulating what he wants to know he is given a further vision of the little horn that spoke arrogantly v. 21, a reminder, considering he had seen that horn destroyed in v. 12 that we are being given a series of images, not a timeline.

He sees that its arrogance focuses on opposing God's people, and he is seen to be successful in that – until God acts. The people of God receive deliverance from God as HE executes His judgments, and they enter into their inheritance.

*Daniel 7:<sup>23</sup> "This is what he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, different from all the other kingdoms. It will devour the whole earth, trample it down, and crush it. <sup>24</sup> The ten horns are ten kings who will rise from this kingdom. Another king, different from the previous ones, will rise after them and subdue three kings. <sup>25</sup> He will speak words against the Most High and oppress the holy ones of the Most High. He will intend to change religious festivals and laws, and the holy ones will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time.*

His interpreter confirms, v. 23, that this fourth kingdom is different in its reach and destructive ruthlessness. And from conflict within it will come an arrogant king who sets himself against God. His reign will have four features

His boasting is against God, defying and denying him, saying 'there's no accountability to anyone but myself, for there is no god' Ps. 10:3, "God has forgotten, he dies his face and will never see' Ps. 10:11, He will not demand an account Ps. 10:13

He oppresses, wears out, God's people

He seeks to change the calendar, to suppress the remembrance of God and His mighty works enshrined in the calendar

He will seek to change morality, change the law

And he will have the appearance of success in besting God's people for a time, times and half a time

This is a reminder that his oppression will not continue forever, that when he appears to be established, invincible – his reign will suddenly end. You expect 1, 2, 3 – but what you get is 1, 2, - and then a half. He does not continue

*<sup>26</sup> But the court will convene, and his dominion will be taken away, to be completely destroyed forever. <sup>27</sup> The kingdom, dominion, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the people, the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will serve and obey him.'*

For despite his boasts he cannot overturn or resist the judgment of God v. 26, and in his judgment the reign of God will be given to His people.

Trouble for God's people from those who oppose God will be there in history. They live in weakness, crying out to God 'How long O lord', or for God to rise up. Lift up your hand . Do not forget the oppressed. Why has the wicked person despised God." Ps. 10:12-13

But the end is certain, for God reigns. Even if unseen, He is sitting in judgment, and will execute His judgments.

*<sup>28</sup> "This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts terrified me greatly, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."*

Daniel kept the matter to himself, but later wrote it down for succeeding generations of God's people.

How would they hear it? How are we to hear it?

It depends where they were or are in the flow of history.

Those with whom he first shared it, exiles in Babylon, looking forward to the return God had promised and Daniel prays for in chapter 9

Would probably recognise Nebuchadnezzar's reign in the first beast

And learnt that the end would not come with the return to Jerusalem

There would be other empires, a succession of them, all less than perfect

But despite future suffering they would be assured history was moving to a goal - the kingdom promised to God's people, and wondered who the mysterious Son of Man might be

And even if God appeared invisible, unacknowledged by those rulers, or even opposed by them, He was in charge, raising up one and bringing an end to another

And those who oppressed God's people would be judged

The oppressors might appear powerful, secure, unable to be resisted successfully – but their end would come

They would be encouraged to persevere in faithfulness, looking to the LORD for deliverance.

God's faithful people in the second century BC would be able to see a more detailed fulfilment, especially as they reflected on Daniel's vision in chapter 8 in light of the oppression of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes the fourth.

They might have seen the second beast as the Medes, the third as the Persians, the fourth as the Greeks – and in Antiochus the little horn that blasphemed against God and cruelly oppressed God's people – and then was gone

But still they might have looked forward to the mysterious Son of Man

And us?

We read Daniel 7 knowing the Son of Man has come, and He has received His kingdom, and yet is still to come in glory – and we know that because the Lord Jesus taught that.

Jesus deliberately used the title Son of Man for Himself, teaching us by its use to see the wonder and meaning of His person and work.

Apart from the crowds question in John 12:34 and Stephen's testimony in Acts 7:56, the phrase 'Son of Man' is found exclusively on the lips of Jesus, used to refer to Himself.

We know He used it conscious of its use in Daniel. Asked by the high priest at his trial if he were the Christ, the son of the blessed Jesus said

Mark 14:<sup>62</sup> "I am," said Jesus, "and you will see **the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.**"

He identified Himself as that Son of Man who will receive an eternal dominion.

He knew He had the authority of the Son of Man to judge and forgive.

When he was challenged about forgiving the sins of the crippled man lowered through the ceiling He said to his questioners

*Mark 2:<sup>7</sup> "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

*<sup>8</sup> Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?<sup>9</sup> Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat, and walk?'<sup>10</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralytic—<sup>11</sup> "I tell you: get up, take your mat, and go home."*

Jesus knew He was that Son of Man to whom eternal and universal rule was entrusted, who would exercise the judgment of the ancient of days [John 5:26-27], both now and at the last day [Matthew 13:41-43 vs. 43 a recollection of Daniel 12:3] when He would be revealed in glory [Matthew 24:44, 25:31]

But Jesus did not just speak of Himself as the Son of Man when speaking of His glory and authority. Wonderfully He spoke of Himself as the Son of Man when He spoke of His coming suffering and death. [Mk. 8:31, 9:12, 31, 10:37]

Just one reference that captures Jesus' deliberate humbling of Himself. When His disciples were squabbling about who was most important Jesus said

*Mark 10: <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

For even – hear that – for even the glorious Son of Man, the divine Son of Man, to whom is given the rule over all peoples and an eternal dominion, did not come to be served

And it is in Jesus ministry, in His teaching about His ministry, we see what was left unexplained in Daniel, the relation between the giving of dominion to the Son of Man and the saints receiving and eternal and secure kingdom when all their oppressors are vanquished.

They receive the Kingdom because of Jesus, and in Him.

Because the Son of Man has ransomed them from the penalty of sin – from the death we all deserve by His own death

Not because of their own goodness, their own faithfulness, their own strength – but by His death where He humbled Himself to bear our sins, to pay in His own death our debt to God's law

Always in Daniel the kingdom for the saints was a gift, given by God, the result of His intervention, not their achievement

And so it is in the coming of the Son of Man

God's gift to believers, as they are joined to the Lord Jesus by faith, become in believing the gospel His people, His body

In Jesus' ministry it is made clear who the 'holy ones of the most High, the people of God' are. They are sinners who will repent and believe the gospel – like Zacchaeus the greedy and unscrupulous tax collector, the collaborator

*Luke 19: <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."*

They are those who will confess the crucified Jesus as Lord, God's Son

*Luke 12: <sup>8</sup> "And I say to you, anyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God, <sup>9</sup> but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.*

We read Daniel 7 and taught by our Lord Jesus we know the Son of Man has come and by His death and resurrection He has already received an eternal dominion, already reigns at the Father's side with all authority His.

And we know that by His death He has secured that eternal kingdom for His people, all who will repent and believe the gospel that He has died for our sins, been buried, and that God has raised Him from the dead.

But we also know that the end is not yet. History goes on until the Son of Man is revealed in glory, and while history goes on Jesus warned His people that we will know, not just a continuing succession of human rulers, but those who will be like the little horn of Daniel 7, and that such proud opposition will climax before our Lord returns.

And like the little horn such rulers will

Boast against the living God, denying His presence and rule



oppress and put under pressure God's people, seeking to cause them to fall away from Christ

Seek to establish a false religion based on lies, and to do that suppress the remembrance of God and His mighty works and oppose the morality of God's law

And they will appear successful

This is what we see in Revelation 13.

The beast from the sea, a conscious recollection of Daniel 7, speaks blasphemies against God and wages war against the saints and is permitted to conquer them. And that idolatrous human government that claims all authority and demands all loyalty has the beast from the earth, the false religion that deceives those who live on the earth and induces them to worship the first beast.

And that is what we see in 2 Thessalonians 2 where Paul speaks of the antichrist

*2 Thessalonians 2: Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him: We ask you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to be easily upset or troubled, either by a prophecy or by a message or by a letter supposedly from us, alleging that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. <sup>4</sup> He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God.*

But as in Daniel, their end is sure.

In Revelation 19 we see the beast and the false prophet cast into the lake of fire at the coming of our Lord Jesus, the rider on the white horse. They cannot resist Him, the Word of God [Revelation 19:11-21]

And in Thessalonians Paul continues

*2 Thessalonians 2: <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way, <sup>8</sup> and then the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing at the appearance of his coming.*

The Kingdom is secured for God's oppressed and weak people by God, by the appearing of the glorious Son of Man.

And His people share in that victory by continuing to love the truth, the truth of the gospel, the truth of the crucified Jesus exaltation as Lord.

The certainty of Christ's eternal rule and the judgment of the beast, says Revelation, calls for

*Revelation 14: <sup>12</sup> This calls for endurance from the saints, who keep God's commands and their faith in Jesus."*

For believers in Jesus, waiting His return, Daniel 7 both warns and comforts

God's people will be oppressed at times, and at the end

But God is the ruler and judge of all

History is moving towards its goal

And despite what at times appears to be the case as God's people are oppressed and false religion flourishes, the end is certain

*<sup>26</sup> But the court will convene, and his dominion will be taken away, to be completely destroyed forever. <sup>27</sup> The kingdom, dominion, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the people, the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will serve and obey him.'*

That being the case I want to talk in conclusion first to those not yet believers, and then to believers.

Some of you might be sitting here and echoing in your heart the arrogant words – God doesn't see, God doesn't act.

God has told you today He does see, He does act, and His rule in His Son is certain

He has told you that, not just in Daniel, but most certainly in raising His Son Jesus from the dead

You should stop believing your lies, and turn back and ask forgiveness from the Lord Jesus. He has authority to forgive, and make you one of those who will share His eternal reign.

Amazingly He has made that possible by dying for your sin, and He will forgive all who call on Him.

Hear Him today, and ask Him to forgive you. It is as simple as asking Him, He lives, He hears

IF you don't know how, come and ask

If you want to know more – sign up

But perhaps there are some here who don't yet believe in Jesus and you know the fearfulness of the turbulence and chaos of proud human rule, the ruthlessness of the powerful determined to get their own way, and you want a place of safety

Jesus is that place. One of His people, you will share His kingdom

Come to me He said all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest

He beckons to you

You too should call out to Him to make you His own, to give you the rest He promises in a fearful and changing world, membership of His secure and eternal kingdom.

And let me speak to believers

It is easy to be worn down by the relentless lies and opposition of the arrogant who deny and mock God

IF that is you, let Daniel take you behind the veil

See

The just judge of all reigns, and He has appointed a day for all that is proud and arrogant

And He has established His Son, the Son of man, as ruler over all

He will be revealed in glory at the time of the Father's choosing and establish truth and righteousness on the earth

Don't grow weary.

And it is easy to be fearful, especially when you think of the image of the fourth beast, its ruthlessness and proud confidence

Fearful of what that might mean for us and our families

Fearful even of our little strength

Have confidence in God.

He rescued Daniel from the lions

He is determined to save His people

Having spoken of the antichrist to the Thessalonians Paul continued

*2 Thessalonians 2: <sup>13</sup> But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by what we said or what we wrote.*

*<sup>16</sup> May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, <sup>17</sup> encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.*

The God who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion.

The glorious Son of Man has made Himself our good shepherd so that we can say ‘even though we walk through the valley of death I will fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me.’

That was Jesus’ promise to us. No matter how it looks on the outside, our saviour is with us and will keep us.

But thirdly I want to say to believers – we should listen to Daniel 7 and not allow false expectations about the course of history make us unfocused and unprepared.

In the West, unlike many parts of our world, we have known peace as believers, and our society has a narrative that we are the best of societies and will always get better and better, and never return to difficult and oppressive times.

Christians can buy into that, and become pre-occupied with making and pursuing our own plans and small ambitions, and be surprised and easily disoriented when opposition comes – as it will.

If that is you, hear God’s word. The antichrist is always at work, and now is the time to make sure we know and live by the truth

Now is the time to make sure we are making it a priority to do those things that sustain our faith – knowing God’s word, prayer, meeting with each other to encourage each other, living lives of love

Make sure that we prize belonging to Jesus over all, and live that way each day – so that when we are faced with hard choices we know we have already cast our all in with Jesus

And for exactly the same reason – because the kingdom will be given to the people of God, those who trust Jesus, now is the time to be calling others to follow Him

For you can either suffer the judgment of those who believe lies

Or know the life of those who love the truth

When the glorious Son of Man is revealed.