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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 6

When I went to seminary many jokingly called it “cemetery” because many lost their love and fervor for the Lord when their faith was intellectualized. For me, it was just the opposite. I loved seminary; it was a wonderful time of growth and learning. In fact of all the classes I attended, the one I anticipated the most was Eschatology and the study of the Book of Revelation. I had never spent any real time on either topic prior to seminary. So when I sat down in the class that day, I did so with excitement and zeal! I couldn’t wait to find out details surrounding the second coming of Christ, the political events that were going to take place preceding it, and much, much more.

The professor began with these words: “The book of Revelation was not written to make us prophets, but to give the same passion and zeal that John had when he closed the book: ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come!’ AND ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”

As we transition into the prophetic section of Daniel, it is ever important that we keep this exhortation in mind. The book of Daniel was not written to make us prophets! Yet you’d never know it by the way so many read it with their charts, assertions, and predictions! We would do well to keep in mind the words of Graeme Goldsworthy on the purpose of the book of Revelation:

The problem of Christian existence is that we easily allow the tribulation which we experience within the suffering church to obscure the glory that is already ours by faith in Christ. This is the problem that the Book of Revelation sets out to rectify. If only that object and aim of the book were kept in mind we could be spared a lot of speculative interpretation. John's first concern is not to minister to arm-chair prophets in some far-off age, but to the battlers of his own age who struggle to reconcile the fact of their suffering with the fact of Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. (Goldsworthy, 2001, p. 267)

Clearly that was the aim of Daniel with this prophetic work! Daniel was the first prophet to write as an exile, in exile, for a people in exile. As such, he penned this prophecy to answer two questions: When the pain and difficulties of this life come crashing in on you...

- What is the servant of Christ to do?
- What is there to encourage them?

As to the first question, chapter 1 would say: Purpose within yourself to seek the Lord... honor the Lord... worship the Lord... trust the Lord! As we have seen, that is a major theme of this book. As to the second question, chapters 2-12 is Daniel's answer- of which we've seen five thus far: *“Be Encouraged:*

1. *Your God is Great and so Rules Kings and Nations, Daniel 2.*
2. *Your God is Holy and therefore has a Plan that is Beyond your Ability to Understand, Daniel 3.*
3. *Your God Reigns and so Holds the Heart of the King in His Hands, Daniel 4.*
4. *Your God is Jealous and so will not allow Himself- and so the Believer- to be Mocked, Daniel 5.*
5. *Your God's Way is Infallible, Daniel 6.*

We have before us a sixth word of encouragement, this time from God Himself: *Be Encouraged! In the End, God's People Win!* We pick it up with...

In the End, God's People Win

Daniel 7:1, "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind *as he lay* on his bed;¹ then he wrote the dream down *and* related the *following* summary of it."

With this we are back to Belshazzar who, you will recall, co-reigned with his father, Nabonidus (who was the last king of Babylon). That means historically, chapters 7 & 8 preceded chapter 5. Based on the time indicators, the date here was 552/1 BC which puts Daniel in his late 60's. At this time in his life, he laid down to go to sleep and the Lord granted him a prophetic vision which would disturb him quite significantly (cf. v. 28). Let's look at the vision.

Daniel 7:2-3, "Daniel said, 'I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.'"

We know that the "four great beasts" represented literal kings or kingdoms (vv. 17, 23) which makes this passage quite figurative; people don't arise out of water. Accordingly, the "four winds of heaven" conveys the idea of every compass point. The "sea" references NOT an inland sea, BUT a massive ocean (which in Scripture typically references the mass of fallen humanity, e.g., Is. 17:12, 13). The idea being conveyed is that of completeness. It would not be from one race of men that the kings would arise; they would come from the world!

Would you notice that Daniel here is endeavoring to convey the shock/horror which he experienced as he gazed into the future? The word-pictures are sobering and strong! And in the words of Ferguson:

If we are going to read this passage as Daniel intended, it should move us as it moved him! Think of it: to an Israelite, the sea was both dangerous and mysterious- a restless element (Isaiah 57:20). (Ferguson, 1988, p. 135)

Accordingly, to read of "four sea monsters" coming out of the sea and taking over the world would most certainly raise the concern of Daniel's readers! Joyce Baldwin put it this way:

In eagerness to identify the beasts it is important not to miss the emotional reactions these fierce symbols arouse... The reader is meant to register terror before these fearsome beasts, especially in view of their supernatural features... (Baldwin, 2009, p. 154)

So allow yourself to be moved by this passage! From the perspective of Daniel, the near future wasn't all that bright! With this, notice the four beasts of Daniel 7. Each are terrifying:

- The first was that of a lion (v. 4) with the power of an eagle- suggesting dominion and strength. If Daniel 2 and 7 are parallel (which most believe they are), the lion would

correspond with Babylon.

- The second was a bear (v. 5) which in Babylon was a huge creature weighing as much as 550 pounds! It is raised up and ready to pounce on its prey with “the ribs” of a previous victim in its mouth! This would be the Persians!
- The third was a leopard (v. 6) which at the time was considered the most dangerous of the beasts of prey on account of its sudden and unexpected attacks. Yet here it had “four wings” and “four heads” on its back- conveying the idea that there wasn’t a place this creature couldn’t see or get to. This was Greece.
- The fourth was a dragon-type creature (v. 7; cf. Revelation 13:2) with 10 horns- which in Scripture represented strength (Zechariah 1:18-21). This kingdom would be extremely powerful and dangerous. This was Rome.



And yet an eleventh horn with an inauspicious beginning would grow strong and powerful, eventually taking on the power of three of the other horns. That it has “eyes” and “a mouth uttering great boasts” conveys the idea of an individual. In light of Revelation 13, the description here is quite ominous speaking of a dragon that would come out of the ocean:

Revelation 13:5-6, “And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven.”

Now, imagine being in the exile having been ravished by the Babylonians (it has only been 30 years since the destruction of the temple which meant it would have been fresh in the memory of God’s people). Here they received word (in contrast to the message of the false prophets who continued with their promises of “peace and safety”) that other kings and kingdoms would rise up and devour the world. How brutal and unsettling!

Yet that is exactly what would happen! After the Babylonians came the Persians... and then the Greeks... and then the Romans... and so on. With each kingdom came new and renewed suffering for God’s people. Yet the call of God remained steadfast:

1. Serve God in the exile! Love Him; honor Him; worship Him!
2. Don’t grow weary; don’t lose hope! “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward” (Hebrews 10:35)!

Yet what is there to encourage the child of God in this? That is the question- which brings us to a glorious contrast.

Daniel 7:9-10, “I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne

was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened."

If the first vision of the four creatures inspired fear, this would have inspired awe! Against the backdrop of four world powers out of which, from the last, would come an arrogant individual who would speak boisterous words, Daniel beheld the throne-room of a Being awesome in His greatness and power! Notice the particulars text:

- Thrones were set up: there just wasn't one throne placed in the courtyard; there were many. But all that mattered was the One who sat in the middle- described here as
- The Ancient of Days: the denotation of "Ancient of Days" is that of the keeper of time.² Notice his...
- Vesture was like white snow, the hair of His head like pure wool: the picture here is that of transcendence! The Being before Daniel was holy and therefore unlike anything Daniel had ever known or imagined!
- His throne *was ablaze with flames*; its wheels *were a burning fire*: obviously as one who read the other prophets (cf. Daniel 9:2) Daniel would have seen the similarities between this and Ezekiel³ and as such would have known instantly that he was gazing into heaven and at God!
- A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him: throughout Scripture "fire" is synonymous with God's presence (cf. Exodus 3:3; Malachi 4:1). In other words, unlike many an earthly king who looked good but had little ability to change their surrounds, the Being at which Daniel gazed here would impact the world (as we'll see in a moment)!
- Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him: in the ancient world, the size and glory of a king's retinue was a statement of his power and greatness. Here we are told that an uncountable number of beings attended the Lord of this vision. From this it would have been concluded that this King was omnipotent; the greater the number of servants the greater the king's power (here that number is unlimited)! Now what would this Omnipotent Being do? Judge!
- The court sat, and the books were opened: this is the language of judgment- of a trial in session. The "books" would have been a record of transgression/offenses.

So in contrast to the awe-filled description of the four beasts ravishing the world, there is the Lord- high and exalted! In fact, because of Daniel's choice of placement here, the next statement is purposefully anti-climactic.

Daniel 7:11a, "Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking..."

Normally such a description should bother us (if it were in the first section, it no doubt would have). Yet juxtaposed next to the Great I Am, the arrogance and boastings of the beast is seen

for what it really was and is: nothing! The nuance here is one and the same as...

Psalm 2:2-4, "The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed: 'Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!' [Sounds pretty formidable... until you look at God] [Yet] He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them."

That is the contrast here! As great as may *seem* these earthly kingdoms, they are as nothing to God! And so we read...

Daniel 7:11b-12, "I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire [and so the beast would be slain; yet we aren't at the end yet]. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time."

It is significant that the power which the beast commandeered from the three horns would continue to have a recognizable identity, "...life was granted to them for an appointed period of time." In other words, we are not talking here about the Last Day. History clearly has not yet come to an end! Yet the one constant that does remain is the King of kings and Lord of lords who reigns in and through His Messiah...

Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven [think of Sinai, Exodus 16:10] one like a Son of Man was coming [this is the Messiah, Christ, the Lord], and He came up to the Ancient of Days [as an equal] and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion,⁴ glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

What a contrast! Next to these four intimidating beasts you need to see God and His Messiah- both of whom have a rule that extends well beyond the power and dominion of the world of man! Truly, "His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed!"

That was Daniel's vision! What does it all mean? That brings us to the vision explained.

Daniel 7:15-16, "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things."

Again, Daniel was brutalized by what he just saw; specifically the wicked reign of the four beasts. Accordingly he needed to know what it all meant, and so he approached one of the beings in his vision and inquired as to the meaning- to which he was told:

Daniel 7:17, "These great beasts, which are four *in number*, are four kings *who* will arise

from the earth.”

Whether they be kings or kingdoms (referenced in v. 23), throughout this book God has indicated to Daniel that His people would be subject to four world empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (cf. Daniel 2, 7, 8).

Now I don't know about you, but the element to this prophecy that really gets me wondering is the last part, specifically the eleventh horn that would rise out of the last kingdom. Doesn't that raise questions in your mind? It did in Daniel's/

Daniel 7:19-20, “Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and *the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head, and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three *of them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts*, and which was larger in appearance than its associates.”

Just like us, Daniel wanted to know about this fourth beast and the eleventh horn. Well, it too was/is a kingdom.

Daniel 7:23-25, “Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it [the bear in v. 5 would devour some of the earth; here this leader would devour the entire earth. In other words, we are talking here about a kingdom which would encompass the earth]. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings [IOW, he'd be a usurper!]. And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.⁵”

There is a ton that has been written about this passage, much of which has revolved around whether or not we ought to take this as history, poetry, or both. Those who say that it is simply history endeavor to identify the ten kings by name; in the end it is speculative and pointless! Those who say it is poetry tend to distance what is written here from history, leaving the reader unsure if this has any bearing at all on one's daily living.

I believe the best position is the moderate one which says that this is both history and poetry. As such, we can't know the identity of the ten kings, but it doesn't matter. *Again, this was not written to makes us prophets, but to give us hope and encouragement to live as servants of God in difficult days!* So what do we take from this passage?

- There will be a facet of the Roman Empire that would continue far beyond the destruction of the physical city- we call it “*the spirit of the age.*” That is what the 11th horn is all about. Throughout history, this eleventh horn has been identified with Antiochus Epiphanes, the Caesars of Rome, the papacy, and much more. Personally, I

believe the little horn represents the final anti-Christ, the man of sin. But honestly, it is speculation and again clearly not the point!

- This horn will vanquish the world such that in the end, Revelation can speak of it as Babylon the Great (Revelation 14, 18).
- From this empire would come forth many antichrist figures (cf. 1 John 2:18) - one of whom will distinguish himself on account of his brutality and influence. His reign and rule would have three characteristics (cf. v. 25)
 - Blasphemy- he will speak pompous words!
 - A new religion which would oppose Biblical teaching.
 - Persecution.

It is this last part that is key to Daniel! The result of these world empires, all of which culminate in the wicked reign and rule of the eleventh horn, will be the persecution and attack of God's people. That means, as bad as it was in Babylon for God's people, *they ain't seen nothin' yet!* In fact, look at v. 25 again:

Daniel 7:25, "And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One."

This gives us insight into the tactic of Satan and his forces against Christ and His people (a theme expanded upon in 8:24). Recall that at the fall, Satan won a major victory in that he got the most cherished possessions of God's Kingdom- man- to rebel against their King! When this took place, God's kingdom toppled and the world was given over to the devil (Luke 4:6). Two thousand years ago, God Himself became man with a view toward retaking this earth as His own. Yet Satan crucified Him! What a victory, right? That is what one might think, but they'd be wrong! Christ then broke the power that Satan held over death, rose from the grave, and ascended into Heaven where He now reigns as the Sovereign King of kings!

In a rage, Satan turned his focus against the church, the people of God (Revelation 12)- such that today, he "speaks out against the Most High" (Daniel 7:25a; cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6) and so mercilessly attacks God and His people! In this regard, what is one of Satan's tactics? Whether it be by direct assault (persecution, torture, attack, martyrdom) or indirect assault (hostile worldviews, intimidation, threatenings) his objective is clear: it is "to wear down the saints of the Highest One."⁶ You say, "What is there to encourage us?" Notice the climax of this passage and so God's victory:

Daniel 7:26, "But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his [Satan's/the 11th horn's] dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever."

Truly, the spirit of the age, Babylon the Great, is going to fall! In fact I love how passive God is pictured here. The Lord is simply going to utter a word, and the power and dominion of Satan will be "annihilated and destroyed forever." With this the emphasis is on God's absolute and total sovereignty- He simply speaks a word and so renders a judgment!

Family of God, this is most amazing! God is the King of kings and Lord of lords! His regency is absolute, unthwartable, and invincible! How this should encourage you in your faith! And yet, we've already seen this message, haven't we? That is what Daniel taught in Daniel 2! Accordingly, we ask, "What is the message distinct to this chapter that is given to encourage the people of God in the valley of the shadow of death?"

The Glory of God Realized and Proclaimed

Daniel 7:18, "But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come."

This chapter is one of contrasts. It begins with the mentioning of four kingdoms which would rule with brutality over the people of God. Then there is a horn (a leader) who would arise out of the fourth kingdom and devastate the people of God! Yet in contrast to these kingdoms, there is the throne of God, the Judge of the Earth- with whom these kingdoms and kings have to do! God is going to speak a word and these kingdoms will be vanquished!

Now amazingly that is NOT the overriding point! Shock of all shocks, the kingdoms which currently rule over the people of God someday are going to be possessed by the people of God themselves! Did you get that? Someday the dominions of this world will be humiliated, and WE will rise up in their place and rule- as God intended us to when he charged Adam in Genesis 1:26-30! *Yet there's more...*

Daniel 7:21-22, "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom."

Prior to when the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness, there is battle and warfare, right? Satan is seeking to wear us down, and sadly is winning! In fact, this text predicts that God's people will be "overpowered."

Is that you today? Have you compromised your faithfulness because you are tired of the battle? If you haven't, I'm sure at some point you will! BUT HEREIN IS OUR GLORY! The battle ends with God coming forward and "passing judgment in favor of the saints." Do you know what that means? The judgment passed is the glorious "Not Guilty!"- there is "no condemnation" of Romans 8:1! Though we are weak and so compromise, our future is NOT based on OUR faithfulness, BUT Christ's! So will we dwell in the Kingdom? Will we be there when Christ reigns supreme? The answer is, "Without a doubt! For on that day Christ will pass judgment in favor of the believer!!" *And yet there's more.*

Daniel 7:26-27, "But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to... [we'd expect to read, "the

Lamb” as in Revelation 5:12-14, but we don’t! Instead we read- will be given to...] the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.”

This is a most incredible promise! What a future! What a glorious future that awaits us in Christ. In the end, after all the miseries and difficulties of this life, we will be exonerated of all sin and given land, an office, and a title as rulers in the New Heavens and Earth!

With this we behold another sweet truth for bitter providence:

- Your God is Great and so Rules Kings and Nations, Daniel 2.
- Your God is Holy and therefore has a Plan that is Beyond your Ability to Understand, Daniel 3.
- Your God Reigns and so Holds the Heart of the King in His Hands, Daniel 4.
- Your God is Jealous and so will not allow Himself- and so the Believer- to be Mocked, Daniel 5.
- God’s Way is Infallible, Daniel 6.
- And, Rejoice, Christian! In the end we Win!

If this doesn’t encourage us, then we must conclude that (a) the battle has not gone well in our lives, and that (b) Satan/this world has “worn us down” such that we have taken our eyes off the prize of the upward call of God!

If that is the case, then with the assurance of v. 22- that in the end you will be exonerated of all wrong doing and sin- take your focus off of any and all idols and place them solely on the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom! Toward that end, I want to close reminding you of two passages:

Jonah 2:8, “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.”

If you set up anything in this life as something you must have- security, wealth, pleasure, position, a person- you have an idol which eventually will compromise your fidelity and service to Christ. It is these idols that Satan will use to wear you down! So again, turn away from these vain idols! If you will do that, you no doubt will be able to say with Paul:

Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

In the words of Spurgeon:

If ye knew the mind of the glorified in heaven, they think heaven came to their hand at an easy market, when they have got it for threescore or fourscore years wrestling with God. When ye are come thither, ye shall think, ‘All I did, in respect of my rich reward, now enjoyed of free grace, was too little.’” (Rutherford, 2006, p. 51 Letter X)

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End Note(s)

¹ Once again we have here an example of epexegetis where “visions” explain the content of the “dream”- *I saw a dream, specifically visions*.

² cf. Enoch 47:3- though the reference is somewhat anachronistic here!

³ cf. Ezekiel 1:26-29.

⁴ This is an allusion to Genesis 1:26 and the dominion given to man at creation; yet this goes way beyond man's dominion.

⁵ As with Nebuchadnezzar's madness, this could refer to weeks, months, or years- there is no way of knowing.

⁶ Christian, let me ask you: Are you wearing down when it comes to your fidelity to Christ? Your zeal for His service? Your longing for His return? Your purity? Love? Honor? Devotion? Have you forgotten your first love? If you have, then Satan is winning the battle in your life! You must understand that we are engaged in a warfare that is not of this world! And Satan wins NOT if in our service we prove unfaithful (2 Timothy 2:13), BUT if in our service and devotion to the Lord we wear out- “we grow wearing in doing well!” (Galatians 6:9)

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 24, 2014. Greg is the minister of Bethel Presbyterian Church