

LOVE AND MONSTERS , DANIEL 7

Unshakable Faith #7

◆**Intro:** Have you noticed that people seem constantly fascinated by the end of the World. I'll bet in a matter of minutes we could come up with two dozen movies about the end of the world. [*The Day After Tomorrow, War of the Worlds, Independence Day, Armageddon, Meteor, Maze Runner, Sharknado(well maybe not)*]. The most recent one I happened to watch is called *Love and Monsters* in which earth is overrun but genetically mutated giant creatures like worms as big as a school buss.] All these tales are about a coming apocalypse, which has come to mean "crisis" or "destruction" at the end of the world. The greek term actually means "revelation" or "uncovering" as in the Apocalypse of John. You know it as the Book of Revelations.

◆In the ancient Near East there was a whole genre of writing called "apocalyptic literature, just as there is a whole category of "end-of-time" movies today. This genre is characterized by heavy symbolism and mysterious allusions. In the Bible we find predominantly two books in this genre; the Revelations/ Apocalypse of John, and the second half of the book of Daniel. You will recall that the first 6 chapters of Daniel are historical narrative. They are sort of a view from below, the human level on Israel's suffering and God's sovereignty. Starting with chapter 7 Daniel writes apocalyptically, a view of all of human history more so from above; or the heavenly level.

◆**1. First a word about biblical interpretation:** first and primary in interpreting the meaning of God's Word is that we

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want to know what the author was trying to tell his original audience and we find that by looking first at the historical context and the literary context. What was his message to his audience? While biblical prophecy may include foretelling (future happenings), it is always first forth-telling (what God telling the people at that time.) This is especially important when reading apocalyptic literature because attaching excessive symbolism, and futuristic interpretations can serve to drown out the original message meant for its original hearers. And that message will remain for us as well.

◆ You see, apocalyptic is a “revelation” of hope for those in crisis now. Apocalyptic is like your Dad telling you beforehand how what seems like a scary movie actually ends well, so that you can maybe enjoy some popcorn while watching it, without running out of the room. In the same way God through Daniel tells the Jews in Babylon why they can still be hopeful even in the face of some real monsters. Ok, lets jump into Daniels vision in chapter 7. What does it tell us. There are two spots that explicitly tell us what Daniel’s visions mean.

◆ Daniel 7:16-18 (NIV 1984) So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ‘The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.

◆ Daniel 7:24-27 (NIV 1984) After them another king will arise, ... The saints will be handed over to him... ‘But the court will sit, and his

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power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints,

◆ Basically Daniel 7 tells us 1) Beastly kingdoms will always arise and persecute God's people. 2) But the eternal kingdom will go to God's people. Lets break it into its two parts.

◆ **2. Be wary. Beastly kingdoms will always arise and persecute God's people.** This is a given in the Bible and it wasn't just true for Daniel's day. The biblical writers knew that our human world is inherently and powerfully evil and it will continue that way all the way to the end.

◆ Matthew 24:9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

◆ (Lk.11:49) God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.'

◆ Acts 14:22 ...strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

◆ *1 Thessalonians 3:3 ...so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

◆ I know that doesn't sound hopeful right away, but hang on. It's realism that gives us reason to stay aware, and not be knocked of our stools when evil things happen. The trajectory of humanity in Daniel 7 is not upward and improving, but downward and disintegrating. The world's real problem is the moral depravity of

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people which will color all human kingdoms. This comes out quickly in Daniel's vision. Let me show you.

- ◆1. From every corner of the world (4 **winds**) there is a storm of turmoil over the sea. In the Bible the **sea** is a symbol of chaos and rebellion against God. [Cf. Gen.1 where the world is formless and the Holy Spirit hovers over "the water" and then creates order, and life. Cf. Rev.21 where heaven comes down to earth and there is "no longer any sea", ie chaos, or disorder, or crying or pain because the old "order" has passed away.]
- ◆2. What comes out of the chaotic sea of humanity are **monsters**, and impure ones at that, as seen in the fact that they are **mutations** of real things, combinations of things that do not belong together (notably contrary to many OT laws). This is the reality of life on fallen Earth.
- ◆Now these monsters (human empires) of chapter 7 are in perfect historical parallel with the kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream in chapter 2, but there are differences that give us clues to their meaning. From a human standpoint (Neb's dream interpreted by Daniel) in chapter 2, four nations to come are represented by gold, silver, bronze and iron/clay; -all precious metals. But from God's view (Daniel's dream interpreted by an angel) these nations are not precious, but rather monstrous developments of mankind that get worse and worse. Here's a quick parallel comparison:

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◆Ch2: Babylon is the gold. Medo-Persia is the silver that conquered Babylon in 539BC. Greece is the bronze that conquered Persia in 334BC. And Rome is represented by iron/clay mix that conquered Greece completely by 30 BC.

◆Ch7; The historical order is the same. Babylon is pictured by a Lion with eagles wings (an actual symbol on the Ishtar Gates of Babylon. The lopsided Bear equates with Medo-Persians of which Persia was the stronger side (this is explicitly stated in ch8). The flying leopard with four heads represents Greece that speedily took over the entire MiddleEastern world in a short 10 years, after which Alexander the Great died (at 32!)and his kingdom was eventually split between four of his generals Ptolemy, Seleucus, Cassandra, and Lysimachus. And the fourth unknown beast of iron teeth correlates to Rome, that supplanted Greek rule.

◆But here's another wrinkle: In Daniels vision, from the succession of four evil human kingdoms, verse 9 fast forwards us all the way to the end of time itself, God's Judgment Day, as though its *the scenario of human history across the board to have monster kingdoms rise and fall!* Every detail doesn't necessarily correlate to specific history (Rome didn't have just ten kings, though 10 is considered a perfect number symbolically). Instead the vision seems to say that even after Israel returns from exile in Babylon, there will still always be monsters, evil kingdoms that

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will always oppose God and his holy ways.. Here's a quick example from the teachings of Jesus.

◆ *Matthew 24:15-16 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' **spoken of through the prophet Daniel**—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

◆ Here's the thing, that prophecy in Daniel was fulfilled in surprising historic detail already in 167BC. I'll tell you more about that next week. But note here that Jesus sees the fulfillment still coming. As though the "abomination" is a "type" that keeps showing up in human history.

~~◆ John says the same thing about the AntiChrist. He says that it's coming, AND he says that there have already been many of them.~~

~~◆ *1 John 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (Hint that we are in the Millennium.)*~~

~~◆ *1 John 4:3 every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*~~

◆ Certainly history bears this out. We've seen the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Saddam, Khmer Rouge, Rwanda. Earthly kingdoms still oppress God's people today (North Korea, Iran, Nigeria, Arabia).

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It's been estimated that since 1990 and average of 160,000 Christians have been killed every year. In a sense, all followers of God are living in exile until the day of Christ's return. Peter the Apostle says that we are "aliens and strangers" here.

◆ *1 Peter 2:11-12,15 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. ...For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*

◆ So what is our application of this truth? Don't give in, and don't give up. Don't give in to the world's values and pursuits. And don't give up on imaging God's holiness in an unholy world.

◆ There will always be monsters, and by God's commission, we must always add his love to the mix.

◆ **2. Be of good cheer! The eternal kingdom will go to God's people.** Do you recall from ch2 that the divine rock that crushed the statue grew into a mountain that filled the whole Earth? We're seeing it again. God's kingdom will take over it all! This means I can be hopeful anyway. I can endure hopefully because those who follow God will win in the end. You can't stop the Kingdom of God. So I can take the hits. I can bear the ridicule. I can live through the scary movie because I know it all ends well, that is, for God's people. Look at the text.

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◆ Right in the middle of Daniel 7, between the vision of nasty human kingdoms, and the interpretation of the nasty human kingdoms, there is another vision, one of heaven's throne room. It is a throne of judgement where the books (records) of everyone in history are evaluated.

◆ Dan 7:13-14 "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.

◆ **A.** Now we know partly why Daniel was so disturbed by this vision! There's an element in this vision that would horrify any Hebrew, or Jew, or follower of the OT God. And I can't wait to tell you all about it after Easter week...!

◆ But right now we need to ask, "What does the vision of the **throne of judgement** tell us?" Just this. Great as empires may be, and great as kings may become, we all answer to a greater King, the Ancient of Days. China answers. America answers. Israel answers. Republicans answer. Democrats answer. Independents answer. Hindus answer. Muslims answer. Buddhists answer. Everyone answers to the Creator God of the OT. Christianity teaches that there is an end to this fallen sinful existence where every hint of evil will be destroyed, and God's

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holy ones, though always facing oppression and struggle here, will inherit the one pure Kingdom that lasts forever. That's how the movie ends.

◆ This is the central thrust of Daniel 7. Not the coming Beast or AntiChrist (symbolized by the little horn). Not exactly how many years until Jesus returns. The angel doesn't explain the wheels on the throne, or the fire, or four heads on the Leopard. But three times in Daniel 7 we are told that "the holy ones of the Most High" will have an eternal kingdom. That Christian, it a message for you today.

◆ Daniel 7:18. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.'

◆ Daniel 7:22 ... the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

◆ Daniel 7:27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'

◆ **Conclusion.** What does it mean? It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. When the end of this world arrives, it will not be mutant worms, or dinosaurs from the Pacific Rim, or meteors, or viruses, or alien invasions through a time warp in the sky, or global warming, the melting of the polar ice cap, or a new ice age that brings our world to an end. It will be God's throne of Judgement. But there is hope for his own. Are you one?

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◆The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.

Source: Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking: