

Daniel 7 The Son of Man

This Old Testament book of Daniel has been teaching us a lot about God. The name 'Daniel' means 'God is my Judge'. He is a holy God who records and assesses our words and actions and rewards us accordingly.

Daniel and his fellow Israelites are exiled from their home city Jerusalem, having to live in Babylon and serve a foreign king because their forefathers refused to heed prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and kept on sinning by worshipping idols instead of the Lord their God.

Pagan King Belshazzar discovered in ch 5 you can't mess with a holy God when he committed sacrilege, saw the 'writing on the wall' and was killed the same night!

God is also a Revealer of mysteries, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, Who not only knows but *holds* the future in His hands. We see this in King Nebuchadnezzar's first dream in ch 2 in which he is accurately shown the next six centuries of history and the empires that will dominate the region before they come to be. His personal warning dream in ch 4 comes true as he suffers years of mental illness before he submits to God and is restored.

God is holy Judge and Revealer of truth and wisdom, He is also the Saviour and Keeper of His people. We see this famously in chapters 3 and 6 where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are miraculously saved from a fiery furnace and Daniel from a den of lions.

At the start of this series we asked if God could preserve His people as a defeated minority in an alien land and environment. We're learning not only can God save and keep us, He can powerfully use us to influence those around us. Pagan kings Nebuchadnezzar and Darius come to publically revere the God of their captives and Babylonian society was the better for it. Practising Christians may be a minority but we are called to witness positively to those around us.

Daniel teaches us not only about God, it offers pertinent lessons about ourselves, about human beings, culture and government. We do well to note how suddenly these rulers can be humbled when they choose to 'walk in pride'. And yet pride is a common human trait. These days more than ever we're encouraged to take pride in human identity, ability and achievement. Look at us! Look what we can do!

Often coupled with this is an attitude that diminishes or disregards God. Sometimes we try to exert control over each other as if we were little 'gods'!

Think of Nebuchadnezzar's team building golden statue or Belshazzar's deliberate mocking of God at his drunken orgy. We march down the street like we are in charge of our own destiny, and each others', instead of getting on our knees and asking the true Lord of the universe for his grace and mercy!

We can reasonably assume there would have been some good reforms during Nebuchadnezzar's latter years but these were swiftly reversed when Belshazzar was put in charge. His hedonistic, egocentric approach to life and government did not bode well for the immediate future and we can imagine Daniel being concerned. Not long into Belshazzar's reign Daniel himself has a dream with unsettling themes of human leadership but a dream into which God inserts the most wonderful revelation.

We note firstly some human aspects which by now are becoming familiar. A succession of kingdoms arise on earth in which human beings act like wild beasts, dominated by appetite and desire. At first these kingdoms seem to parallel Nebuchadnezzar's dream in ch 2. The first sounds like Babylon with echoes of Nebuchadnezzar himself, the next would be Medo-Persia, the third one, the four-headed 'leopard' perfectly fits Greece and Alexander the Great's rapid conquest followed by his early death and division of territory between his four generals.

The fourth beast sounds like Rome with its invincible war machine but this is where it gets interesting.

Let's bear in mind that Biblical prophecy works in at least three ways. A passage like Daniel 7 usually has a literal fulfilment in the not too distant future. Often the same passage also gives principles and patterns which can be seen repeated through history in different places. And just as often it also points forward to the fulfilment of all things when God brings human history to a climax. Think of it as 'soon', 'generally' and 'finally'.

Daniel's vision seemed to be fulfilled in the centuries leading up to the birth of Christ. Greek culture pervaded. Roman rule was everywhere. The 'little horn' in vs20-22 sounds very like a king called Antiochus Epiphanes who called himself 'god manifest' and tried with great violence to stamp out Judaism around 165 BC. And yet this pattern of totalitarian state and cruel dictator has been seen again and again throughout history. The Roman Emperors Nero and Domitian in the first century AD, Adolf Hitler in the 1930/40s, the various Communist regimes of the last century. Today we can trace similar trends in North Korea or some of the more militant strands of Islam, New Atheism or Pride. Certain individuals being elevated to almost godlike status, particular ideologies being imposed and followers of the true God being persecuted.

Daniel's visions are referred to by the Lord Jesus and the New Testament apostles as also speaking of the end of things as we know them. A final, global government is pictured with a gifted but utterly ruthless leader who will blaspheme God and for a limited time harshly abuse God's people. But like all these other empires and dictators this 'antichrist' will be defeated and punished by the coming of the real Christ!

Daniel is understandably troubled and burdened by the insights God is giving Him. However in the middle of this most terrifying vision yet our depraved human antics are interrupted by the revelation of a higher court. In heaven sits the ultimate Ruler and Authority, 'the Ancient of Days' -the eternal, almighty God Who has been keeping record and Who now authorises a human figure, 'one like a Son of Man' to come on the clouds to punish pride and end evil and share God's kingdom with all who trust Him and answer His call to holiness. 'The saints' shall reign with the coming 'Son of Man' forever.

Now we read our New Testament with better understanding and greater thrill to note how Jesus of Nazareth constantly refers to Himself as 'the Son of Man' and how he preaches, 'the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!' He has come once to suffer for sin, He will come again in glory on the clouds of heaven to 'judge the living and the dead'. Are we ready?

There is righteousness and godly order in heaven and there will be an inheritance for those who learn from the inspired wisdom God has revealed in His Word, learn to humble ourselves before our Maker and Judge and trust in the Saviour He has given.

Have you done so? Will you do so today?

Let's pray.