

**13** “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,<sup>[a]</sup> 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 nations and peoples 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.

## **Nightmare**

I was four years old, stuck in bed, and the house was on fire. I couldn't get out. That was until I woke up and realized it was all in my head, a dream. I still have dreams, sometimes I remember them, sometimes I don't. But it's no longer being surrounded by fire that concerns me, it's my feet caught up in the blankets as I try to move or oversleeping on a Sunday morning. My dreams can be much worse, If I'm working in the garage and suddenly think, “Something bad is going to happen,” and then it does and then I'm holding a rag around my hand, afraid to look and see just how bad it is. There's only one problem, It's not a nightmare. It's reality and your heart sinks as you realize just how out of control you are.

Daniel had such a dream. However, this nightmare was his reality. It was a vision from God. God's purpose was not to terrify but to draw Daniel's his attention beyond the rulers and kingdoms, struggles, dangers, and difficulties of this world, to see a God in control of all history. Even when it doesn't look like it or feel like it.

Whether you are living the dream or sick to your stomach from a never ending nightmare, God's comfort for Israel 2500 years ago is the same for us today. God is in control. Your King Reigns.

The beginning of Daniel is full of the familiar stories, three men in the fiery furnace, the Lion's den. But around chapter seven the book changes from Aramaic to Hebrew, from history to prophecy, history to visions and dreams of the end.

Chapter seven starts and God's Kingdom doesn't look like much. The Northern Kingdom. The kingdom of Israel is gone. Ten out of twelve have been whipped out. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, has been destroyed, carted off, and has yet to return to Jerusalem. Daniel is written while in captivity. Nebuchadnezzar, learned to fear God but Belshazzar his son now sits on the throne and could care less about Judah or God. During a dinner party he brought out the sacred vessels of the temple so they could drink from them and honor other gods. During that party God sent him a sign that his kingdom would end. And just when life is looking up, the Persians take control and remove Belshazzar... Just when it looks like God is about to restore his people, Daniel is thrown to the lions under Cyrus.

Daniel just can't get a break it and then after that nightmare there was this vision, "*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 human being, and the mind of a human 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!'*"

The world is in turmoil. One beast after another comes out of the sea. The first two are bad enough but they only seem to get worse. Daniel describes the fourth as "*terrifying and frightening and very powerful.*" He says that "*it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.*" What does this mean? Thankfully Daniel explains in verse 17: "*The four beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.*" The Lion is Babylon. The Bear is Persia. The leopard is Greece. The terrible one is Rome. It's a nightmare that has become reality and won't end soon. Maybe Daniel thought the worst was behind them. Maybe he thought it would be all downhill from here. God reveals that it won't get any easier for God's people. This isn't just a dream. This is a vision from God that will soon become reality and Daniel feels sick, "*I was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale.*"

Nations described as beasts. Governments making a mess of the world trampling on people, devouring the land. Sounds about right? Often it feels as if we are moving from bad to worse. The world is a mess. Nations are falling apart. There are power grabs in one direction or another. If it's not one thing then there is another that is threatening to destroy us. First it was cold war and communism now it's the war on terror and Islam. It used to be a nuclear holocaust now it's natural disaster. What will come next? Daniel reminds us that such threats will rise and fall but that doesn't matter. God still rules. The King still wins

But life doesn't look or feel that way. Nightmare conditions continue we ask, "Where are you God?" Sometimes people answer with, "We've removed God from schools... Not allowed there anymore." Yes he is. The students, the people bring God, not the government or teachers who haven't been trained or instructed in theology. Do you really think a "Religion Free Zone" will stop God? We may feel as if God is so far away in heaven he can't help. Where is he?

There are a number of reasons why God would allow evil to persist. One reason was to wake up his people. God disciplines those he loves. God loves us too much to let us stray for long. He'll do whatever it takes even if it means using his enemies to teach us a lesson. Sometimes God allows the "bad guys" win to bring us back. Sometimes he lets evil run its course to show us that's not the way you want to go. Sometimes the worst thing that can happen to the church is for it to gain political and cultural power because then... people join not to follow Jesus but to gain power and social status.

Real question we should be asking during these times is not, “Where is God?” but “Where am I?” Am I so infatuated with this world and what it can offer that I can’t stand it when life doesn’t go my way? So focused on the material things and what I can experience in this world that I lose sight of the eternal treasures, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? Do we think only of our suffering and have forgotten how much Jesus suffered so that I could be with him forever?

God should find a more loyal people. He should leave us in exile but that’s not what God did. That’s not the end of Daniel’s vision either. Amidst all of this chaos a boasting horn from the fourth beast, “*thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.*” There seated in glory, he is attended by thousands. It’s Psalm 2 all over again, “*The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed... and the One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.*”

The world powers rise and fall, they cause a lot of chaos. They are temporary. But the Lord endures forever. But what Daniel sees next is, “*one like a son of man,*” didn’t rise up from the sea but, “*with the clouds of heaven.*” Daniel saw him coming to the Ancient of Days to receive his crown and take up his kingdom and reign. This is Jesus at his coronation. This is a vision of the End.

But before we get there. There are the four beasts. When the beast with the iron teeth reigned and trampled on all. Jesus arrived and began referring to himself in the third person as “the Son of Man.” (81x). Jesus told Nicodemus, “*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.*” He said to his disciples, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” A few days before he was crucified, he said, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” That Son of Man is God’s Son, who came from heaven, in poverty he became man without a kingdom, without any power or glory to claim as his own. He was despised, mocked, “You’re a king then!” They saw no king and so he was rejected, crucified by the power of the fourth beast. The Son of Man was lifted up on a cross for us. He willingly took on himself the sins of the whole world. He served. He suffered. He died.

He rose and ascended into heaven, where he was welcomed and crowned! That’s what Daniel saw -- the coronation: “*He was given authority, glory and sovereign power.*” Daniel spoke strongly about worshiping the Lord and serving him only, major theme of the book. And here the Son of Man is worshipped as God. The God who rules and reigns and will come again.

That means it doesn’t matter if kingdoms come or go, how powerful they are, how much noise they make, eventually they will fall. When one kingdom failed another would rise and take its place. In the end no matter how much they roar or devour all will disappear and only archeologist would find traces of their “greatness.” But there is another King with a different kingdom.

His Kingdom is not a political powerhouse. It is not visible. It doesn't look like much but it consists of all who believe. He rules as our King. He is gracious with us. He rules not as a dictator or a tyrant, but a loving Lord who gave his life for you. He brings his kingdom to you daily through his word as he brings forgiveness for our complaints and accusations. He forgives our sin and sends the Holy Spirit who works through his Word and sacraments to lead us to believe. If Jesus rules and reigns over all history what are we afraid of?

We know that there are many who now do not acknowledge, do not worship the King. The church may not look like much and that's okay. Jesus and his apostles didn't look like much. By the time Jesus ascended into heaven their group had dwindled to 120 hiding in an upper room. All of them, with one exception, would die a martyr's death. They hardly looked a winning team. The church is still here. We will continue to serve our King and spread his word until he returns. We know where God is. We gladly gather together in his church, as his people, to hear his word.

When you die you'll discover the nightmare is over as you wake up from this world of sorrow into a kingdom without end. No more nightmares. No more feet getting stuck in blankets or fingers cut or caught in machinery. But the Kingdom of God a reality that you won't have to wake up from. The church is still here not because of the faithful few like Daniel but because of the good and gracious God who guides his church. Who rules for the good of the church. Who will return for his Church. The Son of Man came from heaven to die. As we close this season of End Times we enter a New Church year and look forward to the Advent of our king, not in the cradle, nor on a cross, but as our ever ruling king. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.