

ALPHA + OMEGA

DANIEL 7-12

STUDY NOTES
DANIEL 7

GETTING UP TO SPEED ON DANIEL

Daniel falls within the genre of apocalyptic literature in the biblical books. The simple way of understanding the word *apokalypsis* is revelation. Dramatic symbolism. Apocalyptic literature reveals God's directing of affairs to bring this world to its intended end, and arose out of the conquering of Jerusalem (587/6 BC), and the subsequent deportation, to provide an explanation of Israelite life in captivity.

Apocalyptic material reveals God explaining his purposes in visions and dreams of a supernatural nature. Salvation is now the promise held out to the faithful and afflicted, rather than to a people or nation. The biblical emphasis turns to the interplay between principalities and powers, often on a cosmic scale, yet reveals a path of faithfulness for the believer within them. In the unfolding picture of one ruler dominating another, a supreme ruler arrives, "one like a Son of Man" (Dan 7:11-12), who will be the King of God's Kingdom, and will exercise ultimate authority.

The book of Daniel divides into two halves, chs 1-6 & 7-12 which is how our sermon series has been structured. It contains 2 languages, namely Hebrew (1-2:4a, 8-12) and Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). The first and last sections of the book interpret those in between. Ch 1 is introductory, and chs 8-12 deal with the history of Israel in the light of God's universal plan of salvation. The Aramaic section puts us in sync with the everyday life of the believer in the time of Gentile rule, a new era in God's purposes after the fall of Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel with it.

The message that has been proclaimed to the outside world in Daniel now shifts to what God wants proclaimed to his own people: God is establishing his everlasting King and kingdom in the world. The book is a prophecy that leads us to Christ and his salvation as the Son of Man.

DANIEL 7

Daniel 7 is the first of four visions in the second half of the book (8:1, 9:1 & 10:1). Chs 1-6 have taught about life in Babylon. The visions now overlay those lessons about God's people living in the city, with instructions about heading towards their ultimate home. From being the interpreter of visions, Daniel now becomes the recipient of them. He becomes God's voice, and is himself given an interpreter (7:19).

The chapter is much less about calculating numbers than it is about revealing God's ways in the world. In fact, we might see the chapter as a surprising explanation of the gospel. But who describe it this way?

Three beasts (vv 2-6, 17); then a fourth (vv 7-8, 19-21, 23-26). Then the Ancient of Days takes his place on a heavenly throne of mind-blowing proportions, with thousands attending in worship (vv 9-10), while he swiftly dispenses with the fourth beast and strips the other three of their authority (vv 11-12). One like a son of man approaches the throne and is given all authority and power, with the throngs, the Saints of the Most High (v 18, 22, 25 & 27) now turning their worship to him as he is proclaimed ruler of an eternal Kingdom.

In the understatement of the chapter Daniel reveals he is troubled in spirit by the visions. In God's grace he is provided with an unidentified interpreter in v 16. From the explanations given Daniel learns four lessons:

God's rule is always challenged (vv 23-25). After understanding the four great beasts are kings (reigns), Daniel recognises that the fourth king appears less human than the three before it. It epitomises complete and total opposition to the Kingdom of God and an arrogance that is beyond human, mercilessly trampling all in its wake. In this beastly image there are successive kingdoms ruling, each being crushed by another, with the last king boasting such oppression over the people of God as if presuming to usurp God's plans and purposes for his holy people.

God's rule will always triumph (v 26). The thoroughness of God's judgment is matched by its swiftness. When judgment is issued from the heavenly throne justice is achieved, and the verdict beyond dispute. The Kingdoms of those who oppose the rule of the Most High will be swept away in an instant.

God's rule is centred on the son of man (v 27). In a mighty act of salvation the rule of the beast is dispensed with and replaced by the rule of the Most High and his people. The Son of Man is both a human and divine figure, the one appointed by God to be the king who contrasts with the kingdoms of the great beasts in every way. In his perfect humanity he is the true image of God and represents salvation and life for all who will be members of his Kingdom.

God's rule strengthens and delivers his saints (v 27). The handing over of authority to the Son of Man is not only a declaration of eternal victory, but an expression of comfort and strength to the holy people of the Most High.

Perhaps unexpectedly (though perhaps not), Daniel remains deeply troubled by all that he has seen and had explained (v 28). Is this not telling us that comprehending the plans and purposes of God for eternity ought always leave us with a sense of awe and astonishment? It is only because we have seen these plans come to fruition in the work of the cross of Christ that we are not left as stunned and pale as Daniel. The Son of Man has come and given his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45) so that God's Kingdom may be entered in this world as we await the final consummation. All the powers of heaven and earth that have opposed God's plans and purposes have been subdued by the salvation of the Son of Man, who has now been given all authority.

Jesus not only achieves God's eternal rule, but exemplifies in his earthly life and ministry the humble and obedient pattern of living that God ultimately honours. Let us rejoice in the loving rule of the Son of Man.

GETTING STARTED

1. Would you judge that human kingdoms today appear worse than those in the days that Daniel wrote? What evidence would you give to support your answer?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Daniel 7:1-14

2. How many scenes are there in these chapters? Identify them and the key image in each.
3. What do these verses tell you about the nature of the authority of human Kingdoms?
4. What do these verses tell you about the authority of the Ancient of Days?

Read Daniel 7:15-28

5. The fourth beast's rule is inhuman and inhumane. What do you think is the significance of the horn(s) imagery?
6. What do you think it means when it is described that the fourth beast tried to change the set times and the laws in v 25?
7. What is the outcome for earthly Kingdoms in the vision (v 26)?
8. Why did Jesus assume the title of Son of Man for himself?
9. Daniel writes that he kept the dream to himself (v 28), yet we have an account of it today. How do you think it provided comfort to the first readers of the prophecy, and then to us today?

TAKEAWAY

10. What have you learnt about the purpose of apocalyptic literature in the Scriptures?
11. If you are feeling troubled and overwhelmed by the state of affairs in our world, what perspective might Daniel 7 provide as a source of strength?