

Daniel 7

Exegetical Big Idea: The forces of evil in the world are powerful and able to kill and destroy. They are however completely subject to the dominion of God and his sovereignty dictates all events of history.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Don't underestimate the power of evil, but don't forget who has dominion over it.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Pride deceives us into thinking that we hold power over our lives. Being deceived as such leads to our destruction by the powerful forces of evil that desire us killed. The only hope for humanity is to subject ourselves to God's dominion and the dominion of his Christ.

Background:

This is the first chapter in what is called apocalyptic literature in the book of Daniel. The rest of the book is apocalyptic literature, with the exception of a big part of chapter 9 which is a prayer by Daniel. Daniel is an interesting book in that it has both narrative (which is the story section that we have already gone through) and prophecy. Whereas the narrative sections cause us to focus in on specific place and people and events, the apocalyptic sections cause us to focus out on big picture stuff, and cause us to see things on a cosmic scale.

One of the big differences when reading this type of writing is to imagine ourselves reading a pop-up picture book. These prophecies invite us to use all our senses when we read them. They are meant to make us feel, and see, and even hear the prophecies. Hopefully that will make sense as we go through this chapter.

One thing that I think is often a mistake is to read this type of biblical writing as a codebook. What I mean is that we often think that if we can just figure out the secret code hidden in the meaning of the details, we will understand what the vision means and have the right answer. I'm going to attempt to avoid that as we go through the rest of Daniel. Scholars have forever and a day tried to guess the identity of the beasts and so on and so forth, and there may be merit to that, but I think that if God wanted us to know the specific identity of characters (and he does give that information in certain parts) then he could easily do so. Instead, I want to focus on main ideas, and only make inferences that I am convinced are correct. The last thing I want is to be judged by God for leading people astray concerning his Word.

In the previous chapter we were with Daniel under the reign of king Darius the Mede, after he took over the Babylonian empire. This chapter we are actually rewinding the clock a bit. We are going back to when Belshazzar was over the kingdom of Babylon, before he received the writing on the wall.

During his time, Daniel had dreams and visions given to him by God.

Intro:

As I was studying the passage for this week and reading in particular about the beasts, one of them of course is a lion. My mind can't help but think of the night that Daniel spent in the lion's den that we looked at last week. We didn't spend a whole lot of time talking about the fact that these are lions! Why is it that the king has a den of lion's and not a den of squirrels? Because these are ferocious beasts! They

are powerful creatures that can end any of us. And they proved to be just that when the magistrates and their families were thrown into the lion's den. But that's obviously not what happened with Daniel. What happened to those lions? Did God make them less powerful? Did God turn them into kitty cats for the night and then turned them back into lions in the morning? No of course not. God didn't make them less powerful, instead he displayed his dominion over them by shutting their mouths.

I think there are two big mistakes that we can make as we think about evil and exist in an evil world. The first mistake is that we underestimate the power of evil forces. What I mean is that we can think that we are strong enough in and of ourselves to resist or defeat the evil around us or the sin in our lives. That's just pride, because we can't.

The other big mistake however is the way other end of the spectrum. The other mistake is to be so fearful of evil forces that we forget who truly has dominion over them all. As we are in the lion's den of life as it were, we must be mindful that powerful forces of evil do exist in the world, but that God has dominion over them all.

Even Daniel is exhausted and anxious about the visions he had, but that does not change the fact that God has dominion over all things. Daniel 7 encourages us in this:

Don't underestimate the power of evil, but don't forget who has dominion over it.

1-8: There are powerful forces of evil in the world, and we are powerless against them.

God gives Daniel dreams and visions, but these are not your regular dreams. These are revelations from God. Daniel realizes this and write them down.

In the first part of his vision he sees the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, and from the sea come four powerful beasts. Before we get to the beasts, we need to understand the point of the stirring of the sea. The Great Sea was a common name for Mediterranean Sea. If you can picture the nation of Israel, to the West (on their left on a map) was the Mediterranean Sea that spanned the whole way up and down the nation. The Israelites were not seafarers however. Israel never had a navy, they were not known for navigating the sea. Why is this important? Because Israel's view of the sea was that the sea represented chaos. You can cultivate and master the land, but the sea was wild and unpredictable and untameable. So right away we are met with the picture of wild chaos. But not only that, the four winds of heaven are churning up the sea and making even more chaotic. We are located near a lake here, and it's maybe easy for us to imagine being on the beach when a huge wind storm is churning up the lake and the waves getting loud and big and the water is spraying. Are you using your senses to set the stage for what come next?

So out of this chaotic scene of a raging sea come four beasts. In verse 4 there is what looks like a lion that has wings like an eagle. The wings are plucked off and the lion stands up like a man, and a mind like a man's is given to it. Then another beast come out of the sea, this time it's a bear raised up, maybe on its hind legs it's not clear, but he has in his mouth ribs and is told to devour flesh. And then another come out, this one is like a leopard with 4 wings on its back and it has 4 heads and we are told that dominion is given to it. Finally a fourth and final beast comes out of the chaotic sea but this one has no form like an animal, instead we are just told that it is terrifying and dreadful and strong. This beast had

iron teeth and trampled on whatever escaped its mouth. Ten horns came from this beast, then a small one that seemed to displace three of the horns. This small horn had eyes and a mouth like a man and could speak great things.

What are we to think of this? Well let's look at how the beasts are similar and different. First of all, all of them are powerful. Notice that there is no goldfish or bunny rabbit. They are all ferocious. The lion is a predator of the earth, the eagle a predator of the skies. The bear is a massive animal on the earth and has brut power. The Leopard is a swift killing machine, and the four wings symbolize that he can swiftly attack anywhere, and the four heads indicate that he sees all around and you cannot escape. The last beast we are told has iron teeth and is strong.

Secondly, all of them seem to have some sort of dominion based on their power. The lion has been a picture of kingly rule for as old as time. Solomon had lion figures decorating his throne. The bear is interesting. We are told that he has ribs in his mouth and is told to devour much flesh. His dominion is over whatever he is devouring and his dominion is based on his power. The leopard has four wings and four heads, giving us the sense that he has this universality to him, that he can be anywhere swiftly and sees all that's going on. Finally the fourth beast devours like the bear, and he has ten horns. Horns in the Old Testament meant strength and power. This beast has ten.

Trying not to look too much ahead in the chapter, we can see at first glance that these are powerful forces of evil. They come from chaos, they rule and destroy by power. The question is, what are they ruling? What are they devouring? The answer is in the mouth of the bear. They seek to devour us.

Evil exists. Evil is powerful. Evil wants to conquer and kill you. And you are just torn flesh in the mouth of the beast.

Oh how foolish when people think they are the masters of their own lives. Oh how prideful to think that we determine the course of our own existence. There are forces of evil that exist which are incomprehensibly stronger than we are, and if we do not take heed of Daniel's vision of these beasts, we will end up like torn flesh in the mouth of the bear.

But there is another similarity with these beasts that offers a glimmer of hope. None of these beasts are autonomous. Meaning all of them, are dependent of someone or something. Look again. Where did the winds come from that stirred the sea? Who plucked the wings from the lion and eagle beast? Who made it stand on two feet? Whose voice called to the bear to devour? Who gave dominion to the leopard? Who plucked the three horns from the ten?

Someone holds dominion even over these beasts. Someone is restraining them.

[I used to do camping at Algonquin Park in Ontario. You'd have to canoe to your site, sometimes for hours and hours. There were no facilities and before phones there was no way to communicate because nobody had a satellite phone. At night you have to put your food in a container and raise it up high in a tree outside your camp. You could not keep any kind of food or anything that smelled good in your tent. Why? Well of course it was a possibility that a bear would smell the food and come looking for a meal. It would be extremely dangerous to be face to face with a bear at night because you didn't wash the steak off your face. I think we can all see the danger of that situation. And yet none of us would give a second thought to holding a hotdog while standing face to face with a bear at a zoo. Why? Because he's restrained.]

Yes, evil exists in this world and wants to rule over you and kill you, but God in his power and might restrains evil so that it cannot do all that it desires to do. Thank God! Because if God allowed evil to reign fully on this earth we would all be devoured.

Don't underestimate the power of evil, but don't forget who has dominion over it.

9-14: God alone has true dominion, and he will judge evil in his time.

So Daniel is watching as these ferocious beasts are emerging from the sea and it is terrifying, but in the midst of this, verse 9 begins with "as I looked". How glorious is it to know that as evil rages on around us, God sits in sovereign power over all things.

The beasts have not gone away when Daniel sees what comes next. He looks and thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days took his seat. This is of course none other than God.

Look at the contrast with the previous scene. The first scene was chaos and action, but now we get the sense of calm and even quiet for a moment. God is not fighting, he is not yelling, he is taking his seat.

Fire here is God's throne and around God's throne and it comes forth from God's throne. Before the throne of God are thousands and thousands, ten thousands upon ten thousands. It's a countless multitude of worshipers. Then we hear this glorious verse "the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened"

What is happening? It's judgement time. God, who is the perfect judge, will judge the beasts. How fitting it is that God's clothes and his hair are said to be as white a snow. God isn't the one *being* judged, he *is* the judge. The white here is God's purity. God is not judged by a standard, he *is* the standard. All others are judged in comparison to God the Pure and Holy One. The fire here around his throne represents God's holy judgement.

Daniel gaze is interrupted by the sound that the little horn is making. We are not told right now what it is saying, only that it is making great words. Regardless, the beast is all of a sudden killed, and fire consumes him. The other beasts are stripped of their dominion but left alive for a time.

Now at first glance verses 11-12 seem odd. Why would God judge evil, and take away its dominion but allow it to remain for a time? Well we have to remember that we are looking at things from a cosmic perspective. Stick a pin in these verses for a minute. We will come back to them.

This leads us to a new character arriving on the scene. Starting in verse 13 we see that he is described as coming on the clouds and he like a son of man. Ah, so he's human! And this man is presented to God, the Ancient of Days. But something seems different about him.

In verse 14 he's given dominion and glory and a kingdom. And there's more, all peoples and nations and languages serve him? He has an everlasting Kingdom?

Ah so it's God! But wait, isn't he a human?

The answer of course is yes! He's both truly God and truly man!

This of course can be nobody else but Christ. In fact Jesus himself used the title "Son of Man" for himself all the time, and unashamedly. God reveals this to John as well when he is on the island of Patmos. In the revelation given to John, he sees God sitting on his throne surrounded by lightning and thunder and

angels and a sea. God on his throne holds a scroll that has seven seals on it. Breaking the seals means unleashing God's wrath on the powers of evil in the world and vindicating his people. But John starts to weep because no one can be found who is worthy to break the seal! Can no one give judgement on the evils of the world? And then he looks and sees a lamb who looks as if it had been slain. And this lamb does not come from outside the throne, but he comes *from* the throne.

Christ is God. He has dominion over all forces of evil. And judgement comes from him.

It's the single event of the death and resurrection of Christ that deals the fatal blow to Satan and all evil. In one sense you can say that sin and death and evil reigned before Christ. But when Christ dies, and is raised to life again, he fundamentally destroys the power of hell. Hell and Satan no longer have dominion, because Christ has shown his victory over sin and death. Death could not hold him in the grave. So Christ has stripped all evil forces of their true power. And yet they remain in some way don't they?

Evil beasts have raised their ugly heads all throughout history. Sometimes it's in the form of a physical human kingdom like the Romans or the Nazis. Sometimes it's in the form of oppressive ideology like Marxism or communism. Sometimes it's in the form of godless culture like the one we live in. They seem like beasts to us! They still exist don't they? But rest assured that Christ has indeed destroyed their power and dominion with his death and resurrection, and the day will come when they will be completely destroyed never to return when Christ comes back and casts Satan into the lake of fire.

That's a glorious truth. But there is still one problem. What about us? So far has been no mention of us...unless you consider that we are in the mouth of the bear. Is that were God leaves us? God has conquered evil, but are we destroyed by it?

No. God in his mercy and grace has not abandoned us. He could have, and it would have been just. But thanks the Lord he does not.

Don't underestimate the power of evil, but don't forget who has dominion over it.

15-28 : Christ achieves eternal victory for his saints.

Daniel is alarmed in verse 15 and he turns and asks someone what all this means. Now much of what he is told is actually repetition. He doesn't gain a whole lot of new details. He's not told who the beasts are, except that they are kings that come from the earth. He's not told who the identity of the one like "A son of man" is. He's not told when these events will happen, or if they are already happening.

But there is one very important addition to this section. The saints are introduced. Now this is not a new vision, we are just seeing it from a new perspective. The perspective of the saints. But at first glance it does not seem like amazing news.

In verse 17 we are told that the beasts arise from the earth. These are not different beasts from the ones that came from the sea, we are just now being made aware that they rule on the earth. This is a problem, since we live on the earth!

In verse 21 we are told that the horn makes war with the saints! Not only that but he prevails against them.

In verse 25 this beast with the horns wears out the saints of the most high.

So far this does not seem like good news for God's people! And left on our own this would be our end. But just as we are told three times that we are in trouble, so we are told each of those three times that victory is assured for us! In verse 18 the saints receive the kingdom. In verse 22 judgement is given for the saints and they possess the kingdom. And finally in verse 27 the saints receive, yet again, the kingdom.

The tables turn and the saints inherit the kingdom of God. But there is one very important thing to note. The kingdom is not obtained by the saints on their own strength. Left to our own strength nobody can stand against the beast. In each of these verses the language is that the saints are "given" victory. They don't deserve it, they receive it by grace.

[My mind turns to the exiles that return to Israel in the book of Ezra. By God's grace the people return to Jerusalem and start building the temple. Well a new king, an evil force we might say, takes the throne in Persia. His name is Artaxerxes. Now there are provincial authorities in the land of Israel that do not want to see the temple or Jerusalem rebuilt so they write a letter to Artaxerxes explaining the evil history of Jerusalem and how it's in the king's best interest to stop the construction. Artaxerxes agrees and orders construction stopped. It's stopped for around 2 years. Then Haggai and Zechariah, God's prophets, stir the people's hearts to start up the building again. Now there is yet another king, Darius II, who is king of Persia. Again the provincial leaders write a letter to the king but the Jews add their own. The Jews write that the king should look into the archives and see that Cyrus ordered the temple rebuilt years ago. Darius II makes the search and realizes this is indeed true. Darius II responds to the provincial leaders and to their shock demands that they let the Israelites build their temple. Not only that, but he orders all the materials and provisions for the project to come from the treasuries of the province! And, they are to assist with the rebuilding with diligence. Can you imagine the shock on their faces opening that letter?]

What was it that turned these events around? The gracious hand of God on his people.

How much more so the reversal that Christ gains for us in his death and resurrection! By grace, we go from being at war with Satan that we cannot win, and from being torn flesh in the mouth of the bear, to eternal resurrection life and an inheritance in heaven that can never spoil or perish being held for us by God.

I think verse 28 is a fitting place to end. Daniel is still troubled by what he saw. He is alarmed and confused. I can sympathize with him because there is lots here that I don't understand. But I do understand that evil exists and desires to have us, but if we are found in Christ, we will reign with him in his kingdom forever.

Take this matter to heart. If you are not a Christian, you should fear this. My hope is that you would fear the evil in the world and turn to Christ for salvation.

If you are a Christian, it would be good for us to remember that there is much going on that we don't see or understand. We are in the middle of a war, but if we belong to God, whatever may come, victory will follow.

Don't underestimate the power of evil, but don't forget who has dominion over it.