



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Daniel 7:1-16

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English Standard Version

“Horrible and Heavenly Power”

This is the 6th sermon in the series on the book of Daniel entitled,
“A Broken World and a Sovereign God.”

Daniel 7:1-16

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. ² Daniel declared, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. 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. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ 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. 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. ⁸ 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.

⁹*“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.
¹⁰ 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 judgment,
and the books were opened.*

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.”* ¹² *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were
prolonged for a season and a time.*

¹³ *“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.*

¹⁴ *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.*

¹⁵ *“As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head
alarmed me.”* ¹⁶ *I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all
this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things.”*

*Heavenly Father, once again we have come to Your Word and we're humbled before it. We
confess, Lord, that in our ignorance, we struggle to understand it. There are people here this
morning who need to hear the message of this Word. So we ask that by the power of the Holy
Spirit, You enable us to learn from the Prophet Daniel. By it show us Your sovereignty over
history and events. And may You teach us our great need for faith in Your Son. Do this in and
for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' name, and for His glory, Amen.*

INTRODUCTION: *The End of the World* ¹

The end of the world is a remarkably popular topic these days. Hollywood movies, as
always ... a useful cultural barometer, **are a clear witness** to our fascination with the end of the
world.

Over the last several years, we have seen films in which the future of life on earth is
threatened by aliens, asteroids, floods, frost, killer viruses, lethal machines, mutant creatures, and

¹ The Introduction and the Exposition of the text is adapted from *Daniel: Reformed Expository
Commentary* by Dr. Ian Duguid, pages 105-121. Most of the descriptions are taken from the study notes
on Daniel by Dr. Duguid and Dr. Paul Wegner found in the *ESV Study Bible*.

nuclear holocaust ... **just to name a few**. This interest may stem from the existential angst, which is sort of societal high anxiety, which comes from the constant threat of terrorist **attack**, or a growing awareness of humanity's incredible ability to make this planet **uninhabitable**, or from some root cause that we haven't discovered yet. Wherever it comes from, however, it's undeniable that there's more interest in the end of the world these days than there's been for a long time, at least in my lifetime.

This phenomenon should make this a good time to study the apocalyptic portions of the Bible, because they're largely about **the end of the world**. If people really want to know how the world's going to end — whether it will be with a bang or a whimper — what better place to turn to than the Word of the Sovereign God who controls all of history?

Yet for many Christians, the apocalyptic parts of the Bible, such as the last half of Daniel or the Book of Revelation, are **sealed books**. They're nervous about entering them because of fear that they **simply won't understand** what they find there. Now, it doesn't help that some preachers (or popular fiction writers) expound these books in such a way that they claim that the current configuration of the Middle East exactly fits the end-times scenario that they've constructed.

These scenarios, which are made up of a last-days cocktail of two parts Daniel, three parts Revelation, with a dash of Ezekiel thrown in, end up resembling one of these composite beasts of Daniel 7. These complicated end-times scenarios tend to combine different elements of the Biblical text into a single piece, even though these texts **cannot** be easily harmonized by a plain reading of **any** of those texts. And it all leaves you wondering, "Is there another way to understand these Biblical passages, a way that through sane and sensible interpretation uncovers the message of these passages for believers in all times and places?"

If we understand the central purpose of these passages and focus our attention on what's **clear and straightforward** rather than on what's obscure and complicated, then we'll find blessing and encouragement in the apocalyptic parts of the Bible. And what's more, Christians who disagree on the end-times can agree on **these central truths** ... whether the Lord returns sooner or later.

But before we go there, we need to take a moment to talk about ...

BACKGROUND: *Understanding Apocalyptic Passages*²

To understand any kind of writing, we need to understand its purpose. We usually make such judgments intuitively. We instinctively know when a sentence doesn't make much sense, such as one that begins, "The stars will fall from heaven, the sun will cease its shining, and the moon will drip blood ... and the rest of the country will be partly cloudy with scattered showers."

A pretty obvious mismatch: The first part of that sentence is apocalyptic; the second part is a weather report. And that's the problem with a lot of these end-times scenarios books. They're taking apocalyptic literature and trying to make it sound like a weather report. And it just doesn't work.

So what does work? Well, first of all, we have to define what apocalyptic literature is, and I've printed it there in your bulletin outline.

Biblical apocalyptic is a revelation of the ending of this present age, which is an

² The definition of Biblical Apocalyptic is by Dr. Duguid who adapted it from *The Apocalyptic Imagination* by John J. Collins and *Old Testament Apocalyptic* by Paul Hanson.

age characterized by conflict, and its replacement by the final age of peace. It shows us ahead of time the end of the kingdoms of this world and their replacement by the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. The revelation is unfolded in complex and mysterious imagery, and has the purpose of comforting and exhorting the faithful.

Therefore, apocalyptic literature proclaims a theology of hope to those whom the world has marginalized. It reminds us that God is presently on His throne and that **He will ultimately triumph**.

In the meantime, whatever the cost today in terms of pain and suffering; faithfully following God is the only way to go. People constantly complain about how bad the world is, and it's pretty bad, but know that they did the exact same thing in Daniel's day, and in Jesus' day, and in Apostle's day, and throughout church history. But those who read apocalyptic literature **correctly** — those who take the time to understand what Daniel and Ezekiel and Revelation (which is also called "The Apocalypse of St. John") are all about — these are the ones who have seen Heaven opened **and know how the story ends**.

And so these are the ones who look forward ... **with unshakeable hope** ... to their final vindication when at last the day comes for God to decisively act to bring in the final age of salvation with the triumph of the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

That's the point of apocalyptic literature. "Yes, it's bad, but this is not all there is; the best is yet to come. And when it comes, you will see the Jesus is victorious. And the followers of Jesus will win with Him."

And with the resounding chorus of Handel's *Messiah*, we shall proclaim, **Job 19:25**, "**For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.**"

And so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of the Book of Daniel, since we're not following this in chapter order but chronologically, now we're in chapter 7, and here we find ourselves trying to understand ...

v. 1-8: A VISION OF MONSTERS

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. ² Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. 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. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' 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. 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. ⁸ 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."

The first thing we see here is that we have moved into a new era. There is a new King ...

Belshazzar. The age of Nebuchadnezzar is over and gone. And yet Daniel is still in Babylon and still serving in the King's court.

And one night Daniel has a vision, verse 2, *"I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea."* Immediately we see that we're in the realm of metaphor and imagery, rather than straightforward description. In the Bible the sea was used as **a symbol of chaos and rebellion against God**, which is why the Psalms repeatedly tell us that God is mighty because He rules over the winds and waves of the sea. And thus, when Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He was demonstrating **His power** as the Son of God.

And in this vision, Daniel sees **monsters**. Now these aren't just large and dangerous, like the Tyrannosaurus Rex of *Jurassic Park*. Rather, they're terrifying because they're **evil**, agents of **chaos and destruction**, and utterly **opposed** to God.

This stirred-up **sea** produced **four** startling creatures, one after the other, each more frightening than the one before. Most interpreters see these as representing the same kingdoms as the image of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. Based on this understanding, the **first** beast, verse 4, *"was like a lion and had eagles' wings,"* a mixture of animal and bird, which represents Babylon. This beast signifies the strength and majesty of a lion combined with the speed and power of an eagle. Both images were used by Jeremiah to depict Nebuchadnezzar in **Jeremiah 49**. This beast had his wings plucked off and was transformed into a man, recalling the humbling and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar at the end of Daniel 4.

The **second** beast, verse 5, was *"like a bear. It was raised up on one side"* —either poised and ready to spring or grotesquely deformed. And this bear represented the Medo-Persian Empire. Many scholars think the raised up side suggests the unequal power of the two countries combined in the Medo-Persian Empire, with the Persians being much stronger. It had a mouth full of the ribs of its previous victims. However, he was told to arise and devour even more (i.e., the Babylonians). This empire controlled the land from Egypt and the Aegean Sea on the west to the Indus River on the east.

The third beast, verse 6, was another composite animal, *"like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads."* The leopard represents Alexander the Great and his speedy conquest of the civilized world, and the **"four heads"** represent the division of his kingdom into four parts after his death. It combined ferocity and speed with the ability to see in all four directions at once. Leopards are known for speed, keen eyesight, and keen hearing, allowing them to stalk their prey and pounce unsuspectingly. But the four wings emphasize even more the element of speed, which corresponds well to Alexander the Great's conquest of the known world by age 32. Alexander invaded Asia Minor in 334 B.C., and within 10 years had conquered the whole Persian Empire. After his death in 323 B.C., his empire was divided among four of his generals. These four rulers are symbolized by the four heads. Notice that **"dominion was given to it,"** suggesting a higher power controlling these actions.

The fourth beast, verse 7, cannot be described in terms of earthly animals. It was *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,"* symbolizing the multiplied strength of the Roman Empire.

And it has this bizarre imagery of the horns, verse 8, *"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."*

If this vision represents the Roman Empire; it emphasizes its ruthlessness. The Roman Empire was significantly different than the earlier empires, for it far surpassed them in power, longevity, and influence. The world had never before seen anything like it. There's all sorts of debate over what or who the horns symbolize and who the little horn is, and so on. I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on that, and in fact, I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on these beasts and the interpretation ... mostly because that's next week's sermon. And all of that is sort of beside the point ... **because of what comes next.**

And what comes next is ...

v. 9-12: A VISION OF HEAVEN

*“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.”*¹⁰ *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 judgment, and the books were opened.*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.”*¹² *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*

At the center of Daniel's vision was the heavenly courtroom, with thrones set up for judgment. **“And the Ancient of Days took his seat,”** God himself, sat on the central throne. **“His clothing was white as snow,** representing uncompromising and radiant purity as we see in **Isaiah 1:18,** *“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”* **“And the hair of his head like pure wool,”** symbolizing the wisdom that comes with great age. His chariot-throne **“was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire,”** images of the divine warrior's fearsome power to destroy his enemies.

“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.” A thousand thousands represent angelic attendants, **and ten thousand times ten thousand** represent not one kingdom but all the kingdoms of the earth standing before God.

This vision forms a remarkable picture, especially when we remember how reluctant the Bible is to describe God elsewhere. Most descriptions of God are given in terms of His attributes — being all-knowing and all-powerful. Think of when God appeared to Moses in Exodus, or when God appeared in a vision to Isaiah. In both scenes you actually have very little description of God Himself.

So why do we have such a detailed picture here? Daniel is painting the real world — that is, the world to come — in **glowing images** to counter the constant propaganda of this present evil age. Every day our eyes see this world and everything it offers in all its glory. And our ears hear its songs of beauty and wealth and power and fame.

At the same time, **everyday**, our eyes see all the horror and evil of this age, seen in the tragedies of disaster and disease, famine and war, and which is brought before us most vividly in the persecution of the saints where our ears cannot shut out their screams.

This scene depicts in powerful imagery a judge who has the **wisdom** to sort out right from wrong, the **purity** to persistently choose the right, and the **power** to enforce His judgments.

Then we're told that *“the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.”* The books represent God's records of the deeds of those on the earth, which we see echoed in **Revelation**

20:12, “*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, **and books were opened**. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*”

And then as Daniel kept watching, the beast with the boastful horn continued to mouth defiance at the heavenly court, it was swiftly slain and its body thrown into the fire. All the other kingdoms were allowed to remain for a time set by God and then were incorporated into the following kingdom.

And so here Daniel conveys to us **the greater reality of the world to come**.

He wants us to understand that the rewards of this age are empty prizes; the golden trinkets of Belshazzar are worthless ... just as his time’s already up. In the same way, the horrors of this age have no power to do us real harm. The monsters we dread are as toothless as the lions in Daniel’s den, for **God is the Judge**, and He is our judge. It’s His tribunal before which we’ll stand, and what’s written about us in His book will determine whether we reign with the saints forever, or spend eternity in the fire with the beast. **It’s that black and white**. As Jesus Himself said, **Matthew 10:28**, “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*”

But then we’re reminded that there’s another kingdom coming, a better kingdom, and we get to see that kingdom with ...

v. 13-16: A VISION OF CHRIST³

The Ancient of Days is not the only character in this scene, starting at verse 13, “*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.*”¹⁴ *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.*¹⁵ “*As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me.*”¹⁶ *I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things.*”

For Daniel, this must have been a puzzling picture, because this being seems to combine in one person both human and divine traits. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this phrase “**son of man**” often distinguishes mere human beings from God, as we saw in our responsive reading this morning from Psalm 8.

However, this “**son of man**” seems greater than any mere human, for to “*come on the clouds*” is a clear symbol of divine authority. **Psalm 104:3**, “*He makes the clouds His chariot; He rides on the wings of the wind.*”

What’s more, when this “**son of man**” comes into the presence of the Ancient of Days, verse 14, “*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.*” These attributes aren’t simply the authority that God gives to human kings such as Nebuchadnezzar. He’s far greater than Nebuchadnezzar, because He will rule over the entire world forever.

Now it’s easier for us to understand this, this vision of a God-man, because we have the benefit of hindsight, and can see the prophecy’s fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

³ Eugene Peterson quote comes from his book *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, page 30.

Jesus claims He will fulfill this role, **Mark 14:61-62**, “*But He remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked Him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”*”⁶² And Jesus said, “*I am, and you will see **the Son of Man** seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.*”

And the Jewish leaders understood what He was saying, since they immediately accused Him of blasphemy. However, He will ultimately fulfill this role in **Revelation 19** when Jesus comes at the end of the age to judge and rule the nations. Jesus refers to Himself as “**Son of Man**” more than any other title.

When people heard Jesus use the term “**son of man**,” they had to **decide** which type of “**son of man**” He was — the human one of Psalm 8 or the divine one of Daniel 7. Technically He was both, but it took **faith** to believe He was like the “**son of man**” in Daniel.

In His humanity, to quote Eugene Peterson, “This Son of Man has dinner with a prostitute, lunch with a tax-collector, wastes time blessing children when there were Roman legions to be chased from the land, heals unimportant losers, and ignores the high-achieving Pharisees and influential Sadducees.”

And ultimately He hung upon a cross, bled, and died. But His divine majesty, though veiled while He was here on earth, was still present and evident. He taught as one with authority (Matthew 7:29), He forgave sins (Luke 5:24), and He spoke of His kingdom (John 18:36). Both divine and human aspects were present because Jesus is son of man and Son of God, very man and Very God.

For the first disciples, the lesson that Jesus was the son of man focused on the humanity of Jesus. They had to learn that salvation doesn’t come through the advent of a triumphal heavenly figure wearing a crown and bearing a sword, blasting His opponents with fire from Heaven. Rather, it comes through the advent of a baby in a manger, who grew up to bear a crown of thorns and carry a cross. As we know from **Mark 10:45**, “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*”

However, for the hearers of the Book of Revelation, the lesson of the Son of Man was reversed. They were in **the same situation** as Daniel’s hearers, suffering intense persecution for their faith, and so needed to be reminded of the central lesson of Daniel 7. The second coming of our Lord and Savior will **not be the same** as His first coming. Christ is **not eternally** suffering upon the cross (which is why we have a cross and not a crucifix), but He will return as the Son of Man in glory, riding on the clouds, bearing a sharp sickle, to bring final judgment on His enemies. **Revelation 14:14**, “*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand.*”

And just like the first disciples, we have to **decide** which “**son of man**” Jesus was — the human one of Psalm 8 or the divine one of Daniel 7. And we have to ask ourselves if we have enough faith to believe that He’s both.

CONCLUSION: *Where's Your Jesus Now?*⁴

Karen Spears Zacharias was a crime reporter in Eastern Oregon who was called to a terrible scene one day. A man was wildly unstable, and he had gone to his parent’s home armed with numerous weapons. This man, whose name was Eric, broke into his parent’s trailer home with his common-life wife, whose name was Robin. And the first thing they did was shoot his father, whose name was Charles, and left him for dead.

⁴ The Conclusion is adapted from *Where's Your Jesus Now? Examining How Fear Erodes Our Faith* by Karen Spears Zacharias.

His mother was Shirley, she was a gray-haired grandmother, and was the legal guardian of five of his seven children and a devout Christian. They burst into Shirley's home, took everyone hostage, and threatened all their lives. Everyone was scared, and as you can imagine, there was a lot of crying and a ton of fear.

And in the midst of all this, Robin turned on Shirley, pushed her down on her bed, straddled her and put a gun to her chest, looked at the picture of Jesus on the wall over the bed, and scornfully yelled at her, ***"Where's Your Jesus Now?"***

And Shirley just looked at her calmly, and said softly, *"He's right here."*

Robin laughed at her, and mocked her, and said, ***"You really believe that?"***

Again, very softly, Shirley looked right at her and said, *"I do."*

And she survived that day to share that story with Karen Spears Zacharias, who was a woman of faith herself and a member of a PCA church. True story.

And when we read Daniel's story of the Son of Man, you have to decide if He's the mere man who can't do anything about history or events, or if He's the divine Son of Man who *"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."*

"Where's Your Jesus Now?" Decide which you believe.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, at this time, we pray that You would take our breath away with a vision of the Kings of kings and Lord of lords, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the One who lives, and reigns, and is coming again. Give us the strength to go on in a fallen and broken world, for we ask it in His name, and for His glory. Amen.

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Micah 5:4

"And He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth."