

**Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018 – 11am**

**Daniel 7:1-14**

**“One like a Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven”**

**Introduction**

Well, I wonder what kind of a week you've had?

Maybe we should spare a thought for Theresa May! What a week she's had!? Aren't you glad we looked at Daniel 6 last Sunday morning, and learned that God is in Control, no matter what kind of chaos is going on in our world!? - Very timely!

This morning we're moving on to look at Daniel 7. We're going to look at vs.1-14.

Now this chapter is still written in Aramaic, so it's still linked to chs.2-6. But, we've moved out of chs.1-6 which were all stories about Daniel & his 3 friends in Babylon, into chs.7-12 which are all about Daniel's dreams and visions about the future. We've moved out of narrative, into **apocalyptic** literature. cf Revelation.

So, that means the chapters that will follow, won't be just as easy to understand or interpret as the chapters we've looked at so far.

Some preachers stop at chapter 6 and never go on to preach on chs.7-12. So spare a thought for me as we continue to look at this book together.

*United Kingdom - United States of America - United Nations - European Union*

What have all those places got in common? They all claim to be united. But they're not, are they?

Never before have we seen such a longing for unity, and such a lack of unity at the same time. Everybody wants to be united – but they're not – far from it! They're divided. There is so much division all around us, it's unbelievable!

But let me show you a better Kingdom... A truly united one! Daniel 7 begins with...

**1. An Overview of History (vs.1-8)**

I want you to notice where it starts. There's **a date** given to us in v.1. We've jumped back in time to the *'First Year of Belshazzar King of Babylon'*.

We know that Daniel's lifetime has stretched from 1:1 to 6:28. After living his childhood and teenage years at home in Jerusalem, he was carried off into exile, by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon in ch.1:1. We're told in ch.1:21 *'Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus'* (Persia). Now we read in ch.6:28 that *'Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius (Mede) and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.'*

So he has lived through the Babylonian Empire and now he is living through the Empire known as the Medes and Persians, who over-ran Babylon in 539 BC.

But now at the beginning of ch.7, we jump back in time to the start of Belshazzar's reign – the last king of the Babylonians – so we're during the first Empire here.

Just flick over in your Bible and notice that we get a date at the beginning of each of these chapters (7:1, 8:1, 9:1, 10:1 and 11:1). Each of Daniel's visions are dated.

We have to remember that. The Overview of History we are going to be given in this chapter starts in Daniel's day, just over 500 years before Christ, and it spans the last 2500 years bringing us right up until today.

So don't be tempted to understand these chapters as beginning with us today, and going on until the end of the world. We've got to see that it starts in Daniel's day.

**Daniel has a dream.** Makes a change! He's usually interpreting somebody else's! He saw a dream, and had visions in his head, as he lay in his bed. He's dreaming!

But then (v.1) he gets up and writes down the dream and tells us the sum of the matter. He's giving us a written summary of his dream. So what was in his dream?

**Four Beasts** – *'I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea.'* (v.2)

The Great Sea was usually how the Jews referred to the Mediterranean Sea. Daniel hasn't seen it since he was a child. So maybe he's looking back over his life. Dreaming about days gone by. Wishing he was still there!

But into this beautiful vision of the Sea, comes a great upheaval. The winds, coming from all directions – north, south, east and west, stir up the Great Sea. So it's choppy, stormy, full of chaos. And if that wasn't enough, out of this stormy sea come four great beasts, one after the other, up out of the sea. And they're all different from one another (v.3).

**No.1** – The first beast was **like a lion, but it had eagle's wings**. The winged lion was a symbol of Babylon. The Empire that was in power at that time – remember it was the first year of Belshazzar – the king of Babylon's reign. But this beast doesn't actually depict Belshazzar – it actually depicts Nebuchadnezzar – the first king of Babylon – the one who had carried Daniel off into exile as a young man. Why do I say that? Well, look at what else we're told about this beast in v.4. *'Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.'* Do you remember the story of Nebuchadnezzar in ch.4, and the dream he had?

How he had become a very proud king, puffed up with pride. How he had walked about the roof of his palace, saying *'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?'*

But no sooner had he said those words, than a voice came from heaven telling him that the kingdom had departed from him, and he would be driven from among men, and he would live like a beast in the field, eating grass like oxen, until he knew that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whoever he wants to. At the end of that time, having been humbled, he was then raised up again, he was lifted up from the ground and was able to stand on his feet again like a man, his mind was restored to him, and as a result he praised and honoured and worshipped the God of heaven, and told all the peoples of his empire to do the same.

That's how we know that Beast No.1 represents Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Babylon was in power from 626 to 539 B.C.

That ties in with what we are told in Daniel 7:17...

*'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.'*

So that's the first one – what about the others?

**No.2** – (v.5) *"And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had 3 ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told 'Arise, devour much flesh'."*

Well, if the first beast represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of Babylon, then we know from the end of Daniel ch.5, that the next empire to appear was the Medes and Persians. King Darius was a Mede, and King Cyrus was a Persian. The Persians had overtaken the Medes by taking 3 of their great cities, before they over-ran Babylon on the night of Belshazzar's feast, so that probably explains the 3 ribs in its mouth, representing the important 3 cities it had just captured.

It was like a bear, on all fours, but it was raised up at one side – maybe signifying that it was an amalgamation of 2 powers, but one was more powerful than the other. The Persians were always stronger than the Medes, and eventually it was just known as the Persian Empire, stretching all the way to India in the East. The Medo-Persian Empire was in control of the Middle East from 550-330 BC.

That brings us to the next one.

**No.3** – (v.6) *"After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it."*

Now the number four is significant here. We know that Alexander the Great, the son of Philip of Macedon, just north of Greece, was the most powerful warlord of that time. He overcame Darius III in a number of battles in or around Syria. And having defeated Darius III, who was then killed by one of his own men, Alexander the Great rode into Babylon as the King of Asia. So he ruled all the way from Greece in Europe right to the edge of India. But on the way back from the borders of India Alexander the Great took ill, and died suddenly of a fever, aged only 32.

He had four generals, who decided to parcel out the kingdom between them, rather than fight for it, and so the Greek Empire continued under the control of these four generals – Cassius, Ptolemy, Seleucus and Lysimachus.

**The leopard** is the fastest of all land animals – representing Alexander and how fast his kingdom spread from Greece to India. But **the four wings on its back** represent the four generals who took over after his untimely death.

Now, we have to remember, that Daniel saw this dream during the first year of Belshazzar's reign in Babylon. So only the first of these kings had just died. Now he's seeing away ahead of his time, not only to the Medes and Persian Empire that he did live in, but to the Greek Empire which he never lived through, because the Greeks took over in 334 BC and stayed in power until 146 BC. This is future.

That brings us then to the fourth and final beast:

**No.4** – (v.7) *"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."*

Now, do you remember the first dream that Nebuchadnezzar had back in ch.2? Do you remember the Statue, that had a head of gold – i.e. Nebuchadnezzar, and a chest of silver – that was the Medes and Persians, and the legs of bronze – that was the Greeks, and then it had feet of iron and clay – that was the Romans. Well, here we have a hideous beast with iron teeth, which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet – this beast represents the Roman Empire as well. The most terrifying and ruthless of them all! Julius Caesar came to power in 60 BC, but the Roman Empire doesn't actually start until his successor came to power in 27 BC. He was called Augustus Caesar, who actually proclaimed himself to be *'a Son of God.'* The Roman Empire held sway when Jesus was born as a baby in Bethlehem's manger. It still held sway when one of its governors, Pontius Pilate, ordered that Jesus be put to death by crucifixion in or around 30 AD. In the years that followed, many of the Roman Emperors wanted to be worshipped as if they were God, and that caused all kinds of problems for the early Christians – many of them were fed to the lions in Rome!

Now, that's how we think of the Roman Empire – being in power around the time of Jesus...

### But what happened since?

(Well I could say more on this, but I'm going to wait until next time, when we look at the rest of this important chapter, where Daniel asks more about the 4<sup>th</sup> beast).

Look at vs.7-8:

*'It [Beast 4] was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.'*

This is where we need to be careful not to get into speculation, but it's quite clear what the first 4 beasts represent – the four great Empires from Daniel's day down to the time of Christ: **Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Greeks and the Romans.**

So we know that what Daniel saw 2500 years ago, was at least an overview of history from the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon, right down to Christ!

N.B. *All* of these world powers and authorities eventually become 'beast-like'. Someone has said, '**All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely!**' Left to their own devices, they get puffed up with pride, and become beast-like, instead of God-like.

Notice the end of v.8 again – '*And behold, in this horn (the little horn) were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things...*'

And then jump down to v.11 – '*I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.'*

This overview of history that Daniel saw, shows us the ultimate end of **all the beasts** – those who set themselves up as absolute powers – and particularly those who trample and persecute God's people down through the ages.

**All the beasts will be destroyed**, all of them will have their kingdoms and their powers taken away from them, without exception - especially the one who boasts great things!

We've seen **An Overview of History**, but let's now see...

## 2. A Glimpse of Heaven (vs.9-12)

Before the beast is killed and destroyed, Daniel is given the privilege of seeing right into heaven. He's given a Glimpse of Heaven. And what does he see?

(vs.9-10) '*As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before Him; A thousand thousands served Him, And ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; The Court sat in judgement, and the books were opened.'*

**N.B. This is the Judge** that all of us are going to have to stand before one day! Daniel gets to see into heaven. And what he sees is a courtroom scene. It's a scene of judgement. This is God's Judgement. The Final Judgement.

### Thrones are placed...

The Ancient of Days took his seat – that's God. He has always been there. The one who is from eternity to eternity; He has no beginning and no end. He is not bound by time. That's why He is called the Ancient of Days. Everything about him is white – pure white. Brilliant white. His clothing is as white as snow. The hair on his head – is white like pure wool! Daniel's friends came through a fiery furnace – speaking of judgement or purity. The throne in heaven is surrounded by fiery flames; its wheels are burning fire; and a stream of molten fire is coming out from before the throne. Conjuring up an idea of absolute purity - so fiery wrath and judgement awaits!

But look again – a thousand thousand are serving him or worshipping him. Ten thousand times ten thousand are standing before him. (100 million). A vast multitude – so many you can hardly count them.

### What are they all there for?

*'The Court sat in judgement – and the books were opened.'*

Do you believe, really believe, that a judgement day is coming? Daniel saw it 2500 years ago. He got a glimpse into heaven. It was scary!

The Ancient of Days, *THE* absolutely holy God, is seated upon his throne. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Everything about Him is pure white. Holy. Everything about his throne is blazing with fire – pure fire. Millions will be standing before him. The Court will be called to order. And then the books will be opened. Your book, my book, will be opened!

And you know what? Everything that I have ever done, said, or thought; everything that you have ever done, said, or thought will be laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. And there'll be no arguments. All mouths stopped!

Whatever is written in that book, is the truth. The absolute truth about you and me. We will have nowhere to run; we will have nowhere to hide. We will be laid bare!

How will you feel on that day? How will I feel on that day?  
Absolutely naked!

Unless we are *'in Christ'* – unless we are clothed in the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, we don't stand a chance.

**The Beast will be judged. All beasts will be judged.  
But you and I will be judged too!**

And don't think we'll get off lightly because we're not as *bad* as them.

**You're comparing yourself to the wrong standard!**

The point is: we'll not be as *good* as the one who is sitting in judgement on us!

**So where can we go? To whom can we turn?**

Praise God, our passage this morning finishes with...

### **3. A Preview of 'Him' (vs.13-14)**

*'I saw in the night visions, and behold,  
With the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man,  
and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.  
And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him;  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.'*

**What's going on here?**

Well, **'the Son of Man'** is the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the title (his favourite title) that he took to himself in the Gospels of the NT.

*'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve  
and to give His life as a ransom for many.'* (Mark 10:45)

And I want you to notice that in this passage in Daniel, he has already done that! When The Son of God left heaven to come to earth, he came as a baby. He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's what we'll be celebrating next weekend over Christmas.

But this is not Jesus *going* to earth. This is Jesus *coming back* from the earth.

Read v.13 carefully again. The Son of Man is *returning to heaven*, on the clouds,

He is coming to the Ancient of Days, His Father, and He's being presented before Him. Why? Because he has just been killed on a Roman Cross for your sins and mine. But on the third day He rose again defeating sin, and death and hell, and all the hosts of wickedness. He appeared alive over a period of 40 days and nights to his disciples on various occasions, and now he has ascended on high. How do I know?

Because in Acts 1:9 we're told that *'as they were looking on,  
He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.'*

The Disciples saw this side of that *cloud* as they looked up into the sky, but Daniel saw the other side of that *cloud* – The Son of Man came on the clouds of heaven into the presence of the Ancient of Days – into the very throne room of heaven!

He was presented before the Father; His wounds were presented to the Father, as proof of his atoning work for you and for me, and then what? (Read v.14)

**He was given a kingdom!**

And what were the last words Jesus said, before He ascended into heaven?  
(Matthew 28:18-20)

**'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...  
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'**

### **Conclusion**

Now some of you might object this morning, and say, but surely *'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven'* speaks of Christ's second coming, not his first!?

Surely he still has to come again on the clouds of heaven and take us home?  
Well, turn again to Acts 1, as we finish, and let me read vs.9-11:

*'And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will come (again) in the same way** as you saw him go into heaven.'*

He went up to heaven on a cloud; He will come again on a cloud:- Are you ready!?