

Daniel 7:19-28 – Depending on What Jesus Deserves

If you're just joining us now in our series on The Book of Daniel, let me take 60 seconds to catch you up on the last 11 weeks. Starting in Daniel chapter 1, we learn that God took away their kingdom from the Jewish people in 606BC and gave it to Babylon. By a miraculous intervention from God, one of their kings eventually came to believe in God, but after that things went from bad to worse. So God took the kingdom away from the Babylonians and gave it to the Medes and Persians. During all this time God took care of the Jews, like Daniel, who lived in exile. And sent prophets, like Daniel, to teach them to have faith in God and the Messiah He was going to send. But that was a hard lesson to learn in exile. Then God gave Daniel, in chapter 7, a second vision showing that another worse kingdom was going to conquer the Persians, and then a fourth would rise to rule. When Daniel saw this vision, he asked for someone to help him understand, and an angel tells him, in verses 17-18, **[read]**. But it looks like Daniel wasn't content with that explanation—his own doubts and fears and other human emotions aren't comforted by the basic facts that bad people will rule the world until one day God gives it all to the saints. Those cold hard facts, although true, are not enough to comfort Daniel, and they aren't enough for us either.

What Daniel wanted to know. Vv 19-20.

Daniel did not focus on the succession of Gentile powers, but on the destructive 4th beast and the boastful horn. We learned a few weeks ago that the third beast was the Greek Empire, and the fourth Beast, logically, is the Roman Empire. But we didn't find out yet who the little boastful horn is. So we might be curious, but Daniel was deeply concerned. Afraid even: v 19 suggests he was terrified by what he saw. Verse 15 says Daniel's thoughts about all this were alarming to him. I want to suggest that Daniel's alarm and fear comes from the fact that he was looking at all this through the wrong glasses.

[read vv19-20] Is it possible Daniel was looking through the lens of merit—what people deserve from God? The way he focuses on the fourth beast and not the first three might suggest he figured his own people, the Jews, deserved to be defeated by the Babylonians; But looking at the vision by what people deserve became overwhelming when he saw the cruelty of the fourth beast and the arrogance of the little horn. Surely the sins of Israel were not as bad as this beast and that awful little horn? If justice means that God gives people what they deserve, then isn't it injustice for the Jews to live in exile while the Gentiles get away with murder?

Two chapters from now (9:1-21), 14 years later, Daniel comes to a point of deep humility, repenting before God for his sins and the sins of his people, and praying for mercy and forgiveness. But that was 14 years after he saw this vision in chapter 7. In the meantime, Daniel seems to be "weighing" these enemies and "finding them wanting" (c.f. 5:27). But he's weighing their righteousness against Israel's righteousness. Not against God's holiness. So Israel looks pretty good when compared to more wicked people. But as long as Daniel—or the rest of the Jewish exiles, or any of us!—as long as we keep measuring our holiness by comparing ourselves to others we will not be ready to trust and believe in the love and mercy of God. Faith cannot grow where self-righteousness is allowed to live.

Saints don't deserve defeat. Vv21-22.

Like a father who sees a teachable moment, verse 21 God interrupts the explanation Daniel asked for by showing him a bigger picture. A picture that challenges Daniel's assumptions—and ours—about what

we think we deserve. [read vv21-22] Nowhere in the whole book of Daniel is there any hint that Daniel thought God was unfair to take away the Kingdom of Judah and send the Jews into captivity. He always suggests the Jews deserved the judgement God sent them. So verse 21 is shocking. The word translated “saints” is simply “holy ones”. They don’t deserve this! When followers of Christ suffer for the sake of Christ, we are right to long for justice, (v21). But we are wrong to expect it now. (v22) So Daniel is confronted by two questions implied here: what does God require of us? And when will He save us? What and When: the decrees of God and the day of deliverance. The answers to both questions are entirely up to God. With that challenge to Daniel’s assumptions, Daniel is now ready to hear the interpretation he asked for.

Sinners don't deserve dominion. Vv23-25.

[read v23] This beast is clearly worse than the three before it--Babylon, Persia, and Greece. And yet God gives them a vast dominion. In this age, evil people seem to get away with evil. That’s verse 23; [read v24] The empire of the beast eventually will break up into ten smaller kingdoms, and another “king” will rise up in their midst after them. This makes 11 kingdoms—since all these kings exist at the same time side by side. But the focus is on the 11th: He will also be recognizable by the fact that though he exists alongside 10 other kingdoms in the ruins of the Roman Empire, he gains control over the territories of 3 of the others. That’s verse v24. But before we try to identify the 11th horn, we need first to understand what the angel tells Daniel about the nature of the little horn’s crimes: [read v25] His evil is not relative to other sinners; it is in relation to the Son of Man, the Most High. Just as the “saints”—holy ones—are defined by their relationship to Christ—the Son of Man whom God makes the King over His Kingdom, is called “Most High” in verse 27—and the people are called *His* saints in verses 22 and 27. They belong to Christ. And the “little horn” rebels against Christ.

- He speaks words against Christ (called “the Most High”);
- His “war against the saints” (v21) is described here as “wearing down” the people of Christ;
- He will “think” to change both the what and the when that are up to Christ’s authority:
 - The word for “times” here means “appointed times”ⁱ—the “when” appointed by the authority of God.
 - This word for “laws” comes from Persian, and is explained in the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament as whatever “the king wanted”ⁱⁱ—they are laws because they are decrees of the king. What this horn intends to change are the decrees of King Jesus.

These clues about the identity of this 11th horn add up, in my opinion, to one conclusion.

- After the unified Roman Empire began to break up, Sir Isaac Newton showed that its territory was divided into 10 smaller kingdoms that went through a lot of changes during the Middle Ages, but usually numbered 10: today in that former Roman territory there are the UK, France, Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Luxemburg, and Switzerland. But at the beginning of the “Dark Ages” they were called by their ethnic names, Vandals, Suevians, Visigoths, Alans, Burgundians, Franks, Britons, Hunns, Lombards, and Ravenna.ⁱⁱⁱ
- By the beginning of the 600s, the fall of the Roman Caesars had left a vacuum of leadership in the city of Rome that was filled by the Bishop of the Church in Rome—later called, “Popes”. The Popes became the acting kings of the city of Rome.^{iv}
- The Byzantines and later the Franks uprooted the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Lombards from Italy and eventually 3 territories, Ravenna, the Pentapolis on the eastern coast, and the region

around Rome itself, were donated to the Bishop of Rome so that he had lands to call his kingdom—today known as “the Patrimony of St. Peter”.^v An 11th kingdom from the ruins of the Roman Empire.

- Changing “appointed times”—the Popes not only gave us the calendar we use today, but they decreed that the time when believers get to be with Christ is not right away after we die, but after we serve our time in Purgatory, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.^{vi} Even the belief that when Jesus comes again to rule for a thousand years—the parallel to Dan 7:9-11, 14, 18, 22, 26-27 is in Rev 20—is changed by Catholic dogma to mean that dead Christians who are “saints” are now sitting on thrones in Heaven—to whom we pray—and the many centuries of the career of the Roman Catholic Church are “the millennium”!^{vii}
- Changing “the decrees of Jesus”—The Catholic Catechism insists that sinners cannot pray directly to God for forgiveness through Jesus Christ, but must receive forgiveness of sins through the bishops and priests under the authority of the Pope.^{viii} The Popes of Rome exalt their authority over Scripture itself^x, even insisting only they have the authority to interpret the Word of God.^x
- The Popes speak against Christ (lit. “anti-Christ”) by claiming to be the Vicar of Christ on Earth (lit. “substitute”^{xi}),^{xii} when the Holy Spirit is the personal representative Christ sent His followers; to be the “Head of the Church”^{xiii}, but Jesus is the only Head of the Church; to have all authority to intercede for Christians delegated only to his priests,^{xiv} where Jesus is our once-for-all priest interceding for us (c.f. Rom 8:34).
- Yes the Popes have authorized the murder of untold thousands of Christian martyrs in their “war against the saints” throughout the Dark Ages, but the specific nature of their crimes that Daniel is shown here is about undermining the authority of Jesus in His Word, and getting in the way of believers’ relationship with Christ.

The vision confronts the way we think about good and evil. Instead of comparing ourselves to others--deciding we are more righteous than they are, we deserve God's blessings more than they do--we must learn to see our sin in terms of our relationship to Jesus. It is not a measure of our good works. It is a measure of whether we trust in Him exclusively or not. Not whether we pay tribute to Jesus in our words, but whether we exclusively trust and follow Him with our hearts. Evil will have its day until the day of Christ.

[Only the Son of Man deserves to rule the world. Vv26-27.](#)

[read v26] The Anti-Christ is weighed and found wanting. The same court of God’s Judgement Day that vindicates Jesus alone as worthy to rule the Kingdom of God, judges the Antichrist as a criminal to be destroyed. But as Jesus is found worthy, in verse 14, those who trust and follow Him are included in His reward, the inheritance of His everlasting Kingdom! **[read v27]** The saints are given what we don't deserve. But Christ is given what He does deserve. In a very real sense then, salvation and eternal life for Christians is a matter of depending on what Jesus deserves—and never on what we can earn or imagine we deserve apart from the worth and righteousness of Jesus Christ, the Most High Son of God.

[The true Grace of God is shocking. V28.](#)

After Daniel wrote down the sum of the vision (c.f. v1), a) He was alarmed and in shock—that’s what some scholars think made the colour of Daniel’s face change.^{xv} When he says he “kept the matter in his

heart”, it means he couldn't stop thinking about it: not just the wars to come, the rising evil in the world, or even the fate of the Jews living under the rule of Gentile Empires—one after another. He was plagued by worry that if nobody deserves blessing, who can survive Judgement Day? Jesus’ Jewish disciples asked a similar question when Jesus told them it was practically impossible for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God: “They were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ‘Then who can be saved?’” And what Jesus told them is the hard to believe, hard to accept truth that leaves sinners nowhere to turn but to the grace of God alone: “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.’” (Mark 10:25-27) The message of this vision is not to solve our curiosity about the Antichrist; it is to teach us that we will be judged on the basis of whether or not we trust in the only Saviour, the Lamb of God, Jesus our Messiah.

ⁱ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, #2709a; Brown Driver Briggs, #2651; Holladay, #2215.

ⁱⁱ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, #458.

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaac Newton, *Observations on Daniel...*, cited in John Gill, Expositor, “Dan 7:8”.

^{iv} Also see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope>

^v Encyclopedia Britannica, “Papal States” [<https://www.britannica.com/place/Papal-States#ref701142>] Accessed May 30, 2017.

^{vi} Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 12, Paragraph 3, #s1030-1032.

^{vii} <https://www.catholic.com/qa/does-the-church-teach-that-the-prophecy-of-revelation-201-10-is-being-fulfilled-now>

^{viii} Ibid. Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 10, Paragraph 2;

^{ix} Ibid., Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 9, Paragraph 4, #891.

^x Ibid., 2.3.10.2 (above fn.vii).

^{xi} <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vicar>

^{xii} Ibid., Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 9, Paragraph 4, #s 882, 936, etc.

^{xiii} Ibid., #s 882, 899, 936.

^{xiv} Ibid., #s 881, 883

^{xv} New American Bible Commentary, “Daniel 7:28”.