

This morning we're going to look at the record of a dream you'd never forget if it had been yours. It's the dream that the prophet Daniel had one night in the 6th century B.C. To say it was a bizarre dream is an understatement. It was a prophetic dream, a vision pertaining to future events. We can see the dream by turning to Daniel 7.

Proposition: We want to examine three significant factors in Daniel's dream as recorded in Daniel 7:1-14.

- I. The Preparation for the dream (1)
 - A. What are possible responses to prophecy?
 - 1. Fascination: "I'm intrigued by prophecy."
 - 2. Dogmatism: "I've got prophecy all figured out."
 - 3. Skepticism: "I can't understand it, so why try?"
 - B. What is the purpose of prophecy?
 - 1. It exalts God.
 - 2. It humbles us.
 - 3. It motivates us to live for God now.
- II. The Particulars of the dream (2-14)
 - A. Daniel saw four beasts (2-7).
 - 1. The first was like a lion.
 - 2. The second was like a bear.
 - 3. The third was like a leopard.
 - 4. The fourth was dreadful and different.
 - B. Daniel saw a little horn (8).
 - C. Daniel saw a scene in heaven (9-14).
 - 1. The Ancient of Days sat at the judge's bench (9-10).
 - 2. The beasts were defeated.
 - 3. One like a son of man came in the clouds (13-14).
- III. The Purpose of the dream
 - A. We may be troubled by the dream (15).
 - B. We must not miss the obvious.
 - 1. God has a plan for His world.
 - 2. There is a rival to God's plan.
 - 3. The kingdoms of men are sure to fail.
 - 4. The kingdom of God will last forever.
 - 5. We must make sure we're right with the One who holds the future.

I. The Preparation for the dream (1)

Notice Daniel 7:1, "In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed; then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters."

When we arrive at Daniel 7, we find ourselves in the chapter that begins the second major division of the book of Daniel. The first six chapters of Daniel are primarily historical narrative--they tell us what happened to the people of God living in the 6th century B.C. while in exile in Babylon. The final six chapters of the book, however, are not historical stories, but prophetic visions. They look not at the past, but at the future.

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The second half of the book records a series of visions which God gave to Daniel, four visions to be specific, four prophetic visions.

A. What are possible responses to prophecy? Allow me to suggest three common responses (all of which, by the way, I've experienced in my spiritual pilgrimage).

1. *Fascination: "I'm intrigued by prophecy."* As a teenager, films like "A Thief in the Night" and "A Distant Thunder" captured the attention of many of us. I found it breath-taking to consider the fact that Jesus was going to return. Lots of my peers were intrigued by prophecy as well (even my non-Christian friends), and we pondered the biblical events such as the rapture, the tribulation, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the Millennial Kingdom. Unfortunately, for many, fascination with the future had little impact on living in the present.

2. *Dogmatism: "I've got prophecy all figured out."* Do you remember the popular prophecy-conferences of the 1970's? I remember being fascinated by the charts that expert teachers had developed to detail what the future would hold. They had it all figured out, from who the anti-Christ was (Henry Kissinger was a popular), to which European nations corresponded with the prophecy of the ten toes in Daniel 2.

I became enamored with trying to guess when it would all happen. I had a good friend, and together we developed a time-frame of our own. We were sure that the Lord would return by 1983! But (in case your wondering), Jesus did not return in 1983.

3. *Skepticism: "I can't understand it, so why try?"* For many, the subject of prophecy tends to be divisive, with various camps raising their flags and waving their banners. "I'm a Pre-Millennialist." "Well, I'm a Post-Millennialist." "Not me. I'm an A-Millennialist." "Me? I'm a Pan-Millennialist (I believe it will all "pan out" in the end)."

After being bombarded by the labels for a while, we're inclined to throw in the towel and say skeptically, "Why study prophecy? Who can figure it out anyway? I'm not even going to try. I'll just stick to what's relevant, the present."

I don't know where you're at in your pilgrimage this morning, but I want you to consider something Charles F. Kettering said, "We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there."

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Some of it is easily understood and applied. Other parts of Scripture are quite mysterious and perplexing. But of this we can be sure. It's all good, and God knows we need it all, including the prophetic sections.

Think about the following statement. Just because I can't figure something out does not mean it's not important, nor does it give me sufficient reason to avoid it.

In fact, did you realize that Daniel himself didn't understand much of what he saw?! I want to show you how Daniel responded to the prophetic truth he learned. According to 7:15, after seeing the first prophetic vision, "I, Daniel, was *grieved in my spirit* in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head *troubled* me." 7:28 indicates he turned pale.

After his second vision, he responded this way (8:27), "And I, Daniel, fainted, and was sick certain days...and I was astonished at the vision, but *none understood it*." Isn't that interesting? Daniel himself said that when he received his vision, it was beyond understanding (his words in 12:8 are similar, "And I heard, but I *understood not*").

Daniel's admission after his third vision is quite amazing (10:15-17 NIV), "While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, 'I am overcome with *anguish* because of the vision, my Lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My *strength is gone* and I can *hardly breathe*.'"

So here are the words Daniel used to describe the impact prophetic material had on him: grieved in my spirit, troubled, my strength gone, can hardly breathe, and I did not understand.

You say, "I don't get it. If I can't figure something out, what value is there in studying it?" What's the purpose of prophecy if we can't understand it all?

B. What is the purpose of prophecy? There is value, for studying prophetic sections in the Bible accomplishes at least three purposes in our lives.

1. *It exalts God.* The truth is, only God knows everything about everything. Have you ever worked with someone who had an answer for everything? Some people act like they know everything about everything, but they are kidding themselves.

Turn to Revelation 1:1 and notice something very important. The greatest book of prophecy in the Bible is the final book of Revelation. Why did God give us this book? To reveal end-time events? Yes, but that's a secondary purpose. What's the primary purpose? The first verse tells us--the book is designed to reveal the Person of God to us. It's "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The first result of prophecy is it exalts God.

2. *It humbles us.* God has told us enough about future events both to cause our hearts to quake, and to quiet them again. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." Prophecy should drive us to our knees.

3. *It motivates us to live for God now.* We can't change what God has said will happen in the future. But we can prepare for it. If you knew you were going to get fired this Friday, would it affect how you spent your money this week? If you knew you were going to lose your spouse next year, would it affect how you treated him or her this year? Knowing God's prophetic plan should motivate us to live for God now.

With that lengthy introduction, let's look at the preparatory statement in v 1. When did Daniel say the dream came? "In the first year of Belshazzar." Don't miss that. There was a new king on the block. Daniel had served under Nebuchadnezzar for many years, but the stability of his reign was gone. There were a couple of kings that reigned in between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar--one was assassinated, another was knocked off by a conspiracy, and another left the country on an archaeological dig in search of the moon god. That king's son, Belshazzar, actually ruled in his father's absence.

It was King Belshazzar's first year. It was a year of political transition. Perhaps Daniel wondered, "What will happen to me, to my people, now that this new man is on the throne?" In that context, God revealed to Daniel His plan for world history.

There are four main visions in Daniel 7-12. The first (chapter 7) was a vision of four beasts. The second, which occurred two years later and is recorded in chapter 8, was a vision of a ram and a goat. Daniel saw the third vision, that of a man, as recorded in chapter 10, in the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia. We see the details of Daniel's final vision in chapters 11-12, a vision of the kings of the north and south (he saw it "in the first year of Darius the Mede"; 11:1).

After seeing vision #1, Daniel did not write down all that he saw, but tells us in 7:1 that he preserved for us "the sum of the matters" (the main thrust of it). Let's look at it.

II. The Particulars of the dream (2-14)

Daniel saw three particulars in his dream.

A. Daniel saw four beasts (2-7). He states in v 2, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea." Notice the details (in Bible study, before interpretation must come observation). The vision occurred at night. The first thing Daniel saw were four winds of heaven stirring up the sea. It was a scene of turbulence, and out of it, Daniel saw four unusual creatures (3).

1. *The first was like a lion.* V 4 says, "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings; I beheld till its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man; and a man's heart was given to it." The first beast, then, resembled a lion, but with wings like an eagle. Its wings eventually were torn off, after which it stood like a man, and was given a man's heart.

2. *The second was like a bear.* Notice v 5, "And behold, another beast, a second, like a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between its teeth; and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh." Beast #2 looked like a bear with its paw raised, ready to strike (LB). In its mouth were three ribs. A voice indicated the bear was certainly no pet, for it devoured its prey.

3. *The third was like a leopard.* V 6 reveals the third beast was like a leopard with four wings, four heads, and dominion. The final phrase is passive, implying that its authority to rule was given to it.

4. *The fourth was dreadful and different.* The LB describes the fourth beast in these terms (7), "Then, as I watched in my dream, a fourth animal rose up out of the ocean, too dreadful to describe and incredibly strong. It devoured some of its victims by tearing them apart with its huge iron teeth; and others it crushed beneath its feet. It was far more brutal and vicious than any of the other animals, and it had ten horns."

What bizarre images! A lion with wings, a bear with three ribs in its mouth, a leopard with four wings and four heads, and a dreadful beast with iron teeth and ten horns!

At this point, we must mention that Daniel's vision in chapter seven parallels the vision of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter two. That vision also had a four-fold division, with an image consisting of a gold head, a silver chest and arms, a mid-section and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of part clay, part iron. The four parts represented four, successive world empires (2:37). So in chapter seven, the four beasts represent four kingdoms (7:17).

Who were these four kingdoms, these four world empires? The first unquestionably was the Babylonian kingdom. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar in 2:38, "Thou art this head of gold." Conservative scholars interpret the following three beasts to represent the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire, and the Roman empire.

I find it interesting to note what caught Daniel's eye. He tells us in v 8. It wasn't the beasts per se, but what? "While I was thinking about the horns (NIV)." Notice Daniel was "thinking" (KJV "considered"). He exercised his intellect. The meaning of the vision was not obvious to him. He had to think.

Footnote: The church today has been influenced by anti-intellectualism. Many Christians don't want to think. They come to church to "feel good." Ephesians 4:23 calls us to be renewed in the spirit of our *minds*.

While pondering the horns on the fourth beast, Daniel saw a second particular in v 8.

B. Daniel saw a little horn (8). He describes it in v 8 (NIV), "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."

Observe that the little horn had eyes and a mouth, namely, human characteristics. Even if we had no commentary on this verse, based on the simple observation of the verse we would conclude then that this little horn represents a man, an ungodly ruler. What's more, the ten horns which precede it were also men who were rulers associated with the fourth kingdom (Walvoord, 162).

Ten horns, that's five times the natural number of two possessed by most animals. Ten horns speaks of the extraordinary power of the fourth beast. Yet Daniel beheld the little horn uproot three of the ten horns, indicating some type of power-play.

Thus far in his vision, Daniel observed an earthly scene. In v 9, however, he began to behold a quite different perspective, a heavenly scene.

C. Daniel saw a scene in heaven (9-14). Don't miss what's happening here. It's like watching a television that has a picture in a picture. Daniel sees the first scene, what's happening on earth. He sees the what's happening from human perspective, as kingdoms of men come and go. Then, he sees the big picture, the scene in heaven, and that changes his entire perspective of what's happening on earth. Here's what he saw, three images.

1. *The Ancient of Days sat at the judge's bench (9-10).* Follow the action of verses 9-10 (NIV), "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat." Who is this "Ancient of Days" who is seated on a throne in heaven? Listen to His description, "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. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him."

Stop there for a moment. Wouldn't it be amazing to have a video of this! Daniel saw God! He saw God on His throne. He saw a river of fire flowing out from His throne. Why fire? In the Bible, fire frequently depicts God's presence, and specifically God's judgment (Mal 4:1).

Notice what Daniel saw in the courtroom of heaven. "Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened (10)."

What's going on in heaven in verses 9-10? The heavenly court is in session, and the Ancient of Days has taken His seat at the judge's bench. Judgment is about to begin.

The scene corresponds to what John saw in Revelation 4-5. The Ancient of Days seems to refer to God the Father, as distinct from God the Son who we'll see in v 13. God has man's number, and He's about to call it. An innumerable host of men and angels minister before the glorious throne of God. The Judge of all the earth is about to do right.

2. *The beasts were defeated.* A voice from the earthly scene captured Daniel's attention in v 11 (NIV), "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." In v 12, we learn that though stripped of their power, the other beasts were still living. Soon, they would all be destroyed. By whom?

3. *One like a son of man came in the clouds (13-14)*. Here's the climax of Daniel's vision (13-14), "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him." Who is this one who is like a son of man that has access to the very throne of God? Conservative scholars agree that it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

V 14 is convincing proof (NIV), "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." The beasts have come and gone. Man's kingdoms are no more. Jesus reigns.

III. The Purpose of the dream

Robert F. Kennedy said this, "Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not." What should we get out of Daniel's dream?

A. We may be troubled by the dream (15). Daniel himself was (15). He was grieved in his spirit because of it. We want to feel good. The fact is, there's a time to not feel good. When you contemplate the future of the unredeemed, it hurts.

B. We must not miss the obvious. I want to offer a word of caution. Don't go out of a limb in interpreting Bible prophecy. Say no more than, and no less than what the Scriptures warrant. And remember, our goal is not to support an eschatological system. Our goal is to rightly divide the Word of God, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

There are five obvious truths we can derive from Daniel's prophetic vision.

1. *God has a plan for His world.* That's good to know, isn't it? One time president of the Moody Bible Institute, William Culbertson once said, "Sometimes those of us who hold that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming are spoken of as pessimists. I think it can be truly said that we are really the only ones who have any right to be optimistic."

2. *There is a rival to God's plan.* From the first day he committed cosmic treason in heaven, to the day when he will be cast into the lake of fire, Satan has and will seek to rival God. He rebels against God, and seeks to lead humanity to follow him. Will he succeed?

3. *The kingdoms of men are sure to fail.* Babylon failed. So did Medo-Persia and Greece, and in the end, so will the revived Roman empire. The little horn will arise and create quite a commotion, but in the end, he too shall fail.

4. *The kingdom of God will last forever.* The day is coming when the wicked will be destroyed and the godly will worship the Son of man forever. The Puritan writer Thomas Watson said, "Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset; eternity to the wicked is a night that has no sunrise."

We see the goal of history in Daniel 7. The Son of God is going to destroy the kingdoms of men, and establish His eternal kingdom so that His people will worship Him forever. That's God's goal. The question is, is it your goal? The scene in v 14 reveals that one day people from every nation will gather before the throne of Christ to worship Him. The most obvious lesson of Daniel's dream is this...

5. *We must make sure we're right with the One who holds the future.* Are you worshipping Jesus Christ right now? Are you right with God? There's a German proverb that says, "Forever is a long bargain."

Response: We've learned this morning that we will worship the Lord forever. But we don't have to wait to worship Him. We can do it now.

**Hymn of Response: #72 "We Will Glorify"*

**Congregational Prayer*

Are you ready for the future? Are you ready for the events that Daniel 7 says are sure to come? A question we must all ask is, "How can I be ready?" The answer is this. Make sure you are right with the One who holds the future!

We're going to take time to respond now, to reflect on God's Word. With our heads bowed, consider some questions.

Do you know for sure you are saved? Do you know that your future is secure in Jesus Christ? You need not fear the future. If you will call out to God right now, repent of your sins, and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can be saved!

To those who are saved--Is there anything in your life of which, if Christ returned today, you would be embarrassed? Are you right with Christ? Is there any hidden sin in your life? Confess it to Him now, and choose to forsake it by His help.

Do you have any bitterness in your heart towards another person? The truth is, some of us are going to be standing side by side before Jesus' throne with people we can hardly stand now! We must confess these attitudes as sin.

**Time of Response in Prayer*

Now that we've taken time to make sure we are right with Christ, let's worship Him by singing to Him.

**Worship through Singing:*

#97 "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

#82 "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"

**Men's Quartet: "In Times Like These"*