

One Like a Son of Man

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- [0 : 00] Daniel was a Jew, and my suspicion is that Jews hate the sea, or did hate the sea. They're landlubbers, you see. Daniel and his ancestors were land-based people, and to many Jews, the sea was a place of deep, dark, tumultuous heaving.
- It was dense, hostile, dangerous. The sea was a concentration of energy which sort of split people apart and threatened to disrupt and overwhelm the order of the world.
- It was chaos and disorder personified. And so it was that one night Daniel found himself dreaming of the sea. And, you know, gales were coming from every direction, and coming as a whirlwind over the sort of deep and murky blue waters.
- Supernatural winds were whipping up the waters, heaving, you know, you can imagine heaving, white-tipped waves, and then out of the mist they emerge. Out of chaos they come.
- Four creatures, powerful, threatening, increasingly sinister. It was the stuff of nightmares for a man like Daniel. The first creature you can see described in verse 4.
- [1 : 12] He was like a lion, the king of the animal world. He has wings like that of an eagle, the king of the bird world. And in his dream, Daniel is captivated by it, unable to shift his eyes from it.
- And then, as he watches, its huge and glorious wings are torn off, so that it stands on two feet like a human. And a human heart is given to it.
- The beast is strikingly similar, when you look at it, to Nebuchadnezzar, as he occurs in chapter 4. There, Nebuchadnezzar is both human, like Adam. He also becomes a beast. And his hair grows like the feathers of a bird, and his nails like the claws of a bird.
- So, verse 5 then describes a second beast beside the sea. Now, this second beast is terrifying as well. It resembles this huge bear, voracious and malignant in its strength.
- This bear, the bear in the ancient world, or in the world of Palestine, was the most dreaded animal. This one rears up on its hind feet. It stands there with one raised paw, apparently ready to strike at anything that comes into its path.
- [2 : 23] And with three ribs that are sort of protruding from its mouth, from its last meal, it's told by a verse from out of the dark, Get up! Eat your flesh!
- Eat your fill of flesh! And then, verse 6, A third beast occurs. This one's a fearsome predator, looking like a leopard. It too has wings like that of the first beast.
- This time, we have four wings attached to its back, or along with four heads on its shoulders. And because of the wings, the heads, and the eyes, this beast can see everywhere, move quickly and ably in any direction.
- Like the others, this beast is given authority to rule. Like the others, this beast is terrifying and beastly in its exercise of its rule. Then in verse 7, comes a fourth beast.
- This beast is so frightening, it just cannot be explained. No beast known to Daniel resembles it. Terrifying and sinister in the extreme, it crawls out of the sea.

[3 : 28] Then with ten large iron teeth, it crushes and devours all its victims, before it just marches on remorselessly, trampling over the remnants of its victims as it goes.

He was a beast that is clearly and explicitly fearsome and destructive. Ten horns. Horns are, in the Old Testament, symbols of strength.

Symbols of full-blown strength and power protrude from its head. And then, while Daniel's pondering the ten horns, there is another horn. He sees another horn emerge from the midst of them.

This horn is little, and it comes up in the midst of the other ten. And then before his eyes, three horns are uprooted before the one little horn. And as Daniel peers on, he notices the eyes of a man and a mouth which speaks arrogant and godless words.

The first three animals that we saw, beasts, are clearly somewhat under control. Not so with the fourth. The fourth is totally out of control, has a mind of its own, doing its own thing, its own way without God.

[4 : 37] Instead of living under the will of God, this fourth beast overreaches itself. It attempts to take control of its own destiny, takes on God himself, assaults the people of God, crushes them, defeats them.

And then without warning, in verse 9, thrones are put out, ready for the inevitable divine judgment. And as Daniel watches this new scene, there's no more horror, no more fear, no turbulent wind, no crushing of waves, no crushing, flying, stomping beasts.

No, instead of chaos, there's order and dignity. Serenely, the Ancient of Days takes his seat. His clothing is as white as snow, his hair is white, of his head is white like wool, his throne is, is capped with fire, and its wheels are spinning ablaze.

And before this God, this Ancient of Days, there flows a river of fire, and thousands upon thousands attend God, ten thousand upon ten thousand stand before him, and then in verse 10, his heavenly court sits down.

And the books are opened. And all wait for the judgment God will proclaim. It's a startling picture, isn't it? And its meaning is very clear.

[6 : 08] The picture is a picture of God in control. God, you see, has set a course for history. He's judged those who do not rule or act according to his kingly rule.

He wages war against opposing forces of chaos and brings them to account. History might look as though it's proceeding without pattern, without meaning.

The nations might seem to be autonomous and out of control, but in reality, God is not asleep nor absent. He's reigning and judging. Then look at verse 11 in your outlines there, or in your Bibles.

Despite the calm of verses 9 and 10, the little horn, well, he keeps going. He's continuing his campaign. And in his dream, Daniel continues to hear the arrogant, insistent, provocative voice coming out of that tiny little mouth of that little horn.

And then, as he continues to look, the beast is slain, and its body destroyed, and it's thrown into the blazing fire. And like other beasts, his rule is stripped finally of its authority.

[7 : 18] It's at that point that verse 13, in verse 13, the most incredible event occurs. You see, because as Daniel dreams, as he gazes at the destruction of the beast, another figure emerges.

There's no beast this time. No animal features. Instead, he comes one like a son of man. And that is a human-like figure, but not only human, but also a bit heavenly, because he comes on the clouds of heaven.

So a human, but heavenly creature. Not creature, but person. One like a son of man. And boldly, he comes into the courtroom.

He's led into the presence of the Ancient of Days. And the Ancient of Days hands him a kingdom. And he's given authority, glory, and sovereign power. And all peoples and nations and people of every language worship him, because his dominion will be an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom, one which will never be destroyed.

Friends, can you hear the contrast between this verse and verses 1 to 8? Can you hear it? In this verse, order. In those earlier verses, chaos.

[8 : 33] In this verse, human. In the earlier ones, beastly. In this, eternal rule versus temporary rule.

In this verse, endorsed rule versus condemned rule. Here was something that Daniel had longed for all his life. The lived out divine rule captured in a human being.

And yet, look at verse 15. Daniel's troubled. Some details confuse him. So he approaches one of those beings standing nearby and questions are asked and explanations are given in verses 17 and 18.

So if you have a look at it there, you'll see these verses and I'll read them to you. Well, reading from verse 15, Friends, I want you to notice what's going on here.

verse 17 and 18 is an explanation of verse 13. But I want you to notice the difference. In verse 13, the kingdom is given to one like a son of man.

[10 : 00] In verse 17 and 18, the kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High. I wonder if I can explain what's going on here. You see, I think what's being said is that in some way the one like a son of man is representative of all the holy ones, all the saints.

He's representative of everyone who wants to live under the overarching rule of God. They are like him. They, like him, live as human beings were meant to live as humans in the image of God under the rule of God.

So I reckon the thrust of this chapter, though it looks confusing at first, is straightforward and understandable. What's been said is this, that behind the world Daniel lives in is a heavenly or spiritual world.

and in many ways that world that is behind him is the real world. And in that world, on one side are the anti-God forces of chaos and disorder.

They're represented on earth by the beasts that come out of the sea. They're represented, in other words, by human rulers who reject the rule of God and tyrannize the people of God.

[11 : 13] On the other side are the pro-God forces. These pro-God forces are seen in the heavenly Son of Man, represented on earth by those who, by the saints or the holy ones of the Most High.

Can you see it there? A spiritual world going on. Anti-God forces, pro-God forces, represented on earth by human rulers and by the saints of the Most High.

Friends, in the middle of that courtroom, in the middle of that conflict is what? In the middle of that conflict which happens in heaven and on earth is a courtroom. And that courtroom tells you that the result of the pre-ordained battle is won, is known, is decided by God.

The saints of the Most High are going to receive the kingdom and win it at the hands of their representative in heaven, the Son of Man. The broad outline, the meaning, is clear.

Daniel, though, wants some more information and he gets it in verses 23 to 27 which we read. But verse 28 says that the explanation doesn't stop Daniel's anxiety.

[12 : 32] He's still deeply troubled. After all, you see, what verses 20 of those verses signifies that there are dark days ahead for the people of God. The people of God that Daniel knows and loves.

And in those dark days the only comfort will be that one day what is going on in heaven will be represented on earth. There'll be a day when all rights, when all wrongs are righted and when God is seen to reign.

And on that day his people will reign with him over all in submission to him and the heavenly Son of Man. Friends, that's Daniel 7. Now, let me tell you, if you haven't noticed, it's very different, isn't it, from chapters 1 to 6.

Very different indeed. You see, there's just stories about men and acting in a court, ordinary human beings. Here, we've shifted into a heavenly and cosmic scope.

So, although the general outline is clear, though, there are some mystifying bits and perhaps the most mystifying bit is this heavenly Son of Man.

[13 : 39] Now, I think if we'd understand this bigger, we're going to have to do some background work. So, in your outlines, if you pick up your outlines, you'll see that I've put a couple of other Bible verses there. I want you to look with me at Genesis 1, 27 to 28.

First page of the Bible. God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Friends, what is it to live in the image of God?

It is to rule. To rule over God's world, under God's rule. You can see this in the commentary in Psalm 8, which is a commentary in Genesis 1.

You made him, that is human beings, rule over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, all that swim in the paths of the sea.

[14 : 43] You see, both passages are saying that to be in the image of God is to rule over God's creation. Human beings living in the world under the will of God, exercising the will of God over God's world.

That is the way that God created us to be. Daniel 2 showed this in relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 2 showed us that Nebuchadnezzar was meant to rule rightly as God does.

Daniel 4 showed us that he didn't. There were times in his life when he did get it right. But most of the time Nebuchadnezzar got it wrong. You remember in Daniel 4 there comes a point when he lifts his eyes to heaven, sees God in perspective as it were, and becomes a human being again.

He has the mind of a man at that point. You see, Nebuchadnezzar was a mixed bag. And this is picked up in Daniel 7. The first place obviously is Nebuchadnezzar.

It's basically in style and at times it looks human. Such rule or human rule is given by God. But it can only be temporary because humans don't rule properly.

[15 : 58] And that leads us to understand the Son of Man. You see, the Son of Man has no best-leaf features about him. That is, he lives as humans we're designed to live under the rule of God.

And when you find a human being who does this constantly and consistently, what's God going to do with him? He's going to give him all will, all authority, all power, forever.

Because he's the first human being to have ever done it. And the world has been waiting for a human being like this. You see, only such a one is worthy to receive the eternal kingdom.

And he represents all of those who line up with him. Now friends, we've done a lot of work to get to this point. This is a really tricky passage of the Bible in some senses. And I guess most of you have been thinking, oh Andrew, don't you see it?

The Son of Man is Jesus. And that's right, isn't it? The Son of Man is Jesus. But I've told you the background so you might understand what is happening in the ministry of Jesus.

[17 : 02] I want you to understand why he called himself the Son of Man. And can you see it now? As he carried out his ministry on earth, Jesus was obviously aware of Daniel 7 and his world of thought.

He knew there was a battle going on. He knew he was caught in the midst of it. In fact, he knew more than this. He knew that he was the focus of this battle. And when Jesus, in Jesus and his ministry, heaven was stepping into earth for a little while.

And Jesus ended into this battle. And he waged war in it. He stilled the goat. Do you remember him stilling the waters? Saying, be silent.

Be still. What's he doing? He's saying he has the power of all creation and all the watery beasts that come out from it.

You can see that in Mark 4. He walks on the surface of the water as God himself walks on the recesses of the deep. You can see it in other places.

[18 : 05] In Mark 6, 45-52, where he casts satanic forces out of evil from people. He heals the sick. And in effect, he's saying the finger of God has come upon you as I do this.

I am showing you what is happening there in heaven. I am demonstrating the power of God in his kingdom. I am showing you behind the scenes.

I am the Son of Man who represents you before God. See, what like a Son of Man is where Jesus found his identity. That's why, do you remember when we looked at these verses in Easter when he was dragged before the authorities toward the end of his life?

Do you remember what he said? He said, you shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. In other words, you will see me, the Son of Man coming in judgment.

You see, Jesus knew that he represented and embodied the kingdom of God. That he represented and embodied the people of God. He knew that he represented and embodied what God wanted of human beings.

[19 : 13] And as he defeated Satan on the cross, so the kingdom will be ours and his, through his victory, he received the kingdom that we shall receive.

Jesus, at one point in his ministry, said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So blessed are those who come humble before God, live in dependence upon him, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now you can see, can't you, why Jesus is the second Adam. He alone has perfectly lived under the overarching rule of God. He's the perfect human being. He's lived for God's choice for the future.

And he will give the future, the kingdom of God, to those who fear God. So there's Daniel 7. Friends, this is one of the purple passages of the Old Testament. It's grand, it's deep, it's awesome.

It's all about God's purpose in his world from Genesis 1 all the way through to the death of Jesus and through to the end of time. But think about Daniel 7 for a moment and what it means for us.

[20 : 22] You see, Daniel has been rolling back the heavens for us and letting us see what God is doing there. Daniel has been giving us a peek into heaven and urging us to look and see that God is there.

God is acting. God is fighting. He will be victorious. He is the one behind history and he's telling us there are situations in which you will need to know this.

There are times when you will not understand this world and you need to see God, his battle and his victory, though it is not evident. There's times when you need to look into heaven and see what is going on there because it will not look like it on earth.

And when it happens, draw comfort from the fact that the God who is there sitting on his throne judging in the Son of Man who has given all rule. Now, in all of this, what should we then do?

How should we then live? Well, the New Testament urges us in the following manner. I'm just going to read some verses from the New Testament. Listen to them. The first one comes from 1 Corinthians 15.

[21 : 30] Verse 58. Paul says, therefore, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know your labour is not in vain.

Can you see it there? You know. You see it to heaven. You know what God's purposes are. You know it's not in vain. 1 Timothy 4.

In the presence of God and of Jesus, of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead. And in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge. Can you see what he's saying?

In view of what is going on and where it will end, I give you this charge. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time is coming when people will not put up this sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

[22 : 30] They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you keep your head in all situations. Why? Because you know. Keep your head in all situations.

Endure hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Discharge the duties of your ministry. 2 Peter 3. The day of the Lord will come like a thief.

The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

That is, since that's going to happen, what sort of people should you be? Well, you ought to live your godly and holy lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed his coming.

For that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

[23 : 41] Friends, I want to close with a passage, with how this passage, Daniel chapter 7, motivated one person in history. I want in your Bibles for you to look up Acts chapter 6 and 7.

So can you look up in your Bibles? If someone's got a page number for me, they could shout it out. Acts chapter 7. 890.

890. Now I want to tell you just a bit about what this is. This is the story of a speech by a man called Stephen. He was one of the early Christians. Chapter 6 verse 5 tells us he was full of the Spirit.

Chapter 6 verse 8 tells us he was full of grace and power and did great wonders and miraculous signs. Verse 10 says he was powerful in theological argument. Verse 11 says he was charged with blasphemy.

Acts 7 gives the speech he gave in his defense. It's a long speech that records history of God's work in the Old Testament. It climaxes with Stephen telling the people, the Jews, that they have hard-heartedly misunderstood God.

[24 : 47] That they've resisted the Holy Spirit, they've persecuted the prophets, they've betrayed and murdered the Messiah. And the Jewish leaders are understandably very, very angry. And I want you to listen carefully to what Stephen says.

Right at the end of the chapter there, full of the Spirit, he looks up to heaven. That is, he looks behind the scenes, behind the heads of those who persecute him, behind them into heaven.

He looks and he sees the glory of God. And he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he tells people around what he sees.

He says, look, I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And it's actually just to think upon those words.

What was different about Stephen's words about Jesus from the rest of the New Testament? What is Stephen saying that's different from the rest of it? What is Jesus doing according to Stephen?

[25 : 51] He's standing. What's he doing elsewhere in the New Testament? He's sitting at the right hand of the Father. Here he's standing. Well, what's the standing a bit about?

I think he's exercising judgment. He's vindicating his servant. Friends, you see, I think Stephen grasped Daniel 7. He used the language of Daniel 7. And he looks up and he sees Jesus, the righteous judge, the one true king.

And he looks to him for vindication. That's what Daniel 7 is about. Jesus, the saved man, is he to whom you look when life seems out of control.

Friends, I wonder if you do that. When life looks out of control, do you think there's the ancient of days?

And the son of man who has the will of God in his hand, who will bring order even though the light world seems chaotic. You see, Jesus is God's promise that light will triumph.

[26 : 58] He is God's guarantee that God's purposes will win out. He is the assurance that God's rule will bring peace and shelter for God's people. That they will inherit the earth.

That the kingdom he received will be their kingdom. And he, and thou with him, will possess it forever. Yes, friends, that's right.

Forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus.

Thank you for his sacrifice on the cross. Exercising your will on behalf of us, your people, and of your world. Father, we pray this day for our brothers and sisters around the world.

Who long for vindication. Father, we pray for the men that are experiencing persecution. Or whether they just feel that their world is out of control.

[28 : 11] Father, we thank you that you are the ancient of days. Who sits amongst order and judgment. And that you have and you will judge all the world through your son.

We thank you for the son of man. For his wonderful will. For his rule on the cross. Judging the evil one and forgiving sin.

Thank you for what Stephen saw this vision of him standing. Vindicating and judging. Father, please help us to see eternal realities.

To look beyond the everyday. To the eternal and everlasting. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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