

Welcome to the Jungle

Daniel 7:1-8 (should read all of Daniel 7)

As we come to Daniel 7, it is clear we are in a new section of the book, and we stand on new ground. This begins the second half of this volume, and it very different from the first half.

For instance, we are no longer following chronologically. We find various visions which took place earlier in Daniel's life, when he was under the Babylonians and not the Persians. You can see this at the beginnings of chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11.

But even though these visions were received earlier, they point us not backward but forward, to what the Lord would do in history. We find – as with the king's dream in chapter 2 – the prophecy of 4 more kingdoms rising after Babylon – the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and here in Daniel 7, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

We can also tell we are on new ground by the way these chapters read. Here in Dan. 7, we are found standing with Daniel as he watches 4 great beasts arise from the sea. And they are not ordinary animals. This is why we have called our message today, “Welcome to the Jungle”!

We face, not only these animals, but a symbolism that may be difficult to cut through to understand the message. This should remind us very much of the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, which is also highly symbolic. One author even calls this passage: “Apocalypse!”

The word, “Apocalypse” or “Revelation” means to unveil what is hidden. This is a style of writing using figures or symbols, behind which we read another truth. For instance, here, the lion is Babylon, the bear is Persia, the leopard is Greece, and the last monster is Rome or something beyond.

Paul speaks prophetically of the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2. Yet he does not refer to him as a little horn with a mouth speaking great blasphemies, as in Revelation 13.

This is a more challenging section of God’s Word, and calls for greater attention; but also rewards our efforts.

A second introductory remark touches on the place of Daniel 7. Many have placed a dividing line of the book from the history of 1-6 to the visions of 7-12. The fact that chapter 7 takes us back to the days of Belshazzar adds weight to this.

But there is another more satisfying view. Some teachers (Keil and Robertson) divide the book based on the Aramaic and Hebrew sections of Daniel. Daniel 1 is in Hebrew, and gives the setting of the entire book. Daniel 2-7 is in Aramaic, and begins and ends with the visions of the four kingdoms. Then 8-12, which are in Hebrew deals with events in the 2nd and 3rd kingdoms, leading up to the final consummation. Our plan is to go more lightly on 8-11.

The last observation to make by way of introduction is to see the glory of God’s sovereignty over all the wicked nations, and especially this evil little horn; over all is the unending greatness and victory of the Kingdom of God’s Son.

This is the basis of what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer – "Thy Kingdom Come." We pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened. (WSC 102)

So let us come now to the vision before us – the vision that made Daniel troubled and sick – and we begin with the sea. The rough and dangerous sea is often used in the Bible as a picture of evil – something big, uncontrollable, dangerous. We notice that the four winds are stirring it up, as if they are summoning these beasts.

We wouldn't think much more of this except in Revelation 7:1, there are angels sent over the four corners of the earth who take hold upon the winds. These winds show us God's rule and dominion; that He not only knows ahead of time that these kingdoms will come, but that He rules over every dominion of man.

But more to the point, it is His Son's everlasting Kingdom, which stands over and above the earth, which abides forever. In Daniel 2 remember, this Kingdom was likened to a Rock made without hands, which will crush the four kingdoms that they become like chaff; they will be no more. There is a Psalm 2 quality about Daniel 7, where the Lord has exalted His Son over the nations, and the kings of the earth are to bow before Him. Little wonder that many call these 28 verses: The Triumph of the Son of Man.

Let us turn now to these creatures; these four great beasts arising after one another, each different from the others.

Verse 17 leaves us in no doubt as to what these mean – read. The kings stand as well for their kingdoms. So as we said, this vision is quite similar to the colossal statue of chapter 2. Recall there that there were four different kingdoms, of four increasingly lesser materials. But here, more detail is revealed.

The first is like a lion – but with wings. The lion was a favorite symbol for Babylon; on her famous Ishtar Gates, yellow lions are found in procession upon blue-glazed brick. The plucking of its eagle wings, and lifting it to stand as a man on the ground, and then a human heart given it, seems a picture of Nebuchadnezzar’s flight of pride, his humbling, and his sanity being restored. This is acknowledged universally as Babylon the Great, which would soon fall – given Daniel’s perspective.

The second beast is different. Not so great as a lion, a great bear appears with three descriptions. First, it is raised on one side, second, it possesses three ribs in its mouth and firmly held by the teeth, and third it is given the command to devour much meat.

What a perfect picture of the coming Medo-Persian Empire, which overthrew Babylon when Belshazzar was king. The bear has two parts – one lifted up as though greater than the other side – the Persian portion far greater than the Median part. Cyrus and his son are well known to have had three great conquests in establishing the Kingdom, defeating the Lydians in Asia Minor, 546; the Babylonians in 538; and the kingdom of Egypt, in 525. These are the three ribs.

Furthermore, the voracious appetite for new lands and subjugating new peoples is well documented. They were effective but more ponderous or slow than either the lion or leopard to follow.

The third beast, a leopard, a swift predator, is even more so with the addition of wings. However, it has four heads along with its four wings. OT scholar Gleason Archer says: “The beast portrays the division of Alexander the Great’s swiftly won empire into four separate parts within a few years after his death in 323 BC. Those four parts were Greece under Cassander; Asia Minor under Lysimachus (pronounced lisimakus); Asia under Seleucus (selukas); and Egypt and Palestine under Ptolemy (pronounced Tolemy).

The fourth and final beast emerges. In Daniel 2, recall it was more base than the rest, a mixture of iron and clay. Here, it is more dreadful, terrifying, extremely strong, having iron teeth, devouring all. And what was left was trampled by its feet – different from the beasts before it. Davis states well: it is different in the terror it inspires (terrifying and dreadful); in the chaos it creates (devouring and breaking in pieces); and in the power it possesses (ten horns, where most creatures have only two). We could add that it is different in the ruler it produces – a little horn with great intelligence (eyes like the eyes of a man) and arrogance (a mouth speaking great things). This is clearly a deadly combination. And this is clearly the Roman Empire.

In the feet of the great statue, it was a mixture of iron and clay; something brutal and coarse, so quite ferocious.

Tacitus the historian, in 98 AD, described Rome from the view of their subjects, those who were under its feet: “These [Roman] plunderers of

the world, after exhausting the land by their devastations, are ransacking the ocean: stimulated by greed, if their enemy be rich; by ambition, if they are poor; unfulfilled by the East and by the West: the only people who behold wealth and poverty with equal covetousness. To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and **where they make a desert, they call it peace.**"

Now on the head of this terrible creature, sat ten crowns. Some take them as ten emperors or rulers; others, more likely, take them as ten rulers simultaneously, otherwise how could one little horn rise up and take over three of them? The point to be made is the brutality of their rule, with the rise of one most terrible, with eyes as a man and a mouth full of great boasts.

As Daniel has questions and answers later in the chapter about this last beast, and the little horn, we will wait until then to open this up more fully. But not before coming to the heavenly scenes of 9-14.

So, what can we take from this introductory message, these descriptions of the kingdoms of men?

1. The Lord is sovereign over all the nations – their rise, their rule, as well as their ruin. Where are the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans today? No matter how terrible they are and especially so to the people of God, they are held in the hand of Him who does all He pleases among the inhabitants of the earth, and the armies of heaven. He has all at His disposal over the greatest of them. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. This was especially illustrated for us in humbling the arrogant King of Babylon. How

about you? Can you say with Ps. 119:161 – “Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your words!”

2. The Kingdoms of men, especially when holding great power, are often quite evil. To be likened to a ferocious lion, a bear, a leopard, a beast who chews and crushes his way to success, tells us something of the evil of human rulers. They are capable of great devastation; great destruction of life; great torment to their citizens. And the wicked rulers of this world often escape judgment and retribution in this life. But they will not in the world to come. God takes notice of them. They cannot say God overrules so as to absolve me. What will it be like to stand before a holy God with the blood of many, of hundreds, of thousands, or of millions upon your hands? You would not want to be in their shoes for all the world. The very depths of hell are created for them.
3. Having spoken on tyrants and tyranny, should we not say that there is a reason for them? When we read the description of man in Romans 1, what but a whip, a shackle, an exile, a sword, can keep wicked men from rising up and making life even worse? We want good governing, but that depends upon a people who can be governed, who are self-governed. The Lord has shown that he will use the force of dictators for an ungovernable people. And this is especially the case when a large portion of the populace is dependent on the government for bread.
4. As bad as all of these empires are, there is a worse case in the little horn. The exact identity will be more fully explored down the line – but the possibility of a great time of tribulation before the return of King Jesus seems a biblical position. See verse 25. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24: *"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as*

has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. ²² *"Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Mat 24:21-22)*

5. Lastly, these terrible kingdoms and kings serve as the dark backdrop to the best King and the most glorious Kingdom. The true God's King shines in the middle of this dark ocean of trouble and of fear. The words of the prophet Isaiah seem appropriate here – a promise for you, that your eyes will see Jesus!

¹⁷ *Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will behold a far-distant land...*

¹⁹ *You will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, of a stammering tongue which no one understands.*

²⁰ *Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, an undisturbed habitation, a tent which will not be folded; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its cords be torn apart.*

²¹ *But there the majestic One, the LORD, will be for us a place of rivers and wide canals on which no boat with oars will go, and on which no mighty ship will pass--*

²² *For the LORD is our judge, The LORD is our lawgiver, The LORD is our king; He will save us-- (Isa 33:17-22)*

I heard a story in seminary of a group of learned men were sitting around a table discussing and disagreeing over the meaning of the book of Revelation. This went on for a while until an elderly and untaught black man sitting in the corner listening to their discussion, interrupted them. "I know what that book means," he said, which made all at the table turn to hear what would say. "The book of

Revelation means that Jesus is going to win!” May we do more than say amen to that; may our thoughts, our hearts, our lives all say amen. Let us bow the knee, and confess with our tongues: “Jesus is Lord!”