

We are continuing this morning with our series “Jesus in the Old Testament.” You can not fully understand Christmas, or Jesus, without understanding the Old Testament story and how it all points ahead to him. Last week we looked at King David and how his story points ahead to Jesus, the king of kings. After David, things go from bad to worse, and Israel is invaded and conquered by the **Babylonians in 605 BC**, who take the Israelites who are not killed as captives to Babylon. Among those captives is a man named Daniel, an Israelite whose character and integrity and ability to understand dreams and visions from God cause him to be a very important servant to king Nebuchadnezzar (also known as Belshazzar) and then King Darius, once the Persians conquer the Babylonians. Chapters 1-6 of Daniel are court stories about Daniel and three friends – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – who remain courageously loyal to God in the midst of very challenging situations.

Chapters 7-12 include a series of apocalyptic visions about the rise and fall of succeeding empires. **Apocalyptic literature is written in times of persecution, looking forward to a time when God will judge evildoers and save His people. It uses visions, dreams, cryptic language, and symbols in order to encourage the faithful that God is sovereign and will eventually destroy every other kingdom until His kingdom reigns forever.** Like Revelation, it is written when the church is under persecution, and it is meant to encourage the church that God is sovereign and that every other kingdom will eventually be destroyed and only God’s Kingdom will reign forever.

This morning we will be in Daniel 7, looking at how this chapter in Israel’s history points ahead to Jesus and the redemption God will bring to the world through His Son:

Daniel 7 - *In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. ² Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ³ Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. ⁴ "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. ⁵ "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' ⁶ "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it*

was given authority to rule. ⁷ "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast-- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. ⁸ "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. ⁹ "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. ¹¹ "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. ¹² (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) ¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. ¹⁵ "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-- yes, for ever and ever.' ¹⁹ "Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws-- the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. ²⁰ I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. ²¹ As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. ²³ "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. ²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak against

the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. ²⁶ *"But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.* ²⁷ *Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'* ²⁸ *"This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."*

So Daniel has a vision of four beasts, four monsters, four kingdoms, that trample the earth in great wickedness and violence, followed by a little horn. Then a court scene develops in heaven, and God calls the world to account. The last monster is put to death. One like a Son of Man appears before the throne and is given all authority, and will reign forever along with the people of God, who have suffered but now will be rescued and will reign alongside the Son of Man. Historically, the interpretation of this dream has been the following:

Lion with the wings of an eagle - Babylon

Bear raised on one side with three ribs in its mouth - Medo-Persian empire (the three ribs are the three countries it has already devoured; raised up on one side to signify that the Persian side was dominant) from 539-330 BC

Leopard with the four wings like a bird - Greco-Macedonian empire of Alexander (333-323) – at his death it was divided among four generals, represented by the four wings

Awful beast – Roman empire

The little horn represents Antiochus IV, who set out to crush Jewishness in Jerusalem by forcing them to adopt his policy of Hellenizing his lands. He desecrated the Holy Place by erecting a statue of Zeus there in 167. This led to the Maccabean revolt, commemorated by Hanukkah.

The most important part of this passage, however, is verses 13-14:

¹³ *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.* ¹⁴ *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

God, the ancient of days, moves to render worldwide judgment. One like a son of man comes – a human, but he is worshiped, so he must be divine. He comes from the clouds of heaven, also suggesting divinity.

***Psalm 68:4** - Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds--his name is the LORD-- and rejoice before him.*

And he is given all authority, glory, and sovereign power, a dominion that will never pass away. After a period of intense persecution, the little horn, this Antichrist figure, will be stripped of his power and be completely destroyed forever. Then the Messiah will begin his uninterrupted rule and reign forever.

²⁷ *Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'*

The saints, the people of God, will rule along with him.

What does this mean? How does this point us to Jesus?

1) **Jesus, the Son of Man, is Messiah and King, sovereign over heaven and earth.**

Jesus' favorite title for himself was Son of Man – and as I read some of the passages, you'll see how he meant it to bring to mind Daniel 7 – someone who is both human and divine, who has come from heaven, and has been given authority to rule and to judge:

***Matthew 9:5-7** - Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the **Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." ⁷ And the man got up and went home.*

***Matthew 16:24-28** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the **Son of Man** is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person*

according to what he has done. ²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the **Son of Man** coming in his kingdom."

Matthew 19:27-30 Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" ²⁸ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the **Son of Man** sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Matthew 24:25-31 See, I have told you ahead of time. ²⁶ "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. ²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ³⁰ "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the **Son of Man** coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the **Son of Man** comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 26:62-66 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the **Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.

John 5:24-27 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the **Son of Man**."*

John 9:34-37 *To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the **Son of Man**?" ³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."*

Acts 7:55-56 *- But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the **Son of Man** standing at the right hand of God."*

Jesus is the Son of Man, come from heaven, both human and divine, given authority to judge and to reign over heaven and earth. Jesus has ascended to heaven and is at the right hand of the throne of God, ruling over the world, and one day he will return to judge the earth. Are you ready for this?

2) God's people may suffer now, but in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had judged evil, and one day will destroy evil, giving His people an eternal kingdom – it seems like evil is winning, but Jesus is king, and He will judge and make an end of evil. At the cross it seemed like the powers of evil had won, but Jesus conquered the grave.

So why is there still so much evil? This reign is already/not yet. He reigns but has not yet put a final end to evil. Like the president who has been elected but not yet been inaugurated. Or, as Oscar Cullman put it in his book *Christ and Time*, it is like the World War II distinction between "D-Day" and "V-Day." When the allies established the Normandy beachhead on "D-Day," the war in Europe was really won. Yet, "V-Day" remained in the future and the battle went on. Likewise, when Jesus came as God's Messiah (Deliverer), it was "D-Day," the beachhead of God's kingdom was secured. It literally broke in upon us as the future became present. Nevertheless, we await its final consummation. When Jesus returns it will be "V-Day." The Christian life is then lived in this tension between the kingdom come and coming. He reigns but that reign has not been fully implemented yet.

We live between the accomplishment of the reign of God and its full implementation. We cry out “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

There is a reason the kingdoms of this world are pictured as monsters and beasts. They are the stuff of nightmares, bringing persecution and fear. At the moment the monsters are running the world, but the time is approaching when God will judge the world and rule in favor of the holy ones of the most High.

One of the reasons for receiving the prophecy in Daniel 7 is to let them know that even though they will return to Jerusalem, it will not mean peace. There will be yet another persecution. Don't get so caught up in figuring out what kingdom is what. The reality is that monstrous kingdoms will keep arising until Christ returns. One world war follows another. One evil leader follows another. Stalin is followed by Hitler. Al Qaeda is followed by ISIS. Same thing with diseases – AIDS, cancer, Ebola. Curing one doesn't bring lasting peace. Another arises. Look at the natural disasters, and the manmade ones. Every week brings a new one. So why do you look to anything in this world for your peace?

Think of what happened in Newtown. Imagine that being the reality of your life every day. That is what it was like for Daniel's audience, living in exile. But in the midst of that horror, God is reigning and has a plan:

Revelation 21:1-5 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

The intent is to encourage God's people living under foreign rule that God will judge evil. They will be rescued in order to be enthroned alongside their God. Jesus has fulfilled Israel's calling, and now God's people can reign along with him.

Revelation 22:1-5 - *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life,*

bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Our suffering will be no more, and we will reign with Him forever.

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

There will be no true peace until Christ returns. But when He returns, all the monsters of this world will be destroyed, and we will live in peace. So keep your eyes on the throne room, and trust in Jesus.

3) In the meantime, we bring God's kingdom by suffering for our God. Jesus suffered in order to bring about the kingdom, and we will do the same.

At the moment, the world is ruled by monsters. The principalities and powers of this world are cruel. Jesus entered our world and suffered and through His suffering and death brought victory. We will suffer as well. But one day God will judge, and there will be vindication. Those who would implement Jesus' kingdom are called to suffer and die alongside of Him. We are here to address the evils of the world in the light of the victory at the cross.

Colossians 1:24-29 - Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Just like Paul, we suffer alongside our Christ for the sake of His church and this world, to bring His hope and love and life to our broken world. Jesus is the good shepherd, who sees the lion, the bear, the leopard, and the beast coming and lays

down his life to protect the sheep. And in the same way, we are called to love and give ourselves for this world.