Good morning. If you would, please take your Bibles and turn to Daniel 7. This morning we are venturing into book II of Daniel. We are entering the second half of the book which contains apocalyptic literature. This portion of Daniel may be said to be the book of Revelation of the OT. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by heavy symbolic language. There will be talk of the future, but it will come in code so to speak. There will be depictions of events and people and nations in ways that are like a wild dream.

You know how your dreams can mix all kinds of things? You can be 50 years old sitting in elementary school dressed like an astronaut. It gets weird sometimes. The same thing happens in apocalyptic literature. You see truth, but it comes in images that don’t necessarily comport with reality as we know it. But it is still truth. You just have to use some keys to decifer it.

That’s what’s going to happen in our passage. And because it is symbolic, a lot of people will have different interpretations. That’s the trick with this portion of Scripture. I recognize that there are lots of different interpretations. And I want to be up front with you about the way I’m taking it. I’ll be looking at these chapters in Daniel in a particular way.

For instance, the passage is going to talk about a little horn. There have been all kinds of things said about this little horn. Some think that it is the pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Others believe it isa future ruler who will arise, someone who is yet to come. I personally believe, based on the text, that this represents a ruler who has already appeared on earth. We’ll talk more about it as the message develops, but I just want to be frank now that I’m taking a view that all of what we find here has already come to pass.

If you’re sitting here thinking: Well bummer. I was hoping we were going to get into some futuristic stuff. I’m sorry to burst your bubble. But I can guarentee you that you’ll still find a great deal of edification in this passage. And that’s a thousand times better than merely hyping up your vain curiosities.

So let’s go to the passage. Daniel 7, please follow along as I read God’s holy and inspired word.

One of the things that people need most is hope.

When I am counseling people, that’s sometimes the most important part of my counsel. It’s even more important than actually solving their problem and giving htem the solutions they need. In order to begin the road to recovery and reformation in their lives, they need the motivation. They need the hope that things can change and that the problems will not keep them down.

Hope is the key to life. Without hope, life looks miserable. Actually, we can say that life is miserable. It doesn’t just look miserable, it is full of misery upon misery. And that’s especially true for you and I as a Christian. Things often look hopeless.

You might be in just such a situation. A lot of you follow politics. There’s not a lot to get you revved up in the political world now a days, is there? Others of you probably pay no attention to the political theater. You really don’t get into it, or you turned it off a long time ago because you don’t find anything satisfying about it. But you still have your griefs and sorrows, don’t you? You’ve just found misery in a another place. Maybe its in your home. Maybe its in your friendships. Maybe its in your own sins and shortcomings.

There’s suffering and misfortune at every corner of life. And that’s why you need hope, isn’t it. You need hope to keep going.

That’s why Daniel 7 is so great. Daniel 7 gives you hope. It gives you a look at the future from Daniel’s perspective. And it gives you a description of real life. It’s symbolic and almost seems fanciful, but it’s real life—real history. And it talks about troubling things, but as it does so it lays out a great deal of hope for God’s people. And that’s what I want you to gain this morning. As we look at the several different symbols and consider how the different characters are described, our hearts should be given that boost of hope that we need to live the life of faith in this world.

I want to begin by simply talking about the description of God we have in this cahpers.

1. **Description of God**

In just a few minutes we’ll consider the section which talks about the Lord as the Ancient of Days. But we really need to begin with the fact that what we have here is such an accurate rendering of history before it happens.

As a matter of fact, in the next several chapters, we have laid out for us an amazingly accurate account of world history. It is so accurate that many scholars say that the book of Daniel could not have been written in the 6th century, like we believe it was. They say that these predictions could only be this precise if someone was writing after all of it has already transpired. So they date the book of Daniel as being written not long before Jesus was born. They just cannot bring themselves to believe that anyone could possibly write with such precision all that happened 500 years before Jesus was born.

Yet there is not one reason to doubt that Daniel was written in the 6th century BC. We who are Christians understand that there is a God and he knows all things. He is able to speak about things before they happen because He knows the end from the beginning. He himself has ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

So here at the beginning we should take account of how our God may be described. Before we get into the minute details of this prophecy (and the prophetic utterances of the chapters to come, which are even more specific), it’s good to just stand back and be in awe of our God. He is above time itself. Or, as Daniel has said elsewhere, “He changes times and seasons, he removes kings and sets up kings.”

As Lord of all, history unravels at His command. Our God has laid out the days of men and he determines the number of their days. And as we go through time, we can remember that all powers in heaven and earth are subservient to the King of Heaven.

This was written for our comfort in this world. This was written to assure us that all that happens is not random chaos or merely an outworking of the survival of the fittest. Powers may clash, and suffering may be a frequent by product of those clashes, but all of it is under the direct hand of our God, who is working all things according to His purpose.

And you can be assured that whatever transpires in our own day is just the same. A passage like this allows us to zoom out and get a broad view of things. It reminds us that we have hope in this world because history is going somewhere. History is, you might say, our God’s playbook. And we can take great comfort in that.

Thus we begin with a wonderful description of our God. He is set forth as the Lord of men and the Lord of time itself. That is the first and most important profile in our text.

But our text describes nations too. And so we need to talk about how these kingdoms are depicted.

1. **Description of the nations**

In our passage we are introduced to 4 different beasts which represent the 4 different kingdoms which would arise after Daniel’s time. And part of the reason we know this is because this chapter parallels the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2. There was a statue with four segments. Here we have four beasts which are said in verse 17 to represent four kings (or kingdoms).

You’ll notice that you have 4 predators listed in this chapter. These are all carnivorous beasts who’s natural instinct is to destroy and take life.

And what you find is that each subsequent beast becomes more powerful and more ruinous. The lion seems tame compared to the ravaging bear that comes after it. But the leopard is much more swift than the bear (and thus it has the ability to wreak more havoc in a blitzkrieg fashion).

But the leopard is just a kitten in comparison to the last beast. This beast is not even given a physical description other than we’re told that it has 10 horns. Your imagination is left to fill in the blanks. The profile we do get is that it is angrily trampling and stamping upon anything and everything in its path. It’s kind of like a Godzilla like picture. It’s more of a monstrous thing than an animal.

The point is that each of these 4 kingdoms is powerful, dreadful, and destructive. And yet, despite their mayhem and might, each one is limited. Each is cut off and brought to nothing. Ultimately, these ferocious creatures disappear.

Well, let’s break it down. The four beasts represent, as we’ve said, the 4 kingdoms that would arise after Daniel’s time. The lion corresponds to Babylon. As we saw in chapter 2 with the statue, the head of gold, Babylon had a noble character about it. And that the beast becomes humanized may harken us back to Nebuchadnezzer who was reduced to a beast mentally, and then restored to his right mind.

Then comes this bear. That stands for the kingdom of the Medes and the Persian. It is raised up on one side likely signifying the dominance of the Persian side of the empire. The Persians had a lopsided dominance in terms of the rule of this kingdom.

This bear has three ribs in its mouth. We’re not told what that is, but most people believe that it has to do with the three kingdoms it conquered: Babylon, Egypt, and the kingdom of Lydia (which would have been located in Asia Minor).

This bear is told to devour and that’s exactly what the Medes and the Persians did. Their empire might not attain to the glory of Babylon, but it did exceed it in terms of sheer expanse. The Persian empire was the largest up til that point in time.

The next animal is a 4 headed leopard with 4 wings. The leopard’s claim to fame is its speed. It is one of the fastest land animals on the face of the earth. And if you give it wings, the idea is that it only becomes that much more swift.

This is indicative of the Greek Kingdom, headed by Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered the Persians in 331 BC and swept across the known world gobbling up land and dominion. In just 3 years Alexander succeeded in bringing under his control not only all of the land belonging to the Persian Empire, but he expanded his territory beyond that into India in the East and Egypt in the Southwest.

Most people agree that the four wings and the 4 heads represent the 4 generals that took over after Alexander died. Alexander died at a very early age and the empire was divided into 4 different regions under these generals.

Then you have the 4th beast, the most terrible of all the beasts, which described in verses 7-8 and again in 19-22. This beast was so peculiar that Daniel wanted to know more about it.

This beast represents the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire is described in this bizarre way because it would be known for its excessive cruelty. As one commentator has put it, “Rome had no interest in raising the conquered nations to any high level of development. All her designs were imperial: let the nations be crushed and stamped underfoot.”

We’ll come back to discuss what this 4th beast does in just a moment. As I said, there’s more detail given to this beast and its activity. What’s important to note at this point is that all of these kingdoms are exceedingly threatening. All the descriptions are all about power. These kingdoms and realms had significant military might and authority. Each of them had incredible power to destroy and oppress. There’s a sense in which the regard for human life is quite small. And we see and increasing depravity in each of them.

But what is more important to see is that each one’s power is profoundly limited. It might be a great power, but it is a power that comes to an end: The lion has his wings clipped. The bear and the leopard, for all their ferocity, basically disappear. Only a verse is given to each. You expect more to be said of them, but they no sooner are described than they are passed over.

And even the fourth beast, which is especially ruthless—even this ghastly, ravenous monster is eventually overthrown. You come to find that the power of the Ancient of Days is too much for him.

So in the final analysis, what you understand is that these kingdoms are ruled by a greater King. These kings and kigndoms may seem like colossal titans to us, but in reality they are nothing more than paper dolls to our God.

We might wonder why God gave Daniel such a weird dream and we may wonder why Daniel didn’t just save a lot of space by stating things in much simpler terms. But if we didn’t have all the symbolism, we might miss the drama of what is being communicated. We have here a testimony to what real life is like. When evil men come to power, death and destruction is common place. Depraved men will tyrannize the world and cause much bloodshed and suffering.

But as we look about our world and see these things, we do not have to despair. There’s hope to be had. Tyrants will not reign forever. The evil that they perpetrate will not last forever. They themselves will come under God’s judgment. They will be held accountable. And even as they are raised up by the hand of God, they will be cast down by the same. They will serve the purpose that God has laid out for them and then they will be no more. They will take their place in the history books, but they will ultimately be replaced in time.

The Lord shall clear them away, and each one shall only be a stepping stone which the Lord uses to usher in his kingdom.

Which is what brings us to our next description. We need to understand what Daniel is says about God’s people.

1. **Description of God’s people**

The first mention of God’s people is found in verse 18. We are told that the “saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.”

This is a description of the glorious joy that we now possess and will possess for eternity. The kingdom of our God is ours and we have everlasting life, for this kingdom will itself never end. We may praise God because right now we have citizenship in this kingdom and this kingdom will not be like any of the previous kingdoms we’ve studied because it will go on through all time.

What’s interesting through is that God’s people are described as having to endure a great deal of suffering. In verses 19-28 we read about the 4th beast. This beast has no regard for any man as it devours the whole earth and tramples it down and breaks it to pieces.” (23)

But what we find is that there is a special hatred this beast has for God and for his people. This is where we can think about all the horns this beast has. Verse 23 tells us that each of the horns represents a king (or emperor). In the ancient world a horn was a symbol of strength and power. And so in this kingdom represented by the beast, there are a series of 10 kings who come to rule this kingdom.

We are told that one horn grows up in the midst of the other 9 horns. In verse 8 we read how there is a little horn that plucks up three horns before it. And verse 24 essentially repeats the same. This horn is unique. It has eyes and a mouth that speaks great things, blasphemies against the Most High. And verse 25 talks about how he is especially cruel to God’s people. He “wears them out” and they are “given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”

What do we make of this little horn? I would like to suggest to you that this horn represents Nero. There were three emperors that were assassinated to make way for Nero: Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. And we know that Nero was especially cruel to the Christians of his day. When the great fire of Rome burned up to a third of the city, he blamed it on the Christians and he used that as an excuse to bring about one of the worst persecutions in Roman history. Christians were put to death in droves. They were impaled and burned in his gardens as lanterns. They were dressed in the hides of wild beasts and harassed by dogs. They were crucified and killed en masse.

And the interesting thing is that all this happened for about 3.5 years, which corresponds to a time, times, and half a time. (a time is a year, times is two years, and a half time is a half a year). The great fire of Rome started in July of 64 AD. The persecution started soon after and lasted up until Nero’s death in 68 AD.

But then notice what it says 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.'

This is spelling out the victory that was mentioned earlier. It’s basically saying that Nero dies, but the church of Christ lives on. Not only does the church survive, but it comes to dominate the world. Kings will follow Nero. The Roman Government will continue. Several other horns will have power. But in so far as God is concerned, His kingdom becomes the dominating kingdom.

What is ultimately described in these verses? You could say that the church is described as being oppressed, but victorious. The church exists between the ever present tension of the hatred that comes from the world and the ever present care of God. But one thing we know: Ever since the time of Christ an the Apostles, the church has had the victory in the world. Jesus even said, “Take heart, I have overcome the world.”

Which brings us to the last point of our passage. We have a description of the authority of our God.

1. **The Description of God**

The centerpiece of our passage talks about this one who is the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven. The description that he receives is one of incomparable strength and authority.

Verse 9 describes him as the ancient of days. That’s likely pointing to his eternal nature. He lived before all these other beasts and he outlives them. He’s also described as white, signifying his purity. In that respect he is a great contrast to the depravity of the nations. With that purity there is fire that surrounds him and comes forth from him, symbolizing his judgment and divinity.

Interestingly this Ancient of Days is described in just two verses, but he is set forth in such a way that you know that none can match him or stand against him.

Then in verses 13-14 you have another figure being described. He is described in divine terms as well. He rides on the clouds of heaven. He presents himself before the Ancient of Days and is given all authority and dominion.

It is not a coincidence that the most frequent term that Jesus uses for himself in the New Testament is the phrase “the son of man.” In the gospels it is used 81 times. Some people think that this is a term of humility, but when you read this passage in Daniel 7, you recognize that it is a specific reference to his divinity.

There is the one specific incident where Jesus is on trial and he’s asked by the High Priest what he has to say for himself. And Jesus says that he will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven.

Those of you in the Bible Bee, you can take note. At the beginning of the book of Acts, what do we find? The disciples ask, “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of heaven?” They are asking this question, right? And Jesus answers, “It’s not for you to know the times and seasons, but you will receive power when the HS comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Sameria, and to the ends of the earth. Immediately after, he’s taken up and hid in a cloud, right? Then we are told he will come again, just as he left.

We have in Acts 1 a reference back to this chapter of Daniel. And we are reminded of the greatness of our God. The kingdom is miniscule and seemingly nothing, but that is no matter. Our God is great. And He shall bring about the restoration of his kingdom.

And that’s what our Great God is doing right now. He’s building his kingdom through the witness of his people. Jesus is sitting victoriously in the clouds right now and we know he’s going to return in grand fashion one day.

And the real joy is that this morning as we have that witness here this morning. In the ministry of the word and Sacrament, we have a testimony to our great redemption and the coming of His kingdom. We are right now witnessing the real power and victory of that kingdom.

Above all, we have this hope: Christ is alive and well; He is ruling over the nations even today. Right at this moment we know that He is ministering to us the reality of his victory.

What’s more, we have the hope that he will soon come again, and all the earth shall know him.

So whatever misery we may face, it may be faced with this outlook. All of it can melt away in view of the good news that Jesus is defeating all the powers of sin and dominions of darkness.