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DANIEL: Ancient Prophecy for Modern Days Daniel 7ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! For those of you that are guests, we want to say a special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. Whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are excited to have you with us today. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we say welcome you today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you. You can simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, you will be sent a reply text that will have a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with and to pray for you.

MISSIONARY UPDATE:

Those of you that have been here the past couple of weeks have heard about a prayer concern regarding our Mission Partners in Honduras, Paul and Kay Newby. I want to thank you for praying and provide you with a little bit of an update.....

Thanks again, Church Family, for your prayers for this situation and for all future matters regarding our work in Honduras.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in the middle of a series where we are working our way through the Old Testament book of Daniel. Today we come to chapter 7 of Daniel in a message I have entitled, "Ancient Prophecy for Modern Days." I want to invite you to turn in your copy of God's Word to Daniel chapter 7.

OPENING ILLUSTRSTION: Super Bowl Predictions

My mentor and I decided to have a little fun with the NFL playoffs this year since our beloved Cowboys were eliminated yet again in the first round. We decided to make predictions regarding who we thought would win and make it to the Super Bowl. This was for bragging rights; I don't do gambling. So, each week, by Friday, we would send in our predictions to each other.

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This year's playoffs were anything but predictable. It seemed like every game played came down to the wire and there were some crazy plays. And what seemed like certain victories on paper played out to be the opposite. I'm sure, if you follow football, you found this year to be brutal on your playoff predictions.

As humans, we do not have the ability to know the future. We do not always know how things are going to turn out. Perhaps some of you have taken a risk in a business venture not knowing how it would work out. Maybe others of you have invested in startup companies not sure of your investment seeing a return. We do things like that based on key factors that we know, but it is impossible to know how things will turn out.

While we do not have the ability to predict the future, God does. God is eternal, meaning that He exists outside of the bounds of time. He is not limited by time or space as we are. Therefore, God views everything, all events, as history. He knows the past, the present, and He is already in the future. That's important to understand because of where we come in our study of Daniel.

BACKGROUND:

I want to provide you with a little bit of background foundation as we approach chapter 7 this morning. First, Daniel 7 is known as a transitional chapter. As I mentioned when we began our study back in January, Daniel has two parts. The first 6 chapters are historical happenings surrounding Daniel's life and the last 6 chapters are prophetic in nature, meaning it deals with the future.ⁱⁱ In fact, one commentator I read said, "Chapter 7 is the single most important chapter of the Book of Daniel."ⁱⁱⁱ

Now, about 25% of the Bible was prophetic when it was written.^{iv} And as is the case with Daniel, many of the prophecies have been fulfilled while some prophecies have yet to be fulfilled. The prophecies contained in the Scriptures that have yet to be fulfilled are known as apocalyptic, meaning it deals with end times. Let me say a couple of things about apocalyptic literature before we dive into Daniel 7.

First, when understanding apocalyptic literature, we have to realize that **there is a lot of symbolism and figurative language used**. Most of the time, the symbols are explained, but sometimes we have to look to other Scriptures to understand those symbols.^v

Secondly, **take the account that is written at face value.** If the Scripture explains the detail of the prophecy, then hold onto that. If it does not, take it at face value, meaning don't read into it what is not there. I think there is a purpose to God leaving mystery in apocalyptic writing as it requires us to trust Him and leave it in His hands.

Thirdly, when it comes to apocalyptic literature, the **prophecy is validated by the historical accuracy of what has already been fulfilled.** In other words, we can trust the validity of the prophecy based on the fulfillment of other prophecies written by the same author. For example, when it comes to Daniel, we know that his fulfilled prophecies occurred just as he had written them prior to their occurrence. Now, if a proclaimed prophet has not had prophecies fulfilled the way in which they were recorded, the prophet is then discredited. Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies are valid based on the accuracy of the fulfillment of his other prophecies.

Fourthly, very important, when it comes to apocalyptic literature, there are **things we hold with a closed hand and others with an open hand.**^{vi} In other words, there are certain things that are non-negotiable and absolutely certain, while other things, not absolutely certain, we lovingly debate but never divide.

For example, the non-negotiable aspect of Biblical apocalyptic literature is that Jesus is coming again. And Jesus will set up His Kingdom which will never end. That's closed hand. Whereas the timing and the exact playing out of the prophecy is more of an open-handed item. We do not know the exact time of Jesus' return and there is debate as to how the order of events will play out.

View these things as guardrails for where our study is going to take us in the coming weeks. Now, at the conclusion of our time today, I want to give some very practical takeaways regarding the purpose of prophetic writing in the Bible. But first, I want to look at this revelation that Daniel records. We are going to see the setting, the specifics, and the summation. That will serve as our outline here this morning.

MESSAGE:

So, let's first look at...

1) The Setting.

Read with me verse 1 of Daniel 7. *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.***

Daniel gives us a clue as to the date in which the revelations about the future came to him. It was in the first year of Belshazzar's reign. Now, you will remember Belshazzar from chapter 5. He was reigning when the handwriting on the wall occurred. Nabonidus was Belshazzar's father, and he was the true king. But he spent much of the time away from the kingdom and left Belshazzar in charge. Nabonidus began his reign in 556 B.C. We know from historical data that he reigned for 3 years before he placed his son in charge. So, from that, we ascertain that this dream occurred in 553 B.C.^{vii}

That's important for two reasons. One, Daniel recorded the rise and fall of key empires before it took place, that's prophecy. Two, this occurred after Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interpretation but dove tails with it. Basically, this vision takes Nebby's dream and gives more detail to it.^{viii}

Now, remember the difference between a dream and a vision. Dreams happen while you are asleep and visions while you are awake.^{ix} Most scholars believe this was a series of reoccurring dreams and visions Daniel had which prompted him to write down what he saw.

That's the setting. Now, let's look at...

2) The Specifics

Daniel shares the specifics of his vision and then asks an angel to interpret it for him. For the sake of time, I want to share with you what all Daniel saw and then dive into the interpretation.

The first thing Daniel noticed was the churning of the Great Sea. He specifically said that four winds of heaven caused that. Sea in Scripture often refers to peoples or nations of the earth.^x The idea is that the earth is churning, in turmoil, as a result of the activities of both human and divine doings. Does anyone else feel like they are living Daniel 7 in real-time? And as we learned in Daniel 2, God is ultimately the One in charge.

Then Daniel sees 4 beasts emerge from the Sea. He described each of the beasts. **[Show Graphic]**^{xi} The first was a lion with eagle's wings that had the

wings removed and then walked like a human. **Show Graphic** The second was a bear which was larger on one side and had ribs in its mouth. **Show Graphic** The third beast was a 4-headed leopard that had 4 wings on its back. The fourth beast was the most terrifying. Artists have tried to conceptualize this animal but there isn't anything definitive. Whatever animal, it differed from the others and had large iron teeth and destroyed everything. It also had ten horns and then a smaller horn came up out of it and uprooted the other horns. Daniel described this horn as having eyes and a mouth. Then God's court convened, and the final beast was defeated and destroyed. At that point, Jesus comes and sets up the Kingdom of God ruling forever. That's verses 2-14.

Strange vision, I know. And Daniel was anxious and alarmed by what he saw. So, he asked an angel to interpret the vision for him. This is where we pick up in verse 17. Look there with me. 17 and 18.

*17 'These **four great beasts are four kings** who shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'*

This statement sends us back to Daniel chapter 2 when Nebuchadnezzar had his first dream. You remember the statue with the head of gold, the chest of silver, the mid-section of bronze and the legs of iron and clay. We talked about how those represented the different kingdoms that would rule. Here the angel says the same thing. So, each of these animals represent a kingdom.

We are familiar with this practice today. Let's play a little game here to illustrate that fact. The United States is represented by what animal? Eagle. Correct. The Democratic party? A Donkey. Republican party? Elephant.^{xii} Okay, so, you see that we have long associated groups of people and nations with animals.

Let me show you a graphic that compares the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream with Daniel's vision here. Now, remember, Daniel's vision came after he interpreted the dream, so this is probably making more sense to Daniel as the angel interprets. **Show Graphic**^{xiii}.

The nation of Babylon tied itself both to the lion and the eagle.^{xiv} In fact, archaeologist have uncovered Babylonian statues of lions with wings. In the vision, the Lion's wings were torn off, a depiction of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness and loss of power. The lion then stands on two feet like a man and

receives a human mind. This points to Nebuchadnezzar's return to sanity, coming to faith, and briefly regaining the kingdom until his death.

The next world power was the Medes and the Persians. A bear is a perfect depiction of this kingdom because of the size and fierceness of the Medo-Persian empire. The fact that the bear is raised up on one side means that of the two aspects of the empire, one was stronger than the other. We know from historical writings that Persia rose to a position of dominance in the alliance.^{xv}

The bear had three ribs in its mouth which most scholars believe refers to the three great conquests of the Medo-Persian empire. They conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., Lydia in 546 B.C., and Egypt in 525 B.C.^{xvi}

The third beast was the four-headed leopard which represented Greece. Alexander the Great, you know that name, had many great conquests and by the age of 32 had conquered the Medo-Persian empire. A four-headed leopard represented Greece well for a couple of reasons. First, the speed of the leopard can be compared to the speed of the conquests. Secondly, the four heads represent the fact that following Alexander the Great's death, the empire was divided amongst the four generals in his army.^{xvii}

Then we come to the fourth beast. Pick up with me in verse 19 and read through 25 as we see this is an ancient prophecy for our modern days. *19 "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, [this is a depiction of the Roman Empire. Fitting for the might and cruelty of Rome.] 20 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** [eyes symbolic of intelligence and a mouth symbolizing the ability to be a convincing speaker^{xviii}] **that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions.** 21 As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, 22 until **the Ancient of Days** [Reference to God Almighty] came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when **the saints possessed the kingdom.** 23 "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth [Rome], which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. 24 As for the ten horns, **out of this kingdom ten kings shall***

arise [Different from Rome but will come out of the old Roman Empire], *and another shall arise after them* [Another leader will arise from the 10]; *he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.*²⁵ **He shall speak words against the Most High.** [This is the little horn with eyes and a mouth. Speaking words against the Most High is pointing to this as being the Anti-Christ.^{xix} What will this Anti-Christ do?] *and shall wear out the saints* [Wear out meaning oppress and harass until their lives are miserable^{xx}] *of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law* [When you read “change the times,” think change religious holidays, essentially eliminate or overtake religious holidays. And when you read, “change the law,” think abolishing religious freedom by way of pressure and also eliminating the Bible^{xxi}]; *and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.* [Time referring to a year. So, this would be for 3 and a half years^{xxii}].

If you are a student of the Bible, you know this prophecy to run parallel to that which is detailed in the book of Revelation. The 3 and a half years are a direct reference to the tribulation of which half the time is prosperous and the other half devastating. Remember that this prophecy is valid and trustworthy for two main reasons. One, part of this has already come to pass just as Daniel wrote. If he is on target there, he’s on target with that which is yet to come. Secondly, we have, in the Book of Revelation, another record of a vision that very much so correlates to this ancient prophecy.

So, we’ve looked at the setting and the specifics. Now, let’s look at...

3) The Summation

Praise God that the prophecy doesn’t end there. There is more to the story. Let’s read it. Verses 26 and 27 of Daniel 7.

But the court [God’s court] *shall sit in judgment, and his* [meaning the Anti-Christ’s] *dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.* [In other words, completely obliterated.]²⁷ *And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven* [Jesus’ Kingdom] **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.**’ And all God’s people said, AMEN!

The summation of this prophecy is that Jesus wins! And His people, those that have placed their faith and trust in Him, shall live in the New Heaven and New

Earth forever and ever. While the specifics surrounding this final victory may not be completely clear, beloved, it is certain. Jesus is coming again and He will be victorious.

APPLICATION:

Now, we’ve surveyed Daniel 7 by looking at the setting, the specifics, and then the summation. But, in the time we have left, I want to turn to the practical. What does this ancient prophecy mean for us today? I want to consider prophecy as a whole. What is the role of prophecy? What should be our response to Biblical prophecy? Why would God include apocalyptic literature in the Scriptures? I want to offer 3 things to these questions. First, ...

1) To Be Aware.

God wants His people to be able to discern the times. We are called in many places in Scripture to be alert. As we see the unfolding of events in our day, we are reminded that, just as Jesus said in Matthew 24:8, *“All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”*

There are a couple of approaches that Believers tend to take when it comes to apocalyptic prophecies in the Bible. One is to be oblivious, to not study, avoid the conversation, stick your head in the sand. But God doesn’t want us to be ignorant, He wants us to be knowledgeable, aware. The other approach is to be consumed by it. This leads me to my next point. Be aware and then...

2) Be Resolved.

When we read and study apocalyptic writings, we should come to trust God completely. When we consider the fact that Biblical prophecies have proven themselves true, then the prophecies yet to come will come to be. The Believer should then be settled, at peace, that God is in control. That is true even if we are to endure hardship.

There are folks that get all worked up in a frenzy about the end times. They try to predict when Jesus is coming back. They buy up property, building bunkers, storing up canned goods, and writing out charts on ammo boxes. Now, I’m not making light of being prepared, but there is no need for hysteria. God’s got this.

Nowhere in the Scriptures do we see that it is okay to panic, fear, and worry. In fact, we see the opposite. Fear, worry, and panic are expressions of a lack of trust in God. Be aware, be resolved, and thirdly, ...

3) Be Hopeful.

Did you know that God's people have always leveraged prophecy as a means to instill hope? The Jews, living in exile, were encouraged to know that there would be an end to their captivity. They waited in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. To them, apocalyptic literature meant that help is on the way. The cavalry is coming!

The same was the case for the early church. As the early believers faced enormous persecution, they often shared with one another the prophecy of the end times. Because to them, it meant that what they were enduring was not permanent. You can endure anything when you know that there is an end to it.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 shows us how believers have always been encouraged by apocalyptic prophecy. ***16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.***

Yes, we may very well be living Daniel 7, and Revelation 13 in real-time. But we know how it all ends! We will enjoy the Kingdom of God forever and ever. And the enemy will be permanently destroyed. That's good news!

Now, there's one other thing that I want to point out to us today. Look at verse 28 of Daniel 7. ***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."***

While we are to not panic and be hopeful, Daniel here was disturbed. But there is a difference between being disturbed and being dismayed. Daniel may have been bothered by all this but he was not distraught.

What was Daniel disturbed about? I think Daniel was disturbed because he now knew what people were going to have to endure. It bothered him that there would be folks that did not have the eternal security of being with Jesus forever.

And the question to us is, "Does the finality pictured here and the certainty of what the lost will endure disturb us?" When we consider what lies ahead of

those apart from a relationship with Jesus, does that thought greatly alarm us? What causes our color to change?

I think that if I am honest in answering those questions, I would say that what bothers me the most is what happens to me and not what happens to others. Beloved, if we are in Christ, it does not matter what happens to our retirement account, or what we might have to face. If Jesus is king, we win in the end! But there are those that do not have that security because they have not trusted Jesus as Lord. And that should bother us.

CONCLUSION:

As we conclude our time together and come to a time of response, I want to ask the band to come back up and lead us. But I want to close with a quote from a commentary I read this week.

"A frightening scene is set forth here [in Daniel 7]. Someday 'the books' will be opened, and each individual will be judged according to what is written in them. Of course, one's eternal destiny will be determined by whether one's name is written in 'the book of life.' After this is established, the reward of the believer or the degree of punishment for the lost will be fixed by what is inscribed in the record books."

If you are here today and you have not trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior, I beg you to come to Jesus today. The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And that the wages of sin is eternal death. But, there is a free gift of God, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who took your place and my place upon the cross so that we might have eternal life. We are saved, rescued, by God's grace through faith in Jesus as Lord.

If you have not done that, or if you are unsure, you come this morning. Our elders will be here at the front. Simply come, grab our hands, and say, "I need Jesus." That's it. We would love nothing more than to talk with you about how to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you're here today and you are in need of hope. Can I tell you, hope is here? Hope can be found in Jesus. You come and let us pray over you.

I'm going to pray, we're going to stand and sing, but let's also respond. [Pray].

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: Travis Agnew, “Daniel [Series Overview]”, article published on travisagnew.org on August 13, 2020; Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000; Gene Whithurst, “The Book of Daniel Commentary,” document sent to me via Gene; Troy Rackliffe, “Daniel part 8,” preached at Glade Community Church in Daniels, WV, October 2020; Mark Driscoll, “Kingdom Down #7: King Jesus Coming on the Clouds,” preached at Trinity Church in Arizona on February 23, 2020; Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Defend,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, March 10, 2013. Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Decide Part 1,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, March 24, 2013; Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Decide Part 2,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, April 14, 2013, Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Look Ahead,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, April 21, 2013; Dr. Robert Jeffress, Pathway to Victory Podcast, episodes include: *America’s Coming Storm Parts 1 and 2*, *The Coming World Dictator parts 1 and 2*, *The Most Amazing Prophecy in the Bible parts 1 and 2*, accessed via apple podcasts <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/americas-coming-storm-part-1/id611239356?i=1000550759488>.

ⁱⁱ Gene Whithurst, “The Book of Daniel Commentary,” page 56.

ⁱⁱⁱ W.S. Towner, “Daniel,” INT, Atlanta: John Knox, 1984, page 91.

^{iv} Mark Driscoll, “Kingdom Down #7: King Jesus Coming on the Clouds,” preached at Trinity Church in Arizona on February 23, 2020.

^v Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1994, page 193.

^{vi} Driscoll.

^{vii} Miller, 194.

^{viii} Warren W. Wiersbe, “Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel,” David C Cook Publishing, 2000, page 105.

^{ix} Driscoll.

^x Miller, 195.

^{xi} Images taken from: https://www.reddit.com/r/Christianity/comments/nmtaif/revelation_13_cannot_be_properly_understood/

^{xii} Illustration taken from Mark Driscoll.

^{xiii} Graphic found: <https://40daysofstudy.com/2011/11/20/daniel-71-8/>

^{xiv} Wiersbe, 106.

^{xv} Miller, 198.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Discussion on this can be found in Wiersbe, page 107.

^{xviii} L. Wood, “A Commentary of Daniel,” Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973, page 188.

^{xix} Miller, 202-203.

^{xx} Ibid, 214.

^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} J.A. Montgomery, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel,” ICC, Reprint edition, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979, page 312.