

Daniel 7:13-14 (1-14, selected verses)

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End Time 4, Christ the King

A KING LIKE US

Da 7:1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

² Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ³ Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

⁴ "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it.

⁵ "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

⁶ "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

⁷ "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left...

⁹ "As I looked, 'thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. 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.

¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him.

Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated, and the books were opened. '...

¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

¹⁴ 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.

Dear Friends In Our Savior,

So what's it like being a refugee? I really can't imagine. But if you ask the right people in our congregation, a few have been there. They can tell you stories of columns of refugees streaming through their towns. They can tell you of sleeping nights in barns with dozens of others fleeing warfare. Can you imagine? Every bit except what you are carrying, lost: the pictures, the keepsakes, the clothes, the pots and pans, the tools gone; your house destroyed, cars abandoned. All you have worked for, deleted. And if you're a refugee because of conflict, you probably lost family members by violence, or the more haunting happenstance of simply losing each other.

Whatever other considerations there are, we certainly must pity refugees and say a prayer for them. Fellow man, cast upon the restless waves of this world to land who-knows-where or to perish.

In our Wednesday morning Bible studies, we are reading a book about Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is that familiar psalm which begins “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.” Now the interesting thing about the author of the book is that he, like the author of the psalm, was a shepherd. He was a shepherd from way back in the day when shepherds were really shepherds, back in the 1930’s. He didn’t just check on them, he lived with them for many days and nights of the year. When he comments on verse two, “*He makes me to lie down in green pastures,*” he says that sheep will not lie down unless four needs are taken care of. One of those four things is that the sheep must be free of fear. (If you want to know the other three you will have to come to this Wednesday’s Bible class or read the book). He says that these skittish, defenseless animals must be free of fear, or they simply cannot lie down. As a case in point, the author relates how a visitor to his farm brought a little Pekinese dog. When the tiny dog got out of the car, his entire herd of 200 sheep stampeded.

Silly enough, but can we humans be much different? Perhaps a Pekinese doesn’t send us climbing a light pole. But when you feel fear and anxiety, how well do you sleep? And what about refugees? No home, no winter clothing, family members dead or lost. How do you think they sleep?

By the time the Jews received this vision from Daniel in chapter 7, they had been in captivity for 30 years or more. You would hardly consider them refugees any more. Thirty years on, their children born in exile could not remember the cooler climate of Judah, the snow that sometimes fell on the mountains, the smell of autumn rain in Judah. In Babylon, they lived in a very different land. Many a US veteran can tell you from experience what I can only tell you from books and articles: Babylon (modern southern Iraq) is a place of heat and sand and certainly not much rain.

So you might think, “These Jews had been settled there 30 years, some of them 50 years. They had had kids and now grandkids born in Babylon. This was their new home.” Most of us are only third or fourth generation Americans. After two or three generations, we don’t consider England or Germany our home. America is. These Jews should have gotten over it by this time, right?

But here is something we really don’t understand. The identity of every Israelite was locked up with the land of Palestine in a way we never will be with any place. God’s promise to the father of the Israelites, Abraham—when it was just him and his wife Sarah—was, “*To your offspring I will give this land.*” The LORD’s promise was locked up with the land. (Genesis 12:7). Hundreds of years later the land was God’s great promise to the Israelites marching out of Egypt’s slavery.

But that still doesn’t tell you what the land of Palestine means to an Israelite or Jew. The oldest and most influential Hebrew newspaper is called Haaretz. It means “The Land,” meaning “The Land of Israel”.

The Jews, when they had been chased out of Palestine for well over a thousand years and when the nation of Israel was founded in 1947, they came back in the millions. I mean, in a thousand years, who of your descendants is going to care whether you lived in Kentucky or Connecticut or Colorado. But Jews did. Israelite identity was, and Jewish identity still is, tied up with that land.

And so to the Israelites who had been carried off, it didn’t matter if they had settled down, built homes and started businesses in their new place, they still felt like refugees in Babylon. And now things looked more bleak than ever. The Babylonians had carried them off, but the spears and shields were rattling again. Another nation, Persia, was rising in the east. Within a few years it did totally destroy Babylon. Would the puny group of Jewish refugees survive? Would they be a shattered forgotten people in the fight between the world superpowers? To these people, a vision came through Daniel:

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream... He wrote down the substance of his dream... ‘In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the

sea.” (Daniel 7:1-2) Imagine lots of computer generated graphics. In his vision Daniel looked over the sea. He saw hurricane force wind churning up the ocean. Waves big enough to sink huge ships. Out of the storm rose four great beasts, each different, each out of the sea.

Now this strange visions may seem bizarre, perhaps too strange to read. We might simply throw up our hands and say, “Weird” and walk away. But these words had a purpose, and they still serve that purpose if we will listen.

In the Hebrew Bible “*the sea,*” the ocean, is a symbol for the fallen world; the world which is in opposition to God and God’s rule and God’s people. Out of that fury and chaos of a fallen world, four beasts arise.

“*The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle*” (4). This lion with wings was obviously Babylon. This mythical creature was the animal symbol of Babylon – like the bald eagle is to the United States. Archaeologists find this symbol digging around the ruins of Babylon.

“*And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’*” (5). This bear was a symbol of the kingdom which defeated the lion kingdom of Babylon. This was Persia. Within the lifetime of Daniel, a few years after this dream, Persia conquered Babylon, and utterly destroyed it.

Then God showed Daniel what is going to happen farther into the future, “*After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads.*” (6). The third animal, a leopard, is not as strong as a lion or bear, but it is fierce and fast. This was the empire of Greece. In the life of one man with a short life, Alexander the Great conquered well over a million square miles—with an army on foot! But here is what is interesting: two hundred years before it happened, God’s vision to Daniel said, “*This beast had four heads.*” Indeed, immediately on his death, Alexander’s generals quarreled and split the kingdom into four parts. God knew what he was talking about!

“*After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful.*” (7). The fourth animal was so fearsome it was not compared to an animal. It is simply called a beast. The Roman Empire had the strength of iron and ruled for many centuries. “*It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left*” (7). In truth, if you were on Rome’s side, you were treated—by ancient standards—decently. But if you opposed Rome they trampled, crushed and devoured until nothing remained.

So Daniel has this vision and the fearsome future events, and there sit the puny refugee remnants of the Jews on the banks of the Euphrates River in Babylon. There’s a saying that goes, “When elephants fight, the grass is trampled.” Those Jews worried, “When world powers war, won’t we be trampled?” So was that God’s message to his people in a world full of fearsome events?

In the vision of the four beasts, we read further: “*As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. 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. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*” (9-10). There is one who is greater than the raging sea, greater than ferocious beasts. He is named “Ancient of Days.” He is from eternity. He observes the puny powers of this world from his fiery throne. In his sight kingdoms of the world last a short time.

This is good news for the Jews. Yes, God had given the Babylonians power for a short time. He would give power to others too. But he is the mighty ruler sitting in the throne, the Ancient of Days, who holds all power. And he would keep his promises to his people. He would protect them.

But this Ancient of Days... He is just as fearsome as the beasts. He is fiery, he is holy, he will judge. Have you ever stood in the presence of a truly great person? Someone who shapes policies, or

innovates in a way that impacts the lives of hundreds of millions of people? This person controls events that shape the world. What are you and I? Looking at the Ancient of Days, we might have that feeling.

But there is one more personality mentioned in Daniel 7. *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 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.”* (13-14). This *“one like a son of man”* is more than mortal man. He was given authority, glory, power, etc. *“that will never be destroyed.”* Yet, while he is superhuman, there is a relief with his appearance. Daniel’s eyes had seen frightening beasts bent on conquest. He had seen the fiery Ancient of Days. But this one... his appearance “like a son of man”... that is profoundly comforting. It is familiar. That one with a kingdom that will never be destroyed is Jesus the Christ.

As we live in this world we have enough reasons—even without being refugees chased out of our homes—we have enough reasons to feel like leaves tossed in the wind. But we should not. In fact, that feeling really is something to repent of. Jesus himself told us, *“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.”* (Mt 6:25). Elsewhere the Bible tells us *“even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’”* (1 Peter 3:14).

These are times when we need to go to our God and confess to him that our anxiety and worry is sin. Fear and anxiety are a lack of faith that our God really is the ruler of all, the Ancient of Days, who orders all things for the good of his people. Fear and anxiety are denials that we really trust Jesus as our powerful king who will do all he has promised.

How good it is that Christ the King is not only true God, but also true man. One who was tempted like us. One who is merciful to us. One who forgives us. This had been promised from the beginning to Adam and Eve. There would be one born from the family of Eve who would crush Satan’s head. **A KING LIKE US.**

That man who wrote the book about Psalm 23, he said that the best way of all for his sheep to *not* fear, was for him to be out there with them. When the sheep looked around and saw their shepherd, they had a calm that nothing else could give them. They knew they were taken care of.

Do that same thing in the midst of all troubles: look at your Good Shepherd, King Jesus. Realize that his promise for you in this uncertain world is his protective, powerful presence at all times. Amen.