

Sermon: Ancient of Days

Text: Daniel 7

Discussion Questions:

So how many of you are fans of scary movies?

I'm not—and can't imagine why anyone would like scary movies. The same thing would apply to people who like hot sauce. Ketchup is just my speed. The sweeter the better. But I am well aware that there are some folks out there who absolutely love hot sauce—and can't wait until the next scary movie hits the theaters.

- How about you? Where are you on the spectrum of liking/disliking scary movies?
- What would you say is the scariest movie you've ever seen? What made it scary?

So why all this talk of scary movies? It's because some of Daniel chapter 7 basically reads like a scary movie script—complete with multi-headed beasts rising up from a raging sea on a horrifically stormy night. The best special effects of a Hollywood movie set can't even compare with what Daniel recorded for us (although I think some of the video games that are now being released can come eerily close). When Daniel gets to the end of this chapter, he is basically scared speechless: *"I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."* (Daniel 7:28)

This chapter, however, is far FAR more than a scary movie script. It has actually been described as the most detailed and comprehensive prophecy of future events found anywhere in the Old Testament. In many ways, Daniel chapter 7 is similar to Daniel chapter 2. In chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a magnificent golden statue representing the unfolding, over time, of five kingdoms of this earth. Chapter 7 picks up on this outline of five successive kingdoms—but goes into much greater detail.

- In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar saw a monument to human achievement and national conquest. His was a view of the rise and fall of empires from a human point of view: "Look what we've done!" How does this capture the way we, as humans, tend to look at history? Do people tend to forget the bad, and remember all the good?
- In Daniel 7, Daniel is now being shown history from God's viewpoint. What he sees are animalistic kingdoms headed for destruction. Why do you think God uses this imagery? Is it true that people—and kingdoms—actually "devour" each other?

Examination:

- Read **Daniel 7:1-8**
 - We are shifting gears as we move into Daniel 7. The first 6 chapters of the book have been a narrative—telling us the story of Daniel's life. We now move into a series of dreams that Daniel had at various points in his life. According to Daniel 7:1, this dream occurred in the first year of Belshazzar's reign as king of Babylon. Why do you think God "goes to the trouble" of providing all of these historical details surrounding these dreams (e.g. when they occurred, where Daniel was when they occurred, what Daniel did after the dream)? Why does this matter?
 - Describe the four beasts that arise out of the sea.

- An overview of the past 2500 years of earthly history reveals the rise and fall of four kingdoms or empires. The first was the Babylonian empire; the second the Medo-Persian empire; the third the Greek empire; and the fourth the Roman empire. How does it impact your faith—and your view of Scripture—when you see that what Daniel saw in this dream is PRECISELY what has actually played out over the course of time?
- Verse 8 doesn't describe a beast—rather, it introduces a “horn” (a ruler or a king) that seems to come out of the fourth beast. According to the last sentence of verse 8, how is this “horn” described?
- Read **Daniel 7:9-14**
 - The scene completely shifts in verse 9. We shift from beasts and horns—and step into a courtroom (like turning the channel from the movie “Alien” to an episode of “Law and Order”). We are introduced to the “Ancient of Days” (v. 9). Who is He, and how would you describe Him?
 - What happens to the “boastful horn” as a result of his boastful words? (v. 11)
 - The other main character is “one like a son of man.” (v. 13) Who is He, and what do we learn about Him?
 - In the midst of all of the chaos of beasts devouring beasts, what does it say to you when we catch a glimpse of God on His throne; millions of angels attending Him; and Jesus being given all authority and sovereign power?
 - We are introduced in verse 14 to the fifth and final kingdom. Describe this kingdom.
 - By juxtaposing the scene of beasts devouring beasts (earthly kingdoms) with the scene of God on His throne—we are seeing the lower story in light of the upper story. In other words, amidst the chaos of this earth, the Ancient of Days is on His throne and in complete control. Do you believe this? Does this bring you comfort?
- Read **Daniel 7:15-28**
 - A “by-standing angel” helps Daniel (and us) by describing what we're seeing. He starts with a summary statement in verses 17-18. What's the summary?
 - Daniel is especially curious about the fourth beast (v. 19). Why?
 - A great deal of attention is paid in this vision to this “little horn” that we are introduced to in verse 8. We have already seen that he has the eyes of a man and a boastful mouth. What new information do we learn about him in vv. 20-21?
 - And again, in verses 24-25, we learn even more about this man. Here we learn that he will be a king—and that he will oppress God's holy people. This is the first time in Scripture we are introduced to the **antichrist**. Take some time to examine these other passages that describe in greater detail the man who will arise at the end of time (perhaps far sooner than we might think) and seek to rule the world and destroy God's holy people. As you read these passages, make note of the various details that emerge regarding this “beast.”
 - **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**
 - **1 John 2:18**
 - **Revelation 13:1-8**

Application:

With the coronavirus pandemic continuing to hold the earth in its grasp, it becomes even more vital that we root ourselves in the Word of God. Yes—there is chaos. But God is on His throne!