**Daniel’s First Vision: God’s Sovereignty in Times of Trouble Part 1**

**Daniel 7:1-10**

**Introduction**

Good morning! Once again, we would like to share our appreciation for all of the women in the congregation today who serve as mothers, friends, encouragers in the faith and also the daughters who work to live in a way that honors their parents. We praise God and thank Him for the gift of you in our lives. Today we are beginning the second section of the book of Daniel by studying the visions that the prophet Daniel experiences in his life. The book of Daniel is composed of two different kinds of literary genres. The first 6 chapters of the book are historical narrative meaning that they report on events that took place in the years that Daniel served on the court of the Babylonians, the Medes and then finally the Persian Empire. Starting in chapter 7 the book transitions to prophecy. The purpose of the prophetic books in the Old Testament are to share with the people the message of God. Therefore, the role of a prophet was to bring to the people the Word of the Lord. In the Old Testament there are both Major and Minor Prophets. The minor prophets are the shorter books where the prophet spoke for a limited amount of time and was dealing with a singular issue. One such example of a minor prophet would be the prophet Obadiah. If you were to look up the book of Obadiah you would find that it is only one chapter made up of 18 verses. Obadiah spoke to the Kingdom of Edom and was warning them about how their arrogance was going to lead to their eventual downfall. The Major prophets, on the other hand, had much longer ministries and dealt with much larger issues. Examples of major prophets would be Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, who himself was a contemporary of Daniel. These prophets spent most of their lives sending the message of God to the kingdom of Israel and Judah.

Now that we know what prophets usually did, now we need to set the stage for chapter 7 by quickly describing what the purpose of prophecy actually is. Prophecy in Scripture actually fulfills six different purposes: Firstly, prophecy called God’s people back to faithfulness to Him, second, many prophets received visions to tell the people about future events, thirdly, prophecy revealed the character of God and His purposes, fourthly, it provided hope and encouragement to the people when they were going through a trying time, fifthly, it acted as a witness to other nations showing that God is not only the God of Israel, but also the Lord of all nations and lastly prophecy laid the foundation for what would be taking place in the New Testament such as the coming of Christ and His sacrifice. As we will see today, the prophet Daniel will begin recording the visions he experienced that would be telling of events that would be taking place in the future. In chapter 7 Daniel’s vision is dealing with coming kingdoms that would eventually be coming to power leading ultimately to the coming of the antichrist figure at the end of the age.

This morning we will be looking at the first half of the chapter, which is made up of Daniel explaining the vision he saw regarding the future coming kingdoms, his description of God on His throne and finally the appearance of the Son of Man, which is the vision he had regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Please read with me **Daniel 7:1-10 “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and told the following summary of it. 2 Daniel said, “I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. 4 The first was like a lion but had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and set up on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. 5 And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and they said this to it: ‘Arise, devour much meat!’ 6 After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 While I was thinking about the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the previous horns were plucked out before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like human eyes, and a mouth uttering great boasts. 9 “I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. 10 A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were serving Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court convened, and the books were opened.**

**The Vision of the Four Beasts (vv. 1-8)**

As Daniel describes the vision, he tells us that this took place when Belshazzar was king, so we are going back to the king who saw the writing on the wall, therefore he was the last king during the Babylonian rule. In verse 2 we read that the four winds of heaven were stirring up everything that was about to appear. What we learn here is that everything about to appear will be things that will happen because of the will of God. He is sovereign over all the affairs of man, so these future kingdoms that will come to power will only do so because God is allowing it to happen.

When we look at the second part of the chapter next week, we will discuss in more detail the interpretation of the dream as well as what the fourth beast represents. However, today what we can do is identify the kingdoms that the first 3 beasts represent. The first beast in verse 3 is described as looking like a lion, but also having wings of an eagle. The feathers on the wings were plucked and then the beast stood up on it’s back two feet like a man being also given the mind of a man. When we look carefully at this beast, we need to look closely at the clues given to us in the image because it is these clues that shows us who this is representing. Once again, this beast had the head of a lion, eagles wings which were eventually plucked, stood on two legs like a man and then a human mind was given to it. Would anyone like to make a guess as to which king this is referring to? This beast is referring to King Nebuchadnezzar who was the most powerful king over the world during his reign. The head of a lion showed his power as being the most powerful. All of us know who the king of the jungle is, it’s the lion! Not only this but in the kingdoms of the Near East at that time the lion was a symbol of strength, royalty and authority. In Scripture Jesus Christ is referred to as the Lion of Judah! The wings of an eagle represent how the kingdom quickly expanded under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. He made the kingdom of Babylon great and was successful in his goals of expansion. The wings being plucked refer back to the way in which the king was humbled when he was forced to live like a wild animal for seven years. It is the last two details, however, that really gives us the details needed to conclude that this is in fact King Nebuchadnezzar.

This beast was lifted up from the ground and set up on two feet like a man. This makes complete sense that it is King Nebuchadnezzar because for the seven years he lost his sanity a lived like a wild animal he was most likely crawling around on all fours like an animal. It is at the end of that seven years when the king raised his head, looked to heaven and then gave God the credit for all of his success. When he acknowledged that God is sovereign over all the affairs of man and gives power to reign to whomever He chooses, the king was then able to stand up like a man and walk on his two legs again. This shows the restoration God provided to the king.

Finally, we are told in the end of verse 4 that a human mind was given to the beast. This human mind represents the fact that at the end of the seven years that the mind of a human was returned to him and he was given his sanity back. This beast represented King Nebuchadnezzar who was the first major world leader that would set the stage for the kingdoms that would come after him.

The second beast mentioned in verse 5 is described as looking like a bear having 3 ribs in its mouth which spoke telling the bear to arise, devour much meat. When we think about a bear this is a large and fierce animal, but not as majestic as a lion. The second beast refers to the Medo-Persian Empire, which took over Babylon after invading the city. We must remember that this happened after King Belshazzar had the writing on the wall interpreted by Daniel. Eventually the Medes united with the Persian Empire. The bear is said to be raised up on one side meaning that there was an imbalance of power. The Persian Empire was much stronger than the Medes because it is the Persian Empire that will eventually take over most of the world at that time. Now what do the three ribs in the mouth of the bear represent? These show the kingdoms that the Medo-Persian Empire conquered (Babylon, Lydia and Egypt). When those ribs tell the bear to eat much meat, they are illustrating the fact that the Medo-Persian Empire was a very aggressive nation who used their military strength to take over the world. This beast, therefore, shows the second kingdom that would exist leading to the eventual coming to power of the man of sin whom will be discussed near the end of the book of Daniel.

Now we get the third beast, which will be the last beast we discuss today. In verse 6 Daniel describes this third beast as looking like a leopard having four wings like a bird as well as four heads that were given dominion over the world. This beast represents the next major kingdom to come to power after the fall of the Persian Empire. This next king was Alexander the Great of Greece. He was a very powerful general who was able to defeat the Persians as well as any other kingdom that arose against him. A leopard is a hunter that is known for its speed and agility. Alexander was quickly able to conquer much of the known world in a very short amount of time. The four wings show that the swiftness of Alexander’s victories was unmatched making him a very deadly and powerful military leader. Alexander died as a very young man and after his death his kingdom was divided among four of his generals, so this is what the four heads on the beast represent. The dominion it was given tells us that Alexander and his four generals were given the authority by God to have control and power over all the other nations of the world. This Greek Kingdom also plays an important role in the coming of the last beast we will talk about next week.

**The Ancient of Days Appears (vv. 9-10)**

As the vision continues Daniel has an experience of seeing God on His throne accompanied by the immense number of people that were serving Him. As we take this vision in, we need to look closely at some of the ways that Daniel attempts to describe God. At the very outset, God is referred to as the “Ancient of Days.” Now why is this title given to Him by Daniel? This name provides for us two major attributes of God. First, God is eternal in the fact that He is always existing. When God instructed Moses to tell the people His name is “I am that I am” this shows that God always exists. Secondly, not only is God eternal He also is supreme over all of the kingdoms and earthly powers that will ever exist. There is no match for God when it comes to His wisdom, eternal nature and authority over the affairs of man.

God’s garment was as white as snow and His head was like pure wool. In these first two descriptions we see the holiness and purity of God on full display. How is the God of the nations different than the false god’s of man? A major difference is that we worship a holy God that is perfect and blameless in all ways. There is no sin, deceit or filthiness found in the Lord God almighty. This is why the Word of God as contained in Scripture and also the Word incarnate in Christ are pure and holy in everything they say.

His throne was ablaze with flames and a river of fire flowed out before Him. This fire represents the wrath of God because as He says many times in Scripture that He is a God of justice, punishing those who hate Him and making certain that all who do evil face the punishment they deserve. Not only is God the righteous judge, but the fire also represents the power of God to purify. Fire is used to kill infection in wounds and also is used to purify disease as well as provide warmth. The river of fire shows us that the judgments of God are always at work and that He never stops His involvement with His creation.

The myriads of people serving Him shows us that God has a court of servants who rule with Him and serve Him at all times. Not only does the court serve Him, but is assists Him with examining the books to judge all those who have lived to hold them accountable to His divine justice. As we will see when we discuss the fourth beast and the Son of Man next week, the account of God shared by Daniel and the vision that John the Apostle has in Revelation are similar. God is making Himself known to man and showing that everything is in His power and that man can trust in Him to remain in control of all things.

**What Does this Vision Mean for Us?**

All of the words recorded in Scripture have been provided for our well-being and knowledge. With that being said, the vision that Daniel is experiencing and recording here has information that we need to consider as we live under the authority of God. This vision was given to Daniel as the people were being punished in their exile. They had neglected the God who had saved them from slavery and delivered them to a good land. Even though He had shown them such goodness, they still rejected Him by serving the false gods that were in Canaan. This vision was reminding the people that God was still with them and that there was a reason to have hope for the future.

You and I as well have a reason to have hope for the future. When all of us face physical death, we will appear before God the Father and have to give an account for our lives. When we stand before Him what will we have to offer to God so that we can be permitted to be in His presence for all of eternity? If we think that we can stand there using our own goodness or deeds to win His approval we are gravely mistaken. There is no deed we can perform in this life that will make us holy and acceptable to our perfect God. But thanks be to God we do not have to rely on our own goodness or deeds to be acceptable. God provided for us, when we were still sinners, a perfect atoning sacrifice that paid the penalty for our sins and has made us acceptable in the eyes of holy God. Jesus Christ, whom Daniel will refer to as the Son of Man, has lived the perfect life we could not live and has given His life as the atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for all of our sins. What must we do to receive this forgiveness? We must have faith in Christ and believe that He died for our sins, which allows us entrance into God’s kingdom. Not only has Christ died for sin, but He also rose from the dead defeating its power showing us that those who trust in Christ will also overcome the grave. Thank God for such grace and love!

**Conclusion**

Today as we conclude our look at the first part of this vision let us remember that God’s Word has given us everything, we need to know so that we may be made acceptable in the eyes of our Holy God. We are not alone because we have the gift of the church to sustain and encourage us in life. In addition to the church God has also given us the gift of Holy Scripture which teaches us what God has done in the past and what He continues to do in our lives today. Finally, we have the Holy Spirit who serves as our teacher making known to us all of the words that have been given in Scripture. With His guidance each of us can experience the power of God in our lives and use what He has blessed us with to share this good news with others.

One final point that is also very important, we do not have to fear the future. God has planned out everything that will take place in the future and He will see to it that justice is done in every situation. Even though we see the world falling apart and also see that God is not honored by all people, we can rest in the assurance that we serve a God who is always with us and will abide by the promises He has made.