

Good morning! Over the past weeks of this *In the Fire* series, through Daniel 1-6, we've learned how Israel was taken into exile. Babylon came in and slaughtered innocent people, desecrated Israel's temple, and took captive Israel's brightest (think Daniel & Co.), hoping to mold them into their liking. But we've also read story after story of how God showed up for them despite their being foreigners in a strange land—in the fiery furnace, in the lions' den—and how Daniel and his friends maintained faithfulness despite being away from their people and country.

Today we're wrapping up Daniel. We'll be in Daniel chapters 7-12. That's right—7 through 12! Daniel chapter 7, chapter 8, chapter 9, chapter 10, chapter 11, and chapter 12. And to kind of prime the pump, I wanted to find a way to get us in the shoes of Daniel and his friends. So I want to begin by asking a question: have you ever had a moment in your life when something felt totally foreign to you? Like you were a fish out of water? Like everything was totally strange and weird and bizarre? Like, "I do not belong here"?

One of those times for me was high school prom. Oh, how I loathed it! I remember walking in (lights, cameras, streamers) and feeling like I stuck out like a sore thumb. Loud music, not my gig. People talking over the loud music, not my gig. Me *not knowing* any of the music because I only listened to KLOVE stuff at the time, not my gig. The kids that danced to the music and me trying my best to stay in the groove with my elbows here...and here...praying to the Lord Almighty to uphold me by his righteous right hand to keep me on beat, not my gig. I hated that experience. Everyone wanting to dance. People wanting me to dance. My date, poor girl, wanting to dance. Slow dance I can do, because I'm a gentleman. Weird, upbeat jiving—no thanks. I'll stick to the nugget tray.

In a space like that, I'm like, "I do NOT belong." And I'm sure we've all had experiences like that.

Maybe it was when you traveled to a new country for the first time and experienced a different culture. Maybe it was when a friend dragged you to church and promised you some lunch and you walked in feeling like, "Um. . . ." Maybe it was that first trip to the gym and you see Nick squatting like 1,000 pounds and Jeff in the mirror posing and you look down and you look out and you just are like, "What am *I* doing here? I do NOT belong!"

Those experiences are strange, they're foreign, they're weird, and I think they probably give us a glimpse into how Israel felt being exiled into Babylon (only exponentially greater and way more seriously).

You see, by the time chapters 7-12 roll around, we meet Daniel and his friends who've been foreigners in a foreign land for about 50 years! Imagine that—50 years. That'd be like you and me going into exile back in 1970!

Just think for a moment about all the things you find enjoyable or meaningful about life. Now imagine it all being snatched away. Coaching your kid to keep his eye on the ball? Poof.

Celebrating the 4th with friends and family? No more. Binging junk on Netflix? Huh uh. Hunting? Not allowed. Colts' games? No más. Sermons from The Creek? Nope! (Oh, the horror!) Christmas? Vacation? Your job? Gone. Gone. Gone!

Some of Israel's poets wrote of what that time was like. Look at what they said:

How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. (Lamentations 1:1)

My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. (Lamentations 2:11)

Or perhaps this from one of the Psalms which was written about this period of exile:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalm 137:1-3)

To say that God's people were hurting would be an understatement. Anger, frustration, and hatred came oozing out of Israel. Hopelessness and futility set in. I mean sure, they had seen and had great moments of God's presence and provision in their lives (fiery furnace, the interpretation of a few dreams, the lions' den), but those moments of special grace were few and far between over the course of 50 years! And now God's people in exile are in a spiritual valley. They're hanging by a thread. They're looking around and seeing foreign nations with their foreign gods "winning" and they can't help but wonder, "God, where are you?"

And I begin here, because I know that we all at some point wrestle with those same questions. Some of us are hanging by a thread and the hope tank is on E and we look out in the world and it feels like things are going to hell in a handbasket. Not to mention the everyday struggles we've got with family issues, or sickness, or work stuff, or a past that won't stay in the past. And with all that, it can feel like God's losing or not in control or we're on the wrong side of history or all the above. And so we all, myself included, wind up asking at one point or another, "God, are you going to come through for us?"

And it's into that place that Daniel has three visions. I want to share with you these *three visions* of Daniel and then transition into showing how those *three visions* speak of *two kingdoms* and then ultimately how those *two kingdoms* lead to *one hope*.

Three visions, two kingdoms, one hope. Ready? (Preacher general's warning: it's about to get weird.)

Ok, vision #1 in Daniel 7, here's what we read:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were . . . four great beasts, each different from the others. . . . The first was like a lion. . . . 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. . . . After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. . . . After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. (Daniel 7:2-7)

Um ok. Weirdest. Dream. Ever. To recap: essentially, we have four beasts that come out of the sea: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and then a fourth beast whom I'll just affectionately call "super mega beast." So, lion, bear, leopard, and super mega beast. And they're destroying, devouring, and decimating things.

When we keep on reading a bit further, we learn that the four beasts here are representative of four different kingdoms in history: lion = Babylon, bear = Medes, leopard = Persia, and super mega beast = Greece/maybe Rome). So that's vision #1.

What about vision #2? It's just as weird as the first one:

I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great. As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. (Daniel 8:3-6)

Ok, pause. Let's make this fun. We have a heavyweight bout on our hands. Two contenders. We have the Ram vs. the Goat. And right here, right now I want to see who's got their money on who. Maybe a sort of "tale of the tape" will help.

"In the red corner, weighing in at about 250,000 troops strong, led by King Darius, and representing the ancient Medo-Persian empire is the RAM!

"And in the blue corner, weighing in at about 50,000 troops strong, led by Alexander the Great, and representing the ancient empire of Greece is the GOAT!

"Alright, who ya got money on? All bets can be placed in the clear bins around the room. Don't worry: we'll be sure to divvy it up among the winners. How many of you are now in on the RAM? How many of you are in on the GOAT? Ok, let's find out! Ding, ding, ding!"

Verse 7: “I saw it [the goat] attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power.”

There you have it. Despite being vastly outnumbered, Alexander the Great was a great strategist. The Goat/Greece blasted Medo-Persia to smithereens.

That’s vision #2. Let’s move on to vision #3.

Vision #3 covers the last 3 chapters of Daniel – chapters 10, 11, and 12. In these chapters, we see that Daniel again has a vision of Medo-Persia overtaken by Alexander the Great’s Greek empire. He then sees the dissolution of Alexander’s empire, which led to a bunch of “lesser” kings, which then led to two specific kings: one who Daniel calls the “King of the South” who is finally overtaken by the other who Daniel calls the “King of the North”—a king who, as the text says, “will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods” (Daniel 11:36). And later we read that “reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many” (Daniel 11:44).

So we have *three visions*, all with different animals representing these different kingdoms in history who wind up arrogantly trampling and stomping and devouring and decimating each other and innocent people. Which begs the question: so what?

Well, all *three visions* point to the reality that there are ultimately *two kingdoms* at play: (1) there are *the kingdoms of this world* and (2) there is *God’s kingdom*.

Daniel and Co. are dealing with very real kingdoms (Babylon, the Medes, the Persians, Greece, et al.) invading very real space and hurting very real people in very real ways. And as foreigners in a foreign land, Daniel and Israel need hope. Day after day, week after week, season after season, year after year Daniel has seen nations and kings setting themselves up as if they are gods and instead of ruling with justice and righteousness, they inaugurate evil and oppression. They set themselves up against God and in doing so have become beasts. They’re lion-like, bear-like, etc., trampling and crushing things in their way.

And Daniel is being shown that every kingdom of this world has that side to them. Babylon does. Greece does. Rome does. And even nations in our day do.

What God was showing Daniel & Co., and what He’s showing us, is that *he knows* that kings/rulers/authorities/nations can act beastly—that they vie for control and pridefully set themselves up as kings of the world, hurting people in the process. God knows that. No surprise to Him.

But what He also shows Daniel is that in acting animal-like, they run themselves up against God’s kingdom, and that God will deal with the foolish behavior or oppressive empires, which Daniel and Israel needed to hear!

Check this out—in the case of vision #1 with lion, bear, leopard, and super-mega beast, here’s what we read in Daniel 7:9,11a: “As I looked, ‘thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.’ (Notice God isn’t shaking in his boots; He’s calm, cool, and collected.) “His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.” (He reigns with purity and righteousness.) “His throne was flaming with fire and its wheels were all ablaze.” (He rules with power.) “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn [speaking here of super-mega-beast] was speaking.”

And notice what Daniel says next: “I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time.)” (Daniel 7:11b-12). I love that line!

In the case of vision #2 with the ram and the goat, we already know that the goat straight pins the ram, but what happens after is that is that the goat “will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. . . . He will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power” (Daniel 8:25).

And lastly, in the case of vision #3, with the King of the North, who we had read before is one who will do as he pleases, exalt and magnify himself, set out in a great rage, and destroy and annihilate many—what’s his lot in life? “He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him” (Daniel 11:45).

Daniel & Co. needed to hear over and over again that God’s kingdom is very real and that God is not worried one bit. That He is sovereign. He is in control. Sure, the kingdoms of this world might oppose him and attempt to frustrate His plans, but ultimately, what are they compared to Almighty God? And don’t we need to hear that, too?

I saw David Platt illustrate this so well one time. You know what the Bible tells us about the nations compared to God? Look at Isaiah 40:15: “Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales.”

(Please view the video recording of this sermon to view Emerson’s demonstration.)

What’s their weight compared to God? They are as nothing compared to Him!

But the sad truth is that nations aren’t the only kingdoms out there. We have kingdoms, too. And they can be just as animal-like.

As Henry David Thoreau once remarked: “We are conscious of an animal in us. . . . It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled.” The great Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky concurs when he says that “in every man . . . a beast lies hidden.” It’s like what Robert Louis Stevenson was trying to teach us: we’ve all got a bit of Dr. Jekyll but we’ve all also got a bit of Mr. Hyde.

What these guys say here explicitly is what we know to be true implicitly. Not that you and I are animals, but that figuratively, there’s something animal-like in us. We are the kind of people

who, while capable of fantastic good, are often quite prone to lie, cheat, and steal. Prone to connive, plot, and scheme. We find ourselves drawn to what is crude and sensual, to what is debased and corrupt. We give into what Paul calls our “flesh.” We vie for autonomy and in our pride say, “I don’t need God! I can do it all on my own!” And in doing so, we wind up hurting both those we love and ourselves.

Let me ask you: anyone have a boss like that? Anyone have a landlord like that? A “friend” like that? Maybe you’re in a relationship right now with someone like that? Are you married to someone like that?

And may I humbly, lovingly ask: could *you* be someone like that?

These *three visions* tell us that there are *two kingdoms*, but they also relay that, ultimately, there’s only *one hope* for the world. And man do we need hope. For the world and for ourselves.

In Daniel’s very first vision in Daniel 7, we read a passage about who is truly going to rule and reign as Lord of the universe and do so rightly.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 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. (Daniel 11:13-14)

That’s what all of this is pointing to for Daniel. And that’s what all of this is pointing to for us.

What God shows Daniel and what Daniel is showing us is that God’s kingdom reigns supreme and that He will supplant these arrogant rulers with an even better/greater ruler. And because of that we have hope. We need not fear irrationally when circumstances go awry, when stock markets are in flux, when politicians are ousted, when the media spins falsehoods, when it looks like everywhere we turn the world is caving in on itself and it’s all being run by a planet of apes, when we find ourselves in a situation like him, wondering “God, where are you? God are you gonna come through?” No, we need not worry. We can trust God!

And the reason is simple: think about how the nations compare to God. These nations are animals—snarling, stomping, destroying, chewing on flesh, etc. Compare that with God. What animal is He? He’s not any animal! He’s human. He’s the “son of man,” meaning the human one: a total contrast in both nature and character with the beastly kingdoms of this world!

As we flip to the New Testament, we find out that “son of man” is the most common way Jesus referred to himself. Why? Because he saw himself bringing a kingdom. Jesus saw himself as the one bringing to fulfillment all that Daniel had seen, bringing to a close the exile of Israel and grafting in anyone who places their trust in Jesus as Savior and King!

Only, again, he does it differently—not through military might and power, not through greed, not through backdoor deals and plots, not through conspiracy and fear-mongering, but through

crucifixion. Because what good would God be as a ruler if he acted just like what we already have?

I want to show you a picture, “Crucifixion” by Andrea Mantegna. (Please view the video recording of this sermon to see the picture.) What do you see? I see men casting lots over Jesus’ clothes. I see people whose eyes fail from weeping, whose hearts are poured out on the ground because of the destruction of their Savior. I see that Jesus, like Israel before him, has been exiled from the city. He’s in a foreign space as his oppressors assail him with insults and mockery.

Now look at Jesus more closely. I see Jesus’ withered, lifeless body. I see him bleeding out of his feet. I see a small sign above his head with four letters: I.N.R.I. The Latin words are I for Iēsus, N for Nazerēnus, R for Rex, and I for Iūdaeōrum.

In English, it means “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

You see, the Son of Man, the human one, came, and he was de-humanized. He himself was treated like a beast—by both the nations and individuals. As I mentioned earlier, it’s not just nations that find themselves in the category of beastly “kingdoms of this world.” We have kingdoms, too. And they’re just as animal-like.

And we know what happens to Jesus, right? The beastliness of humanity came out. Like conniving snakes, the religious establishment falsely accused him and had him condemned. Like deer in the headlights, Pilate and Herod allowed their government and its justice system to be run by the masses. Like rabid hyenas, the crowds laughed and jeered. Like a pack of wolves, the Romans surrounded Jesus and spit on him, beat him, chastised him, and ultimately crucified him.

Jesus took the full beastly nature that humans and human kingdoms can possess onto himself. He let it kill him. And then when all hope seemed lost, he triumphed over it. When all of creation was groaning for God to come through, Easter morning arrived! Jesus, the Son of Man, the truly human one, triumphed over Death by death. The Spirit of God raised Christ bodily from the grave, shaming the kingdoms of this world and showing each of us a better way, and now Christ sits enthroned next to the Ancient of Days, waiting patiently before bringing the fullness of His kingdom to bear. Daniel had *three visions* of ultimately *two kingdoms*, but, friends, there’s only *one hope*. It’s Jesus.