

May 23

Lesson 12

## The Indestructible King

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**Focal Passage:** Daniel 7:1-14

**Background Text:** Daniel 7:1-28

**Purpose Statement:** To discern what Daniel's ancient vision reveals to us about God and Jesus Christ today

Daniel 7:1-14

<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Babylon's King Belshazzar, Daniel had a dream—a vision in his head as he lay on his bed. He wrote the dream down. Here is the beginning of the account:

<sup>2</sup>I am Daniel. In the vision I had during the night I saw the four winds of heaven churning the great sea. <sup>3</sup>Four giant beasts emerged from the sea, each different from the others. <sup>4</sup>The first was like a lion with eagle's wings. I observed it until its wings were pulled off, and it was lifted up from the ground. It was then set on two feet, like a human being, and it received a human mind. <sup>5</sup>Then I saw another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told: "Get up! Devour much flesh!" <sup>6</sup>I kept watching, and suddenly there was another beast, this one like a leopard. On its back it had four wings like bird wings. This beast had four heads. Authority was given to it.

<sup>7</sup>After this, as I continued to watch this night vision, I saw a fourth beast, terrifying and hideous, with extraordinary power and with massive iron teeth. As it ate and crushed, its feet smashed whatever was left over. It was different from all the other beasts before it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I was staring at the horns when, suddenly, another small horn came up between them. Three of the earlier horns were ripped out to make room for it. On this new horn were eyes like human eyes and a mouth that bragged and bragged.

<sup>9</sup>As I was watching,

thrones were raised up.

The ancient one took his seat.

His clothes were white like snow;

his hair was like a lamb's wool.

His throne was made of flame;

its wheels were blazing fire.

<sup>10</sup>A river of fire flowed out from his presence;

thousands upon thousands served him;

ten thousand times ten thousand stood ready to serve him!

The court sat in session; the scrolls were opened.

<sup>11</sup>I kept watching. I watched from the moment the horn started bragging until the beast was killed and its body was destroyed, handed over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup>Then the authority of the remaining beasts was brought to an end, but they were given an extension among the living for a set time and season.

<sup>13</sup>As I continued to watch this night vision of mine,

I suddenly saw

one like a human being

coming with the heavenly clouds.

He came to the ancient one

and was presented before him.

<sup>14</sup>Rule, glory, and kingship were given to him;

all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him.

His rule is an everlasting one—

it will never pass away!—

his kingship is indestructible.

**Key Verse:** "As I was watching, thrones were raised up. The ancient one took his seat. His clothes were white like snow; his hair was like a lamb's wool. His throne was made of flame; its wheels were blazing fire" (Daniel 7:9).

It can sometimes be difficult to watch the news on television and read news reports in the paper and on the internet. Our hearts break when we hear stories of people suffering at the hands of evil. This evil can be the result of a variety of factors, including prejudice, injustice, and greed. The evil that people experience may be due to oppressive political systems or the acts of individuals. We long for an end to the suffering. We look to God for a word of hope.

Like us today, God's people in ancient times longed for a word of hope. In this lesson, we will look at a passage of Scripture from the Book of Daniel. This book is classified as apocalyptic literature (uh-pok-uh-lip-tik). It looks beyond the present day to God's ultimate triumph over evil in the future. As we study this apocalyptic text, we will discern what Daniel's ancient vision reveals to us today about God and Jesus Christ.

### **The Book of Daniel**

The Book of Daniel has two parts. The first part, [Chapters 1–6](#), contains stories that may be familiar to you, including the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace and the story of Daniel in the lions' den. The second part of the Book of Daniel, [Chapters 7–12](#), contains visions of the end times that are attributed to Daniel. These visions are filled with vivid and symbolic imagery. The stories and visions in Daniel are set in the court of Babylon's kings Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius during Judah's exile in Babylon and Babylon's subsequent fall to the Persians between 606–536 BC.

While the setting of the book is during the time of Judah's exile to Babylon, the first six chapters actually reflect a later time in Israel's history, 350–200, during the latter part of Persia's rule and the early part of Greek rule. Scholars date the final version of the book around 164, when the Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes was in power.

Antiochus IV had no tolerance for the Jewish religious customs. The original authors had him in mind when they wrote, "He will stop both sacrifices and offerings. In their place will be the desolating monstrosities until the decreed destruction sweeps over the devastator" (Daniel 9:27).

While the apocalyptic visions in the Bible are based on historical events, they are not intended to be read as historical accounts. Their purpose is to remind God's people that God will ultimately have the victory over evil. These ancient apocalyptic writings are in fact timeless. New Testament authors interpreted these texts in light of tyranni-

cal rulers in their day, just as we interpret them in light of our present-day situations.

### ***How are apocalyptic writings a source of hope for you?***

#### **A Churning Sea**

In the story of Creation, we see that God has authority over the waters and that God brings order out of chaos. For the ancient people, the sea was a frightening place of chaos. They believed it to be the entrance to the underworld, which was a place of death and separation from God. It was also home to the sea monster Leviathan.

The people's faith that God has power over the sea is evident in Scripture. In his prophecy of redemption for Israel, Isaiah proclaimed, "On that day, the LORD will take a great sword, harsh and mighty, and will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the writhing serpent, and will kill the dragon that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27:1).

Isaiah also recalled Israel's miraculous escape from Egypt: "Didn't you dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep? And didn't you make the redeemed a road to cross through the depths of the sea, a road for the redeemed to pass?" (Isaiah 51:10).

One psalmist declared, "You split the sea with your power. You shattered the heads of the sea monsters on the water" (Psalm 74:13). John's vision of the end times, recorded in the Book of Revelation, contains these words of hope regarding the sea: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Revelation 21:1).

The account of Daniel's vision begins with, "In the vision I had during the night I saw the four winds of heaven churning the great sea. Four giant beasts emerged from the sea" (Daniel 7:2-3). The NRSV translates the word "churning" as "stirring." It has also been translated "fell upon" or "attacked."<sup>1</sup> The point here is that it was God's powerful action over the chaos of the sea that caused the "four giant beasts" (verse 3) to emerge and ultimately be destroyed.

Daniel's vision is about God bringing order out of chaos on a worldly scale. As I considered this imagery, I began to think about the ways we experience God bringing order out of chaos in our personal lives. When we face challenges at work, conflicts in our relationships, or fear and uncertainty following a medical diagnosis, for example, we may feel as if we are becoming lost in a chaotic sea. We are not lost, however, because God knows where we are and has promised to always be with us. We can look to

God with trust and hope, knowing God is able to provide us with the wisdom, courage, clarity, guidance, and peace that we need in all circumstances.

One evening, Jesus and his disciples were on a boat and were caught in a storm. "But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow." The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we're drowning?" Jesus woke up and simply said, "Silence! Be still!"

After the storm was over, the disciples said, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41). As the disciples experienced the calming of the chaotic waters and the quieting of the frightening storm, they came a little closer to understanding who Jesus is.

*In what ways has God calmed the chaotic waters you have encountered in your life? How did these experiences help you grow in faith?*

## Four Beasts

In Daniel's vision, "four giant beasts emerged from the sea, each different from the others" (Daniel 7:3). These four beasts represented "ferocious earthly empires."<sup>2</sup>

Notice, however, that we are not told specifically which empires they represent. The writers had certain earthly kingdoms in mind, but the fact that these are not mentioned by name give these apocalyptic visions a timeless quality. Even between the time these visions were first written down and the time they were included as part of our Scripture, the people's understanding of the kingdoms these beasts represented had changed.

The first beast is generally considered to be Babylon. As we noted above, the stories in the first six chapters of Daniel are set in Babylon during the time the people of Judah were living in exile there. This beast is described as being "like a lion with eagle's wings" (verse 4). Lions and eagles are both noble animals. During the time King Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon, "images of lions with wings decorated the main street."<sup>3</sup>

When Jeremiah was speaking the Lord's word to the people of Judah and warning them of God's coming punishment at the hand of Babylon, he declared, "A lion bursts out of the thicket; a destroyer of nations advances. He's gone forth from his place to ravage your land, to wipe out your towns, until no one is left" (Jeremiah 4:7).

The second beast, the bear, was initially interpreted to be Media. Jeremiah prophesied, "The LORD is stirring up the spirit of kings from Media. He intends to destroy Babylon; this is the LORD's retribution, a day of reckoning for his temple" (Jeremiah

51:11). Proverbs 28:15 states, "A wicked ruler over the poor is like a growling lion or a prowling bear."

The third beast, the leopard, initially represented Persia. The fourth beast, which is not identified as any certain animal, represented the Greek kingdoms. At the time the Book of Daniel was written, the people were living under the rule of the Greek king Antiochus IV.

With time, the second beast came to represent Medo-Persia. It turned out that Media joined forces with Persia to defeat Babylon. The third beast was then interpreted to be the Greek kingdoms. The fourth beast then represented Rome, which ruled over Judea during the time of Jesus. One scholar writes, "Thus Jews and Christians have received the book of Daniel as a forward-pointing prophecy."<sup>4</sup>

*What powers or forces feel threatening to you today?*

## An Eternal Throne

After Daniel saw the four beasts emerge from the chaotic sea, his attention turned upward to the heavenly throne of God. We are reminded of Ezekiel's vision of God in a fiery chariot. In contrast to the chaos in the sea, we see a vision of orderliness: "thousands upon thousands" serving and "ten thousand times ten thousand" standing "ready to serve" (Daniel 7:10).

Daniel watched as the fourth beast was killed and the first three beasts lost their authority. This is a vision of hope for God's people as we look forward to the time when God will bring an end to suffering and evil.

Daniel then saw "one like a human being coming with the heavenly clouds" (verse 13). This scene is in sharp contrast to the previous one. The four monstrous beasts emerged from a chaotic sea. The human being emerged from heaven on calm and peaceful clouds.

Before the time of Jesus, "Jewish interpreters understood the 'human one' to be an end-time redeemer, God's anointed ruler."<sup>5</sup> We as Christians see this figure as Christ. After Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, before his crucifixion, he was questioned by the high priest, " 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one?' Jesus said, 'I am. And you will see the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty and coming on the heavenly clouds' " (Mark 14:62).

The kingship of Christ is quite different from the kingship of earthly rulers. In our own lifetimes, we have seen earthly governments fail and new governments take their

places. We have seen governments support some groups of people and inflict harm on others. Christ came on behalf of “all peoples, nations, and languages,” and Christ’s kingdom is “everlasting” and “indestructible” (Daniel 7:14).

A favorite hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the promised redeemer, the anointed one, the Christ. Through Christ, we have hope that God will calm the chaos and storms we experience in our lives on earth.

Daniel’s apocalyptic vision with its vivid imagery and symbolism points us to that future day when God will destroy evil. Our hope in God is sure. We are living witnesses to God’s hope as we remain faithful through all circumstances. We offer the gift of hope to others as we fulfill our call to live as faithful servants.

*How does Daniel’s apocalyptic vision give you hope? How do you share hope with others?*

### **Praise, Thanksgiving, and Song**

As you prepare to observe the spiritual practice of praise, thanksgiving, and song this week, read again Daniel 7:14. How does this vision bring you hope? How have you experienced God’s faithful presence? You may want to write your responses in your

journal or share your experiences with a friend.

Respond to God’s hope and faithful presence in your life with praise, thanksgiving, and song. You may want to sing favorite hymns or worship songs that express your hope in Christ. You may want to raise your hands toward heaven and voice words of praise out loud. You may want to kneel and offer prayers of adoration and thanksgiving.

**Holy and powerful God, thank you for the promise of hope. Thank you that we may look forward to a day when all evil will cease. Open our eyes and ears to the ways we may be voices of hope and instruments of peace as your faithful servants on earth; in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

<sup>1</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, Old Testament; page 1410.

<sup>2</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, Old Testament; page 1410.

<sup>3</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, Old Testament; page 1410.

<sup>4</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, Old Testament; page 1411.

<sup>5</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, Old Testament; page 1411.

<sup>6</sup>*Hymnal*, 368.