

FAITH

IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

DATE

April 18 & 19

WEEK

3 of 4

OVERVIEW

Daniel 7

KEY VERSE

Daniel 7:13

SETTING THE STAGE

In our last session we looked at the “even if” kind of faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were taken into exile along with Daniel. This week, God’s people are still in exile, having been taken out of Jerusalem and Judah into captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar captured them and brought them back to Babylon. This exile would last for 70 years. Daniel continued to serve God faithfully throughout his life though living in exile. Even when Babylon was overthrown by Persia, the leaders of the new empire recognized Daniel for his integrity and valued him as an adviser. Daniel remained faithful to God even when faced with death, and God blessed him for it and rescued him. ¹

Throughout these 70 years of captivity, Daniel served four kings represented in the chart below:

KING	EMPIRE	STORY TOLD IN
Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	Daniel 1-4
Belshazzar	Babylon	Daniel 5, 7-8
Darius	Medo-Persia	Daniel 6, 9
Cyrus	Medo-Persia	Daniel 10-12

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. 20/20 Foresight
2. The Ancient of Days
3. Keep Looking

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Book of Daniel was written in two languages - Hebrew and Aramaic.

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Setting the Stage, continued >

From the chart you can see that the book of Daniel was not written in a chronological fashion. The first 6 chapters deal with the biography of Daniel and his three friends while under three different kings. They began as teenagers in chapter 1 and by chapter 6, Daniel is facing the lions when 80+ years of age. Interestingly, the book was written in two different languages; chapter 1 was written in Hebrew, chapters 2-7 written in Aramaic geared for the Gentiles, and chapters 8-12 written in Hebrew geared for the Jews.

The powerful miracles recorded in Daniel chapters 1-6 show God's sovereignty at work for His people. The prophecies in chapters 7-12 show God's sovereignty over the Gentile nations and Israel by unveiling what He will do with them far into the future. ²

John MacArthur explains,

Chapter 7 of Daniel is pure future prophecy. It sweeps all the way from the life of Daniel to the return of Jesus Christ and touches the great epics of history in between. It is one of the chapters that lays out for us God's incredible, unchangeable, redemptive plan for human history. ³

Chapters 7 and 8 chronologically fit between chapters 4-5. It is after the death of Nebuchadnezzar and at the beginning of the reign of Belshazzar. It was a time of transition for the people of Babylon as well as a time of the unknown for God's people under the leadership of a new earthly king. God's message to Daniel via a dream, comes at a very critical time in the midst of their captivity, giving them a vision of the future.

Introduction

A few years ago I went to a leadership conference with one of the pastors at this church. The conference was at another local church and as the meeting started they had the PowerPoint presentation on the big screen in their worship center. I leaned over and whispered, "that would never happen at our church." And he whispered back, "what?" And I said, "the words on the screen not being sharp and focused, just a little fuzzy." He looked at me with his eyes glaring through his glasses and appropriately took his glasses off and offered them to me and said, "the screen isn't fuzzy, it's your eyes." Not long after - as I was a bit stubborn on the subject - I went to the eye doctor and got glasses.

¹ *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2012, p. 1135.

² Dr. Thomas Constable, www.soniclight.com, *Daniel*.

³ John MacArthur, www.gty.org, *The Coming of Christ Part 1*, sermon on Daniel 7, March 16, 1980.



I must admit, though I hate to admit, I can see better with the glasses. It did take some getting used to because mine have “progressive” lenses; helping me to see far away, mid-range and very near. So, it may look like I am always agreeing with you, but the truth is I am nodding my head trying to focus!

When dealing with prophecy in the Bible, we need to focus. Sometimes prophecy is to be seen near; what will happen very soon in the next few days, weeks, months, or years. Other times prophecy is mid-range; perhaps in the next several years or generations, and still other times it is far away in the distant future, time unknown.

Daniel 7 begins the prophetic part of the book. Although we will not be going through to the end of the book, this will provide a great picture of God’s faithfulness in His sovereignty. There are times when these chapters of Scripture look a bit fuzzy to us. We cannot quite focus on the trees for the forest, or the forest for the trees. And some of us are not even in the woods!

But, we should never shy away from a passage of Scripture because it is difficult to understand.

But, we should never shy away from a passage of Scripture because it is difficult to understand. In our Bible Study classes, we do not just hang out with the “feel good” passages, it is our goal to actually study the Bible in its entirety. With this year’s curriculum, we are asking the question “Is There More?” as we look at God’s plan and our purpose through the stories of Grace, Deliverance, Promise, and this month, Faith. And what better time to look at the faith and sovereignty of God than the week after Easter when Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of His death, burial and resurrection. Our goal this week is to put on spiritual glasses and get a clear picture or perhaps “less fuzzy” picture of what Daniel saw. Unbeknownst to Daniel, he had 20/20 foresight.

1. 20/20 FORESIGHT

Ironically in the year 2020, we have 20/20 hindsight that God gave Daniel a panoramic picture of the future of world history. Though Daniel did not see it come to pass and was literally physically sickened by what he saw (*Daniel 8:26, 27*), God provided him with 20/20 foresight into the political and spiritual world.

One thing for us to remember as we go along is what God says in Isaiah.

ISAIAH 46:9-10 *"I am God and there is none like me ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done."*

Let us put on our spiritual glasses and see how the 20/20 foresight unfolds. Read the passage below:

DANIEL 7:1-8 *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 related 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 and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand 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 thus they said 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 terrifying 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 contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

Most scholars and theologians believe the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2 which Daniel interpreted for him, and this vision in chapter 7 are similar. Compare:

Chapter 2 - The symbols were **inanimate objects**.

Chapter 7 - The symbols are **living and breathing animals**.

Chapter 2 - King Nebuchadnezzar saw the **world empires** in a **huge statue of a man**, while the **Kingdom of God** was symbolized by a **stone**, which a hand had not touched.

Chapter 7 - Daniel saw the **world empires** reflected in the **animalistic character** and the **Kingdom of God** is represented by the **Son of Man**.

Daniel's vision took place approximately 50 years after Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, so Daniel was in his late 60's at this point.

In Daniel 7, the four animals represent the four kingdoms. Look at the chart comparison.

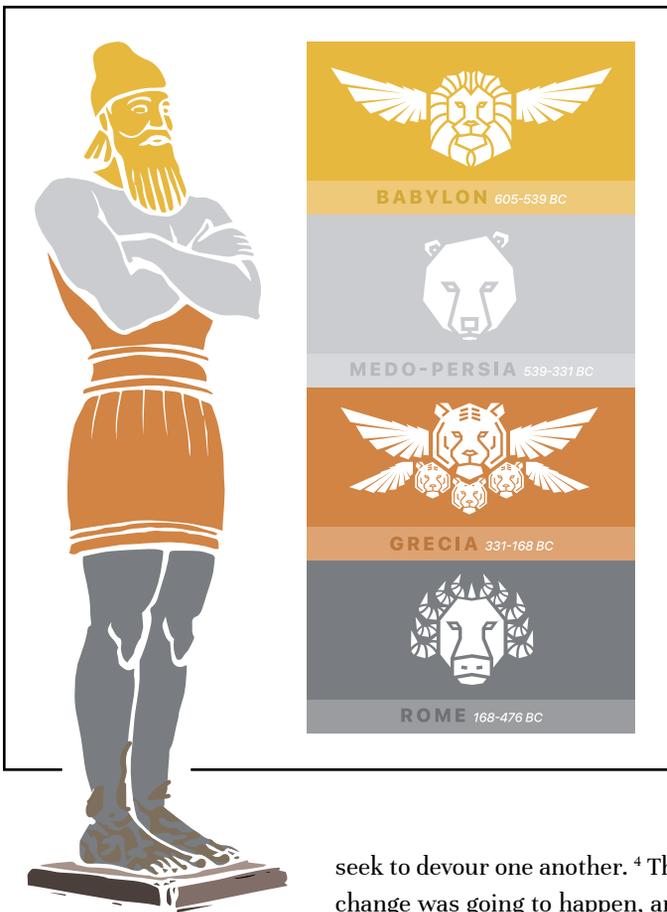
Remember Daniel is still in the Babylonian part of the chart; Belshazzar was the last King of Babylon and this is the first year of his reign. So, it is the beginning of the end, if you will.

For Daniel, everything depicted in the vision was in the prophetic future having 20/20 foresight. For us, we see most of it as historical fact, most having already occurred and viewed as 20/20 hindsight.

What God began in chapter 2 with Nebuchadnezzar, He has fleshed out even more with Daniel. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar saw a great and impressive statue made with valuable metals; Daniel saw dangerous beasts that ruthlessly devoured peoples and nations. To human eyes, the nations of the world are like Nebuchadnezzar's great image, impressive and important; but from God's viewpoint, the nations are only ferocious beasts that attack and

seek to devour one another. ⁴ There was not a specific timeline given to Daniel, only that change was going to happen, and it was going to be aggressive, challenging, and messy at times.

The Lion with eagle's wings represents Babylon; both animals are powerful, one on land, one in the air and yet we see the changing of their power. The wings are plucked off, perhaps showing the humiliation of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar towards the end of his life and then his



⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary OT*, p. 1369.

change of heart toward God in the animal standing on two feet with the mind of a human. But we see the transition taking place.

The Bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire; also powerful. Notice it is lopsided; one side taller than the other, most scholars think that represents the Persian dominance in the empire. The explanation for the three ribs in the mouth is a toss-up depending on who you read. The disagreement is found primarily in what countries they represent, but most all agree it shows they have conquered other countries to achieve their present dominance.

The Leopard with four heads and four wings represents Greece; most believe it reflects the speed of Alexander the Great's conquest. The four heads may represent the division of Alexander's kingdom into four provinces after his death: Egypt, Syria, Macedonia, and Pergamum.

Now the Fourth Beast described as dreadful, terrifying and extremely strong, had large iron teeth, different from the others and ten horns. Many scholars believe this to be Rome and the Roman Empire which became the strongest, most powerful, and influential of all Empires up until that time.

As Daniel describes this fourth beast he says in verse 8, "*contemplating the horns, behold another horn, a little one, came up among them....*" Most scholars see this representing the "antichrist."

Often we think of the prefix "anti" as the "opposite of" something. However, the more appropriate meaning of it in this context is "against" or "instead of" as it pertains to Christ. Warren Wiersbe explains, "The final world ruler will be both a counterfeit Christ and an enemy who is against Christ."⁵ John gives us a representation of this in Revelation 13:1-10. In fact, each of the animals, lion, bear, and leopard are also represented in Revelation 13 as John tells us a bit more of this ruler.

Back to Daniel 7 and our next point.

2. THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

Continue reading starting in verse 9.

DANIEL 7:9-12 *"I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture (clothing) was like white 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 attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened. ¹¹ "Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time."*

In this midst of this dramatic prophecy, we see the good news that God is on the throne. Do not be distracted by the description, rather embrace the majesty and authority of the Ancient of Days. This gives us faith in His Sovereignty. The Ancient of Days, God Almighty, the Creator, the Alpha and Omega took His seat on the throne. If everything else has looked a little fuzzy, a little bit out of focus; put spiritual glasses on and see this truth, this promise, this hope that builds our faith!

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⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary OT*, p. 1370.

The Ancient of Days took His sovereign seat; He is beyond compare:

- The Lion with Eagle wings is powerful, but not Omnipotent.
- The Bear with the ribs in the mouth is strong, but not Omnipresent.
- The Leopard with four heads is fast, but not Omniscient.
- The Fourth Beast is terrifying and dreadful, but not the Creator who spoke the world into existence and is the beginning and the end.

In times of war and rumors of war, we have the promise that the Ancient of Days will take His seat with full authority and sovereignty. Our faith is based on what we know.

In times of war and rumors of war, we have the promise that the Ancient of Days will take His seat with full authority and sovereignty. Our faith is based on what we know. Let's review:

- We know that God is on His throne.
- We know that God is in control.
- We know with 20/20 hindsight that God gave Daniel 20/20 foresight.
- We know that in this year 2020, we can have faith in the sovereignty of God in our lives.

We can be sure of the future because God has been faithful in the past. It may sound like a cliché, but that does not diminish its truth. "I don't know what tomorrow holds, but I do know who holds tomorrow," the Ancient of Days! The same one who held yesterday is the same one who holds today and is the same one who holds all of our tomorrows.

And the Good News just keeps getting better; look at the next verses.

3. KEEP LOOKING

DANIEL 7:13-15 *"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. ¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed. ¹⁵ As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me."*

These verses show the humanity of Daniel and a glimpse of his faith. Notice what he does in verse 13, "I kept looking in the night visions." We know this was a troubling experience for Daniel, he admits it in verse 15, but in spite of his fear, his confusion, his distress, his alarm and perhaps even his doubt, he "kept looking."

That in itself is a lesson for each of us. If we are honest with ourselves there are times when we are afraid, confused, or are experiencing doubt because of the "unknown." Or sometimes it is because of the "known." But whatever we are experiencing in life, even when we want to look away, look in another direction, remember Daniel "kept looking."

We can be sure of the future because God has been faithful in the past.

He did not ignore what was being revealed to him, though it obviously did not give him a good night's rest. He did not completely understand why he was being given this vision and what it fully meant, though God did interpret it for him to some degree.

Daniel kept looking and as he kept looking he finds the key to the entire vision; a new Kingdom! This is the heart and soul of the vision. There is coming a new King, establishing a new Kingdom that will be eternal, it will not pass away, and it will not be destroyed.

There is coming a final Monarch, a glorious King that will establish an eternal Kingdom. A Kingdom unlike anything the world has ever known. Every kind of kingdom and every kind of ruler has been temporary at best. But now there will be an Eternal King, an Eternal Kingdom; one that knows no boundaries or language barriers, known as the Son of Man.

Jesus used this title, Son of Man, to refer to Himself throughout the Gospels, 31 times in the Gospel of Matthew alone. Each time Jesus referred to Himself in this manner, it should have taken those who were listening back to Daniel 7:13. If they had been wearing their spiritual glasses, it should have been an “ah-ha” moment. But we know most people saw Jesus dimly, fuzzy, a bit out of focus. Let us not make that same mistake. For those of us who have eyes to see and ears to hear, let us take note and put on our spiritual glasses.

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Now verses 16-27 are the interpretation of the vision, though most of it is focused on the fourth beast, which was the most unusual. There are thousands of pages of books and articles that deal with these verses. However, we do not want to overlook this completely. Let’s pick it up in verse 19.

DANIEL 7:19-20 *"Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰ and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates."*

Even though this fourth beast is exceedingly dreadful, notice what Daniel does in verse 21.

DANIEL 7:21-22 *"I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom."*

Do you get the impression that Daniel wanted to look away in a different direction? Probably trying to close his eyes, but the images were still there and yet he “kept looking.” And as he kept looking, he sees the Ancient of Days! When life is fuzzy and out of focus, we need to do exactly what Daniel did; we need to keep looking and the Ancient of Days will come into focus.

In verses 23-25, Daniel describes the kingdom which the world has never seen; this is one of the two kingdoms to come. Though this kingdom will still be temporary. It is the kingdom of the Antichrist, which is described in more detail in Revelation 13-19. Whereas the other previous kingdoms declared war on other earthly kingdoms, this kingdom will declare war on the God of Heaven. Let’s look at the outcome; Spoiler alert! Remember Daniel had 20/20 foresight.

DANIEL 7:26 *But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion (the antichrist) will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.*

Yet another “temporary” kingdom losing the biggest battle ever fought.

DANIEL 7:27 *Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.*

This kingdom, the fifth and final kingdom, will be an everlasting Kingdom! The Ancient of Days, the Son of Man; victorious over all evil, over all earthly kingdoms, over all that is temporary. A reminder of what we celebrated last week during Easter, victory over the sting of death.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Two years later, Daniel had another vision with more detail about the “Little Horn” which is recorded in chapter 8. I think the last two verses of chapter 8 serve as a reminder of what we are to do with all this prophetic information.

DANIEL 8:26-27 *"The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future." 27 I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding. (NIV)*

Like Daniel, reading these words of prophecy can leave us feeling exhausted, sick and confused beyond understanding. Sometimes we allow the unknown, out of focus, fuzzy future of this world cause us to live in fear, doubt and not wanting to move forward.

Verse 27 says Daniel was exhausted and ill for several days. He could have easily lived in isolation or just focused on those prophetic visions and nothing else. But look at what he did in the second half of verse 27. Daniel got up and went about the king's business. Even though he was appalled by the vision, and it was beyond understanding, he did not let it get him down or distracted.

Daniel knew that even though the future was fuzzy and seemingly blurry and out of focus, God had it all in focus. The Ancient of Days, the Son of Man, will be victorious in the end for all eternity.

In the midst of this highly troubled and dangerous world, God is present, a God more powerful than all the beasts—a God who loves and nourishes rather than hates and devours. It is in this God we are given hope and meaning, life and salvation "forever and ever."

As we watch the news, hear about the wars and the various world leaders, let us look with spiritual glasses asking God for wisdom, discernment, courage and focus. But let us not be so distracted that we do not get up and go about the business of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man. May our faith be built upon the certainty of His sovereignty.