

“And the Time Came”

The Fourteenth in a Series of Sermon

Texts: Daniel 7:15-28; Revelation 13:1-10

Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 of the prophecy which bears his name, maps out the future of the four great ancient middle-eastern empires with uncanny accuracy. Daniel’s vision dates from 550 BC—the first year that Belshazzar was king of Babylon—but covers historical developments until the rise of the Roman empire four centuries later. In this amazing vision, Daniel sees four fierce and frightening beasts which represent the same successive empires which Nebuchadnezzar had seen in the vision of the metallic statue which YHWH had given to him (and recounted in Daniel 2): the Babylonian empire, the Persian empire, the Greek empire (under Alexander the Great and his successors), and then finally the fourth and most powerful and frightening beast of all, the Roman empire. What makes Daniel’s vision so much more than a mere lesson in ancient near-eastern history is that this vision is given five centuries before these events actually occur. But Daniel is also given a vision of the heaven court in session. He sees one whom he describes as “the Ancient of Days” presiding, with one “like a Son of Man” being led into his presence, possessing a glory beyond all human comprehension, with thousands and tens of thousand attendants. Daniel sees what so many of God’s people across the ages have desired to see—a glimpse of what heaven is like and what transpires in God’s presence.

What readers of the New Testament know, which Daniel did not, is that this one like “a Son of Man” whom Daniel sees is none other than Jesus Christ. When interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the metallic statue, Daniel describes what he sees (Daniel 2:44–45). *“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”*

Coming a generation later, Daniel’s dream recounted in chapter 7 reveals the missing element of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream—who or what is the stone which crushes the metallic statue, specially the fourth empire? Daniel reveals that it is YHWH who directs all of human history to the ends to which he has determined through the person and work of the Son of Man (Jesus)—the mysterious stone seen by Nebuchadnezzar. No human empire, no matter how great it may appear to human eyes, will escape YHWH’s verdict which will be meted out in the heaven court on judgment day, when Jesus returns to raise the dead, judge the world, and make all things new. God will crush all the kingdoms of this world which rise to challenge his divine authority. Daniel, certainly, did not comprehend the full meaning of what he sees in his vision, but with the 20/20 vision of New Testament hindsight, we know that what Daniel saw was none other than the heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus—that “one like a Son of Man.”

In both visions (Nebuchadnezzar’s in chapter 2, and Daniel’s in chapter 7), the fourth empire (Rome) plays the critical role as a future oppressor of God’s people. The fourth beast (empire) of Daniel’s vision is the most frightening of all and does terrible harm to the people of God. Yet YHWH will inevitably bring each of these empires to ruin (including Rome). The reassurance that God controls and judges these empires is of great comfort to Daniel and the Jewish exiles then in Babylon who have been under the oppressive heel of a pagan empire (Babylon—the first beast) which forcibly took many of them from their

homes in Judah 70 years or so previously.

Daniel's vision maps out the future course of history as it impacts God's people presently living in exile in Babylon, who will eventually return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and YHWH's temple (a matter addressed in a later vision in Daniel 9). It also reminds Daniel that as he stands before the greatest men of his age (i.e., the great king Nebuchanezzar and successors such as Belshazzar) that these men rule only by YHWH's permission. No matter how cruel, powerful, or indestructible these oppressors may appear to be, even while pursuing their own ends, they are also accomplishing YHWH's sovereign will.

While still future to Daniel, the content of these visions are much more than a history lesson for us—they remind us that God is in control of all human affairs and that human history will, one day, come to that end to which God has decreed. Therefore, Daniel's visions grant God's people in every age and under the most dire of circumstances the most important thing any of us can possess in times of trial and uncertainty—hope. This vision tells us that YHWH wins in the end, no matter how bad things look, and no matter how things may appear to us. YHWH is in complete control of all people and nations. For as Daniel has witnessed in this vision, the Son of Man's kingdom is everlasting, unlike all the great empires which arise. His kingdom will endure forever, long after all the kingdoms of the world are destroyed.

Before we consider the second half of the vision in chapter 7 (verses 15-28), we begin with a brief recap of the first half of the chapter. In a night vision (a dream), Daniel saw four frightening beasts. The first (v. 3) was like a lion (the symbol of Babylon) with wings like an eagle which were plucked off, informing us that YHWH limits its conquests. This beast is made to stand and given a man's mind (which recalls Nebuchadnezzar restored to sanity after his breakdown). The second beast (v. 5) was like a bear with three ribs in its mouth—symbolic of three smaller empires it devoured previously. This is the Persian empire. It was made to rise and was directed to devour as YHWH directs it. A third beast appears (v. 6). This one was like a leopard with four wings, symbolic of the speedy rise of the Greek empire, which, under Alexander the Great defeated the Persians. This beast had four heads—possibly symbolic of the four kingdoms (the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms) into which it was divided after Alexander died. Or, more likely, this empire extended to the four corners of the earth (the four points of the compass), but had one head, Alexander. This beast too was given its authority to conquer by YHWH.

But it is the fourth beast which frightens Daniel the most. He tells us in verse 7, *“after this,”* that is after the previous three empires arose in succession, *“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.”* As we have seen, this beast corresponds to the fourth empire of Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the metallic statue, the feet of iron mixed with clay which devours all who oppose it. Daniel does not compare this beast with any earthly creature, for no earthly creature is as frightening, nor as powerful.

Unlike the other beasts, it has ten horns, symbolic of its great power and ferocity. The very sight of this creature frightens Daniel. What is more, in verse 8, Daniel tell us, *“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.”* This “other horn” seeks to control the actions of the beast, but is restrained, and therefore able to pluck up only three of the ten horns. But its boastful speech (“great things”) coupled with the fact it possesses eyes and a mouth suggests that this is a king or ruler arising from this fourth empire. We will learn more about this horn momentarily, but it is clearly an Antichrist figure of some sort, speaking blasphemies against God, and waging war upon the saints (the people of God).

In sharp contrast to the tumult surrounding the creatures and the empires they represent described in verse 2 when “*Daniel declared, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea,’*” the scene in the vision shifts to the heavenly court, already in session, and where there is peace and order in contrast to the chaos brought about by the four beasts. Daniel attempts to describe what he sees in verses 9-10, but words fail him. “*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. 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.*” This is one of the few glimpses we are given in all the Bible of YHWH and the glory surrounding his heavenly throne. The highly symbolic language here (YHWH does not really have white hair or a beard) points to holiness, righteousness, and final judgment. The attendants are the angels and redeemed saints.

Suddenly, this courtroom scene is interrupted by the “little horn” and his blasphemies. According to verses 11–12, “*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. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*” While the little horn continues his blasphemies, Daniel is given a graphic view of the fierce beast upon which the horn appears being killed, destroyed, and burned with fire, which is the same fate as the beast described by John in Revelation 19:20-21. This beast is Rome and the little horn is a symbol of Roman’s future emperors (especially Nero—who is the very image of Antichrist) blaspheming God and waging war upon God’s people. Nero, you may know, put both Paul and Peter to death in Rome during his reign. But YHWH will vindicate both his servants and his righteous cause once and for all on the day of final judgment, which makes perfect sense in light of what Daniel sees next, as the vision shifts back from the little horn to the Son of Man.

In verses 7:13–14 of Daniel 7, Daniel recounts that “*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. 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.*” Daniel now catches a glimpse of Jesus (who throughout the New Testament identifies himself as the “Son of Man”). The Son of Man—in complete and utter contrast to the beasts and their empires which Daniel attempts to describe in verses 2-8—possesses a glory far beyond anything seen on earth, as well as an everlasting dominion and kingdom.

All nations and people of the earth will one day serve this one whom Daniel sees, clearly described in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation, as well as ably summed up by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:6–11, when Paul says of this Son of Man, “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” Paul’s perspective on Jesus’ coronation is that after our Lord’s suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, while Daniel’s has none of that yet in view—focusing upon Christ’s heavenly glory.

We left off last time with Daniel’s reaction to what he saw as recounted in verses 15-16. “*As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 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.” The prophet was almost overwhelmed by what he had seen—his head “alarmed him.” No doubt the creatures and the “little horn” frightened him because of their great ferocity and power, and well as Daniel witnessing how that power would be used against the people of God. Recall that Daniel’s frame of reference is being taken captive as a youth against his will, and along with his people (Judah) being taken into exile in Babylon under the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar. Judah’s capital was destroyed and YHWH’s temple sacked and devastated. Daniel knows full well of what these beast were capable. The fourth beast will bring far more harm than Babylon had.

The answer given Daniel by an unnamed fellow witness (probably one of the angels present) of the great heavenly events must have brought the prophet comfort—but only for a moment, since this information only stirred Daniel’s curiosity all the more. In verses 17-18, the witness gives Daniel the *Cliff Notes* (summary version of) what Daniel had seen. ““*These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.*”” In effect, the witness summarizes the first half of Daniel’s vision (vv. 2-8) in verse 17, and the heavenly scene (vv. 9-10; 13-14) in verse 18.¹ We know from the New Testament that these saints are the people of God—those looking forward to the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament, along with baptized believers in Jesus Christ in the New.²

Daniel was no doubt comforted by the fact that the Ancient of Days and one like a Son of Man will conquer these four kings and destroy with fire their kingdoms which arise from the earth and oppress and persecute the people of God—again unlike the Ancient of Days and the Son Man who know no such creaturely limitations as do all human kings, human kingdoms, human power, and human armies. But once his head is no longer alarmed, and his fear is calmed by the heavenly vision and the reassurance that the fourth beast will not ultimately triumph, Daniel’s curiosity is piqued. What is this fourth beast? What will it do to the people of God? Will it destroy them and thwart YHWH’s purposes?

The prophet tells us in verses 19-20, “*then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions.*” The fourth beast is so frightening and different from the others, Daniel wants to know more about it—especially the iron teeth and bronze claws, as well as the blasphemous little horn which spoke great things (boasts and claims to divine glory and prerogatives), and which attempted to overcome the others. The parallels between this beast and the fourth beast Nebuchadnezzar’s dream are quite obvious.

If redemptive-history is essentially the story of God saving sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ, whose saving work is revealed to God’s people in the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, then one of the continuing subplots throughout redemptive history is the struggle between Christ and the Antichrist, a struggle which Antichrist wages in vain. A major revelation of that subplot unfolds in the second half of Daniel 7, when Daniel’s attention shifts back to this “little horn.”

¹ Steinmann, Daniel, 365.

² Steinmann, Daniel, 365.

According to verses 21-22, Daniel reports that *“as I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.”* In this short declaration from Daniel, we have a big picture and panoramic image of the future course of redemptive-history once this fourth empire arises. At some point when the fourth beast appears (the rise of the Roman empire and its self-proclaimed divine emperors), in addition to speaking great things (blasphemies against God and claims to divine privileges and prerogatives) this “little horn” wages war upon the saints—even prevailing over them for a time, until YHWH comes to rescue his people at the time of judgment.

The first question then is who or what is this “little horn?” Calvin identifies the horn as the series of ten Caesars who persecute God’s people.³ Many commentators identify the horn as Antiochus IV Epiphanes (since he is clearly the “little horn” mentioned in Daniel 8), who wages war on the Jews during the time of the Maccabean wars, and who sacked and desecrated the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem in 168 BC.⁴ Still others believe Daniel is referring to the Antichrist spoken of as a present reality in the New Testament age, who by “speaking great things” perverts the Gospel and the Word of God. As many of these same commentators argue, this “Antichrist” does not reach his full power and fury until the time immediately before the second coming of Christ.⁵ With this I concur.

What Daniel sees—a blaspheming “little horn,” which wages war on the people of God—is certainly characteristic in many ways of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but not is not completely fulfilled by his reign of terror in Jerusalem during the Maccabean revolt in 168 BC. It is also clear from our New Testament lesson (Revelation 13:1-10) that Daniel’s “little horn” is in view when, in verses 1-2, John describes the beast which he had seen. *“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”*

Furthermore, the beast John sees in verses 5-8 of Revelation 13, manifests many of the same characteristics as the little horn of Daniel’s vision. *“And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”*

Clearly then, Daniel’s fourth beast and John’s “*beast rising out of the sea*” are one and the same. This is Rome and its series of self-proclaimed ruling deities (i.e. Nero) who ruled from the city with seven hills (Rome) and who waged war on Christ’s people in a series of horrific persecutions in various portions of the Roman empire, graphically described in the church father Eusebius’ *Church History*.

0. Calvin, Commentaries on Daniel, II.55.

⁴ Goldingay, Daniel, 179-181.

⁵ Steinmann, Daniel, 371; Young, Daniel, 158.

Yet, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul speaks of a figure known as the “man of sin” which is also an echo from Daniel’s vision here. This man of sin is an end-times foe, who deceives the people of God in connection with an end-times apostasy, which occurs immediately before the “Day of the Lord” (i.e., that day when Jesus returns to judge the world, raise the dead and make all things new). So, the “little horn” of Daniel 7, likely does not refer to any specific person, but to a series of individuals who will arise until Jesus returns, speaking blasphemous things, claiming divine rights and privileges for themselves, waging war upon the people of God, and which will finally be manifest in an end-times Antichrist. Thankfully, Daniel is told of the ultimate fate of this series of God-hating persecutors of the saints in verse 22, namely, that despite antichrist’s efforts, the time came “*when the saints possess the kingdom of God.*”

But what of the frightening activities of the fourth beast? The witness tells Daniel in verses 23-25, “*thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.’*” No doubt, this is the Roman empire—far and away the greatest empire of the ancient world. Unlike the other three empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece), Rome was not displaced by another empire, but fell from internal troubles, economic woes, and bad public policy. The ten horns are symbolic of the great power of this kingdom, with ten kings rising and ruling, while the little horn seeks to rule the entire kingdom, but is prevented from doing so, and is able to displace only three of the horns.

What sets the little horn apart from the others is the fact that speaks against the most high (the Ancient of Days), and it wears out the saints through prolonged persecution. The horn also shall seek to change the times—which is perhaps a reference to the Jewish feasts and holy days,⁶ or to an arrogant attempt to change times and seasons set in place by God.⁷ As for the law, Daniel’s readers would have certainly understood this to refer to the Law of Moses—including the Ten Commandments, the “holy days,” the feasts and the ceremonies.⁸ As for the duration of the fourth beast’s rule, Daniel sets it at “*a time, times, and half a time,*” which, as we will see when we get to the famous messianic prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, is interpreted by John in Revelation as a reference to the entire period of time between our Lord’s first and second advents—which is half of the ideal time span (seven) of human history.⁹

But the witness does not leave Daniel with any doubt as to the final outcome of these events. He reports the explanation of this fellow witness in verses 26-27. “*But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*” There might be chaos on the earth: upheaval of empires, political intrigue, war, the

⁶ Steinmann, Daniel, 374.

⁷ Young, Daniel, 161.

⁸ Baldwin, Daniel, 162.

⁹ Steinmann, Daniel, 375.

persecution of God's people, the toleration for a time of the blasphemy of God by the little horn (antichrist). But the heavenly court has already announced its verdict—"and the time came" when the fourth beast will lose its dominion and will be destroyed. Today, we go to Rome to visit the ruins of this once great empire. YHWH's kingdom will endure forever and in the end all people and nations will serve him. In fact, we participate in this kingdom through Word and Sacrament every Lord's Day.

When it is all over, Daniel can only confess in verse 28, "*Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.*" He now knows that YHWH wins in the end.

What, then, do we say in terms of application? Earthly kings and tyrants conquer by the sword. They use military, political, and economic power to conquer their enemies and extend their kingdoms. They hate the church of Jesus Christ because God's people confess that Jesus is our Lord, not them. But as Daniel so powerfully reminds us, all such kingdoms are doomed to fail. They will be destroyed by Jesus Christ, who establishes his everlasting his everlasting kingdom by a life of perfect obedience, by suffering and dying, by rising again from the dead and in doing so conquering our greatest enemy, which is death. And the time came when that same Jesus ascended into heaven, to take his place at the right hand of the Ancient of Days, to preside over the heavenly court, and direct all the creatures of the world to that end for which he created them. And the time will come when that same Jesus returns to earth to raise the dead, judge the world, and make all things new. Until that day, we live our lives with one eye on the heavenly scene revealed by Daniel (our source of hope for what happens in this life) and the other on daily life. We fight against all beastly kingdoms by trusting in this same Jesus to save us from our sins, by living lives of gratitude before him, and proclaiming the Gospel of his kingdom to any and all who will listen.