

# Daniel Series Part 16

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Date: 19 February 2012

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[ 0 : 00 ] For over 50 years, Daniel has endured Babylonian captivity. Now, in some regards, it was a comfortable captivity, but it was captivity all the same. And though Daniel was far from home, his heart remained in Jerusalem. Will he ever return? Will the captivity ever end?

Will it do so in his own lifetime? Three times a day, he would get down on his knees and pray towards Jerusalem. Three times a day, he would cry out for deliverance to the God of Israel. And will his God ever answer his cry? On one particular day, seemingly no different from any other. Daniel prayed once, and then he prayed a second time. And then at the close of the day, before he lay down to rest, he prayed again. But this time, heaven was not silent. As he lay on his bed, visions passed through his mind. God was speaking. God was answering his cry for help and deliverance. And what was the message from God? Well, a vision of power-fueled violence, oppression, and persecution. A vision that painted lurid pictures of kingdoms dedicated to conquest and destruction. A vision that presented the course of human history as a seemingly endless succession of kingdoms that ultimately stagger drunkenly, inebriated by the very blood that they shed. But as one falls, another, more terrifying and frightening takes its place on the stage of history. And what of the saints? What of God's people? What will be their fate? Will they know miraculous protection from the Almighty? Well, far from it.

[ 2 : 41 ] They will know what it is to bear the brunt of the violence and oppression of many of those who wield the sword of power and tyranny. Now, this is, I am sure, not what Daniel wanted to hear. He is, by his own admission, troubled in spirit and disturbed. This is not what perhaps only a few moments before he had prayed for with passion and expectation.

But God tells Daniel the way it is. This is the world that Daniel lived in, and it is the world that you and I also live in. In the world that you have a great day. We look around our sin-sick world, and we witness almost at every turn violence and oppression and injustice.

Dictators and despots, presidents and prime ministers, wielding power driven not by a concern largely for the common good, but for personal enhancement and a place in history. And what of the saints? Well, for so many, the vision rings true as they endure persecution, violence, and even death itself, simply for naming the name of Jesus.

This is the world we live in today also. But this is not all that Daniel sees. This is not all that God has to say.

In verse 9 of chapter 7, we read as the vision progresses, As I looked. And these words, as I looked, introduces another act in the drama.

[ 4 : 34 ] The vision shifts with staggering dramatic effect from the chaos of the churning sea to the tranquility and majesty of the heavenly throne.

And is this simply an exercise in visionary escapism? The world is a violent and even hellish place. But lift up your eyes to heaven. But lift up your eyes to heaven and forget for a moment the real world and this nasty little world in which you live.

Well, by no means is that the purpose or the intent of this change of scene in the vision. The heavenly throne, while in a very real world and this is the heavenly throne, while in a very real sense otherworldly in its appearance, is portrayed in the vision as intimately involved with the drama that unfolds on earth.

God is there and He is not silent. God is there and He is active. So, what is God doing? We can best answer the question by walking through the vision with Daniel and discovering what it is that he saw in the heavenly throne room. We have the words before us in verse 7 from verse 9 to verse 10.

geg weighted in- him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. What is the first thing that Daniel sees? Well, we're told there in verse 9, thrones were set in place. Now, Daniel has an advantage over us, because in simply seeing the vision, he no doubt saw things that are not recorded for us. There will be a limitation in the manner in which he would be able to describe all that he saw. And so, no doubt, there are things that he saw that he was able to identify, perhaps with a greater clarity than we are able to. Things that in God's providence have not been clearly interpreted for us, even in this chapter as the vision is then interpreted for

[ 7 : 21 ] Daniel. So, I wonder if for Daniel there was any sense of entry as he considered this plurality of thrones with which this part of the vision begins. Thrones were set in place. We might have expected a throne, but it is not a throne, but thrones were set in place. Well, if Daniel wasn't intrigued by it, many of those who have since pondered on his vision certainly have been. And many ideas are suggested as to what is represented by this description of thrones that were set in place. Now, we are not told who the thrones are for, certainly not who all the thrones are for. We're not even told how many thrones there are. And so, dogmatic certainty is neither possible nor necessary. But two possibilities among many things that we have been presented with. We are presented with one other than the Ancient of Days, who is certainly worthy of a throne, one like a Son of Man. Now, this part of the vision is not our concern this morning. It will be next week. But this other character, one like a Son of Man, to whom is given authority, glory, and sovereign power. And certainly, he is one who would have been worthy of a throne. Might it be that there were two thrones set in place, one immediately occupied by the Ancient of Days, as we are told, and another awaiting the arrival of the One coming with the clouds of heaven. In this respect, we are reminded of the words of Jesus, hours before His death, directed to His accusers. In Matthew's Gospel, we find these words,

But I say to all of you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. Well, that's one possibility. Another possibility involves a theme that is present in this vision and is picked up on in the New Testament. In the interpretation of this vision that we find in this very chapter, one of the very first truths presented is that the saints will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever. We see that in verse 18, as the interpretation has been given to Daniel. And the interpretation is part of the vision as well.

It's not separate from the vision. But there we read in verse 18, as Daniel has given some insight into what he has seen. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever, yes, forever and ever. And the picture would seem to be of the saints reigning with the promised eternal king. In Revelation 4 that we read earlier in the service, what we might call a parallel passage. We are told of twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders, perhaps representing the people of God, the saints. And the saints reigning with Christ is a recurring theme, often alluded to by Paul especially. We were thinking midweek about Ephesians chapter 2, and how in the beginning of that chapter, Paul speaks of how God has raised us up with Christ, and seated or enthroned us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

But if we do imagine and consider that the thrones that have been set in place, some were for the saints, or those who represent the saints, let it be very clear that occupying a throne does not preclude bowing in worship before the one on the central throne.

In Revelation chapter 4 that was clear. There were these twenty-four thrones, and the twenty-four elders were seated on the thrones. But when the angels began their praise and their worship, those seated on the thrones bowed down and joined in the worship. Well, there are two possibilities concerning the thrones.

[ 11 : 59 ] But to be overly distracted by the plurality of thrones, though legitimate to consider, to be overly distracted would be to miss the big picture. So, we move on, and we ask the question, what does Daniel then see? Well, there we read in verse 9, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. Who is it that appears, and what does he do?

Well, the one who appears in the vision is this one named the Ancient of Days. Now, we perhaps immediately conclude that the one described in this way is God Himself, and we are right to come to that conclusion. But it is right also and proper to have this initial impression, if you wish, confirmed by the evidence in the vision itself. Now, the evidence for identifying the Ancient of Days as Almighty God is ample. But we can limit ourselves to noting how it is the Ancient of Days who is able to grant to the one like a Son of Man authority, glory, and sovereign power. Now, such a

prerogative to grant authority, glory, and sovereign power rests with God alone. And so, the Ancient of Days, the creator of the universe, the living and true God, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting, he is the one who appears in the vision and takes his seat. Now, why is God given this name?

The name? The name is one that does allude to his eternal existence, the Ancient of Days, the one of whom in Job it is said, the number of his years is past finding out. He is, as we sang at the beginning of our service, from everlasting to everlasting. And this eternal existence of the Ancient of Days who takes his seat is intended to contrast with the ephemeral and passing nature of the kings of this world, of whom the vision has been speaking. The kings of this world, who despite all their pomp and glory, are like, also in the words of Psalm 90, like the new grass of the morning, though in the morning it springs up new. By evening it is dry and withered. And in glorious contrast, Daniel is given this vision of the Ancient of Days, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting.

And what does he do? What does the Ancient of Days do? Well, the first thing that he does is that he takes his seat. The Ancient of Days took his seat. God is seated on the throne. The picture is one of stability, but also of a rule that is present and active. As we look around the world, appearances often suggest that God is seated on his throne. But appearances deceive. Daniel is made to appreciate in this dramatic way that his God, the Ancient of Days, is very much seated on the throne, and he remains seated on the one who takes his seat. And as Daniel's sight is fixed in this vision of the one who takes his seat, what is it that Daniel is able to discover about the Ancient of Days? Well, we're told what it is that he sees. His clothing was as white as snow. The hair of his head was like wool. The white clothing speaks of purity and untainted righteousness. And again, the contrast that is intended is how different the appearance of the Ancient of Days, how different the vestments and clothing that is white of the

Ancient of Days from the bloodstained garb of the earthly rulers. His white hair like wool, reinforcing the picture of purity, a picture of purity, a picture of purity, a picture of eternal wisdom, something that Jonathan was sharing with the children just a few moments ago. And again, there is a contrast.

[16:47] There is a contrast between the Ancient of Days and his unsearchable and eternal wisdom with the proud folly, often bordering on insanity of the rulers of this world. The one seated on the throne is righteous.

The one seated on the throne is wise. But then, though Daniel is no doubt transfixed, and rightly so, by the one who is seated on the throne. His attention is also drawn by the throne itself. What is the throne that he is seated on? What is it like? And what does it say concerning the one who occupies it?

Well, we read there in verse 9 in the second half, The fire is a picture of destructive power. What are the wheels? These intriguing wheels that seem to form part of the throne.

Are they the wheels of a chariot? Does rather remind us of the visions that Ezekiel had, a contemporary of Daniel, that are recorded for us in the first chapter of his book. Well, certainly the wheels remind Daniel, as they remind us, that God's throne is an active throne, and that God's justice reaches every corner of the world.

We might put it this way. God's justice travels. It travels, as it were, on wheels of fire. There is no place to hide and no place to run from the justice of God, from the one who is seated on this throne with wheels that are all ablaze.

[19:04] The river of fire that is spoken of there in verse 10, I think only serves to further emphasize the active nature of God's rule and judgment.

He not only judges, He not only announces the sentence, but the sentence that is announced is executed. I wonder, as Daniel observes this throne and the one seated on the throne, is it the case that Daniel is alone in this magnificent scene?

Well, he tells us that he is by no means alone. Thousands upon thousands attended him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. Daniel in Babylon, over fifty years, no sign of release, no sign of return, no imminent sign in any case.

Daniel, no doubt, felt often alone and isolated. But in the vision, he is reminded that he is not alone. He too, together with the heavenly hosts, serves the Ancient of Days. Though his posting is a lonely one, he is far from alone.

[20:36] And this, I am sure, was a source of great encouragement for Daniel, not only as he is immersed in the vision, but as he would subsequently go through the vision in his mind.

On those difficult days when all seemed to be against him, when nobody seemed to be with him in faithful service to God, he would remember the thousands upon thousands, the ten thousands upon ten thousands who stood before the Ancient of Days.

That was his place. These were his people. He was one of them. And this too, of course, can and should be a source of encouragement for us in our own service that can at times be a lonely one. But Daniel, as he is granted this vision, remains, I am sure, intrigued. What is actually going on in the throne room?

He is able to see what there is to see. He sees the thrones. He sees the central throne. He is granted this vision of the Ancient of Days who is seated on the throne.

[ 21 : 44 ] He is able to observe and describe the nature of the throne itself. But what is actually going on? Well, much of what we have said has already alluded to that.

But what is then said in the vision makes it abundantly clear. The court was seated and the books were opened.

The throne room is at one and the same time a courtroom, and the court is in session. The judge is seated and the evidence is before him.

The books were opened. Sentences are being delivered and sentences are being executed. We notice what is said in what follows in verse 11.

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. Why was his body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire?

[ 22 : 46 ] Because a judgment had been arrived at, and the judgment was executed. This is the vision of God that Daniel is granted.

A vision that serves to reassure and to embolden, to remind that over and above the rulers of this world, there is one who is seated on the throne.

He is there, and he is not silent. He is there, and he is active. But some might say, maybe quite legitimately, as a legitimate question and concern, some might say, well, that was some 8,000 years ago that Daniel had this vision.

What about today? Has this got anything to say to us today? Well, the world is not so different to the world in the day of Daniel.

And what about the throne room? Is it any different to the throne room, as Daniel was able to see it in his vision? Well, the judge remains seated on the throne.

[ 24 : 02 ] The Ancient of Days is seated on the throne, and he is seated now. God is seated today on his throne, and that throne is, as Daniel was able to see in his vision, a throne not only of government, but of judgment.

As we look around our world, and we see so much oppression and injustice and violence, can we be sure that justice will always be done?

Can we be sure that every judgment will be just? Might there not be in the real world innocents denied justice and tyrants who elude justice?

I think there are three truths concerning the judge seated on the throne that allow us to rest secure in the conviction that justice will ultimately be done and always be done.

We can be sure of this, first of all, because of the character of the one seated on the throne. We have already been able to see something of his character. He is pure.

[ 25 : 20 ] He is altogether righteous. He is altogether wise. And so, the character of the judge guarantees the soundness of his judgments.

But not only his character, there is also, we are told, the evidence at his disposal. The books are open, and all is revealed. You see, you could have a human judge of great integrity, and yet he might not have all the evidence.

And so, though he be a man of great integrity, he could come to a wrong conclusion. But this judge not only enjoys untainted character and integrity, but he has all the evidence at his disposal.

Also, the books would open, and all is revealed. All that is done in a hidden place. All that is done under the cover of darkness.

All that is done when nobody is watching. All of this is known to the judge. So, his character guarantees the soundness of his judgments, the evidence at his disposal.

[ 26 : 36 ] But also, what guarantees not only that the judgments will be sound, but that they will be carried out, is the power of the one seated on the throne.

The one from whom there flows a river of fire flowing. His power ensures that every sentence is executed.

But has this got anything to do with you and me? The books that sit open in the court tell all concerning Nebuchadnezzar.

They tell all concerning Darius. They tell all concerning Alexander the Great. They tell all concerning Julius Caesar. But the books also record the atrocities of modern tyrants, of Stalin and Hitler and Mao Zedong, of Idi Amin and Pol Pot and Kim Jong-il, and the list goes on and on. But this book, and of this let us be very clear, and very solemnly clear, this book also tells your story. And it tells my story.

[ 27 : 54 ] Your life and my life are also recorded perfectly and exhaustively. Your every sinful thought and word and deed.

The evidence is stacked up against not only the tyrants of this world, but the evidence is stacked up against the likes of you and me.

As Paul rightly concludes, there is no one righteous. No, not one. And in the light of that reality, what are we to do?

What are we to say? Is there no hope? Is guilty on all counts the only possible and just verdict for us all? We hear the words of the psalmist as he praises God and cries out to God in Psalm 51, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

In this cry of the psalmist that we can also cry out, There is hope. For he cries to a God of great compassion and of unfailing love, but he cries also to a God who is able and willing to blot out our transgressions, blot them out from the pages of the book that condemns us.

[ 29 : 29 ] And we could rightly ask, Well, how can even God do that? If he is so just, and if his judgments are so sound, how can even God do that?

Well, he can do that because of what Jesus, his Son, has done. You see, Jesus, the promised eternal King of the vision, the one like the Son of Man, Jesus died for every one of our sins recorded in the book, and his shed blood has the power to blot out even the record of them.

In Jesus, and most powerfully at Calvary, love and faithfulness meet together. Righteousness, justice, and peace kiss each other.

And so there is hope. Let us pray.