

Sermon – 21/10/2007 pm

Kingdoms Come and Kingdoms Go

Study Text: Daniel 7:1–8

Many people in this world put their hope in the power of men and of money. A prominent professor recently resigned his academic post to form a new political party. When asked why he wanted to enter politics he said he wanted to change the world.

Governments are full of men and women who want to change the world. Many want to make their mark in the history of this world. The walls of parliament house are lined with brass busts of leaders, many of whom are now in the grave. Who can recall their names? Who can point to how they changed this world. When you cast your vote in a few weeks will you be hoping for a better world?

Nations rise and nations fall. Kings come and kings go. In the Bible we are told that God is the judge who puts one down and exalts another (Psalm 75:7). The kingdom of God is the only kingdom that remains forever. *The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever* said the angel blowing the seventh trumpet in the apocalyptic vision of John (Revelation 11:15). The message in this apocalyptic vision of Daniel is basically the same.

Chapter seven is a turning point in the book of Daniel. In one sense it still belongs to the first half of the book for it is still written in Aramaic. This was the common language, the language the world could read. Later chapters are written in Hebrew, the language of the people of God. In another sense however, it is the first of Daniel's dreams or visions. Up till now he had interpreted the dreams of the king. Now *Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed* (7:1).

The introductory words to this chapter are the same as those in chapter 2 vs. 28. There they were spoken with regard to King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In a dream God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar *what will be in the latter days* (2:28). For God to speak through a heathen king, goes against the doctrine of some men today – as does God speaking through a dream. But in a vision of a metallic man God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, albeit with Daniel's interpretation, the future world kingdoms, kingdoms leading up to the time of Christ (2:44). Daniel's vision closely parallels that of King Nebuchadnezzar in that it details future kingdoms or world superpowers.

Daniel was about 80 years old when Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon. It was in the first year of Belshazzar that Daniel had this vision. He was on his bed, the usual place to have dreams, but this was no ordinary dream. Daniel knew this so he wrote down the main points of it. His dream was vivid and complex, and it troubled him (7:15). He sought, and was given, the interpretation of his dream.

Lion

Daniel saw four great beasts coming up out of the sea (7:3). They came in quick succession with one fading from the scene as the other emerges. The Great Sea is usually the

Mediterranean Sea but may be any sea stirred up by winds from heaven. Here is a picture of turmoil and chaos as usually depicted by the sea in apocalyptic writing. John saw a horrible beast coming up out of the sea to do Satan's dirty work (Revelation 13:2). The beast John saw was actually like all the beasts Daniel saw wrapped up into one.

The first was like a lion with eagle's wings (7:4). The UK has the lion as its emblem, and the USA has the eagle. Are these the nations symbolised here? Many nations have taken the lion as their emblem. Many palaces are adorned by images of lions, including most probably that of the king of Babylon. After all, the previous chapter was all about lions. Just as the lion is the king of the beasts so the eagle is the queen of the birds. It is swift and powerful. I once saw a wedge-tailed eagle swoop and pluck out the eyes of a newborn calf.

Daniel saw the wings of the eagle get plucked off and the lion stand up like a man; and it was given a man's heart (7:4). This may be an allusion to the time Nebuchadnezzar was driven from his place to live like a beast. He was a beast on two feet with a man's heart. He was forced to acknowledge the Almighty God who rules over the nations. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom and God would take it away, as he did soon after Daniel had this dream (5:30).

This beast, like the other three, symbolised a king or kingdom Daniel was told (7:17). So what kingdom did the lion symbolise? In Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a metallic man four kingdoms were also symbolised. The head of gold stood for the kingdom of Babylon (2:37f). Here also the lion stands for Babylon.

Bear

Suddenly a second beast like a bear emerged from the sea (7:5). It was raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth. The bear is another powerful beast used as a national emblem by Russia and other nations. What nation would be in view in Daniel's vision? Not Russia but the kingdom that followed Babylon, the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. They became the world superpower in the time of Daniel (5:31, 6:28).

The bear, raised up on one side, probably points to the predominance of the Persians in this federal coalition. The three ribs may indicate the three great victories won by the Medes and Persians, or it may simply be a symbolic of a large mouthful.

The bear was told to arise and devour much flesh. Who was the 'they' that told them to do this (7:5)? We are not told, but clearly this beast or kingdom was under direction from a greater power, just like the first and third beasts. Notice the word 'given' in the text – one had *dominion given to it* (7:6). They were not independent even if they thought and acted as if they were.

Leopard

As Daniel looked he saw a third beast, this one like a leopard (7:6). The leopard is known for its violent swiftness. The four wings on its back would enhance its speed. Alexander the Great as a young general conquered one nation after another in amazing speed to establish the Greek empire within just four years. He died at the age of 33 years leaving no successor. His kingdom was divided among four of his generals. This may be what was symbolised in the four heads on the leopard.

Fourth Beast

The fourth beast was beyond description in terms of jungle creatures. It was a dreadful and terrible looking, and exceedingly strong (7:7). It was like a giant front-end loader running out of control. Huge iron teeth devoured and crushed all that was before it. This beast ‘must surely signify a singularly voracious, cruel, and even vindictive world power’.

The iron teeth link it to the legs of iron representing the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. The feet of that image were of iron mixed with clay. It was the feet that were struck by a stone causing it to crumble and fall. In Daniel’s vision this fourth beast was also the last. It was the one slain and destroyed in the fire (7:11). The Romans were renowned for their brutality in gaining and maintaining world domination.

The fourth beast is further described as having ten horns. Horns are symbols of power. As Daniel observed and considered this beast he saw a little horn emerge and tear out three other horns. Ten horns point to ten kings that will arise from this kingdom (7:24).

The little horn attracted Daniel’s attention. On it were *eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words* (7:8). With these eyes and a mouth this little horn was more human-like than the other beasts. With its mouth it could boast and speak pompous words, words of blasphemy against God (7:25). Because of this blasphemy, and an arrogant disregard for justice and mercy, divine judgment came upon this kingdom.

Conclusion

Daniel was living in Babylon in the 6th century BC. He was confronted by idolatry and the rule of men who called themselves god. In this dream Daniel is shown what will happen in the world with regard to ‘superpower’ nations. God revealed this to him, and he wrote it down to show that God is the ultimate ruler of the nations.

Daniel was at the forefront of the conflict between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. Such conflict would continue for the next 500 years until thrones were put in place, the ancient of days was seated, and one like the Son of Man came on the clouds of heaven.

The kingdoms of this world come and go according to the will and power of God. God will establish his kingdom on the earth, an everlasting kingdom that shall not pass away. Daniel, like Abraham, saw the day of Jesus Christ and was glad (John 8:56). Daniel, like Abraham, lived in a foreign country as he *waited for the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Hebrews 11:10).

Are you by faith waiting for the kingdom of God to come in all its fullness? Jesus is coming again to bring to completion the kingdom which he inaugurated in his first coming. He is coming on the clouds of heaven to dwell in the New Jerusalem where those whose names are written in the Lambs book of life reside.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon