

Daniel 7: A dream of things to come

Daniel is probably best known for two miraculous 'escape' stories, 'Daniel in the lion's den' (ch6) and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who survived a 'fiery furnace' unscathed (ch3). It appeared that God was still in control, even though Israel was overrun and these young men were captives in exile, forced to serve the Babylonian despot Nebuchadnezzar.

While the period of monarchy in Israel might have been considered something of a 'failed experiment', the Lord was clearly still at work, even in new, challenging circumstances to bring *foreign* emperors to acknowledge Israel's God as 'the Most High', the 'King of heaven'. While Nebuchadnezzar was humbled in a conversion experience of sorts (ch4), a successor Belshazzar was condemned by God for his blasphemy and killed in a sudden coup after seeing 'the writing on the wall' (ch5).

Many readers stop at ch6, put off by the apocalyptic imagery of the remaining chapters. Yet Old Testament passages like these are quoted by Jesus and the Apostles, and provide much of the imagery for the New Testament Book of Revelation.

In Daniel 7, against this backdrop of cruel ancient 'superpower' Babylon Daniel is granted a vision of the future which is at once daunting and inspiring! Babylon would not be the last empire to greedily plunder the earth like a wild 'beast'. Daniel's dreams accurately predict a succession of beastlike empires - Persia, Greece and Rome. Each would have their day, appearing invincible but eventually waning in power.

The vision claims that only one kingdom is to last forever, the one set up during the Roman period by a mysterious figure, 'one like a son of man' (ie. a human being) but with the approval and authority of the heavenly ruler, the 'Ancient of Days'.

Fast forward to the Gospels and note how Jesus referred to Himself. There it is. Son of Man. The one, last and truly universal Kingdom has begun!