Kings and Prophets 17-01-12a

This is Thursday, the 12th of January, 2017. We're continuing our study in the Book of Daniel as a part of the larger series of Kings and Prophets. We've had a little bit of a break here, about a month and a half, but we're resuming tonight in Daniel chapter 7. And if you're like me, you may have a little bit of doubtitude in terms of where did we leave off, so we'll have a little bit of a review just because it's important to have the context in mind.

Daniel is not a random collection of chapters. It is, in fact, a very tightly organized and intricately woven fabric of prophecy, and what precedes is essential to what follows. So let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and we'll pick up our study in the Book of Daniel at chapter 7. Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend time in fellowship and in the study of your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless it to our hearts, that we will be encouraged and guided and directed by the truth that we find in this portion of your Word. We pray that as a result, we will turn the corner from observation and understanding into living the life that you have called us to so that the glory of the Lord Jesus will be reflected and will shine the light on the path to your throne for those in our periphery, and that we will be fitted for service and function both now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

As I said, context is important, and I'm going to casually display my newly-bound Bible here because this is the old, raggedy one you've seen, but now it's got a nice, robust cover on it. And I'm going to turn back to Daniel chapter 6, where, as you may recall, we had Daniel in the lion's den. This is a well-known story.

It's in virtually every children's Bible that I've ever seen. But I just want to look at the end. You remember that this is Darius.

This is the king that was the general who only ruled for a brief time until history changed and you have Cyrus coming in and taking over. So he's only there for a couple of years, and yet he figures as the king of the lion's den story. You remember that this jealousy, they set a trap for David.

These other satraps and governors set a trap for Daniel. I've edited four sermons on David today, so you'll forgive me if I slip. But you remember the upshot.

Daniel survives, the king comes the next morning, and after a distressing night, and you'll notice in verse 18 of chapter 6, the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No musicians. His sleep went from him.

So he is greatly disturbed and distressed. Now, distress is going to recur in chapter 7. Lions are going to recur in chapter 7. The threat of physical danger is going to be represented in chapter 7, which is the vision of the four beasts. And Daniel's experience in the midst of the lions, at the

peril of destruction, there is a design for his destruction on the part of others.

This is a harbinger, it's a pattern, it's a foreshadowing of the nation of Israel and the hostility and the danger of its extinction as these large empires succeed one another, conquer one another. Conquest and empire have involved bloodshed, destruction, amalgamation, reorganization, integration, and so on, all down through history. And so, as you have the Babylonians, and then you have the Medes and the Persians, and you have the Greeks and you have the Romans, this is like giant mixer blades on your kitchen mixer or in a truck full of concrete where things just get mixed and blended and there's syncretism and there is loss of identity.

That is the threat for God's people as these giant secular empires come and go. What will become of the people of the covenant, the people of the promise? That's the big idea. That's what's going on here.

Daniel represents that. He seemingly has no future. He is a eunuch, when I say no future, in the sense of a legacy, offspring, descendants, a line.

He and his friends were made eunuchs when they were taken to Babylon, and there is a sense in which Israel is without the prospect of a future once they lose their land. If you lose the land, why do you need descendants? Because the purpose of descendants is to inherit the land, and loss of the land means loss of the nation. Loss of the nation means loss of property, loss of ownership, loss of identity.

That was part of the covenant promise, and everything begins to roll back, and you think, well, what of God's people? Have God's promises fallen to the ground? He promised them the land. He promised David that there would always be a throne and one of David's sons to sit on that throne, and yet they're not in the land and they don't have these things. Why do we care about all of that? We could talk about it in great detail and come to a better understanding, but why do we really care? Well, we think about ourselves.

We are enmeshed. We are in the midst of and carried along by a completely foreign culture. It is a culture foreign to the word of God, foreign to God's values.

Hollywood and what's on the television, what's on the internet, what's in popular culture, what's on Twitter and Facebook and all the rest of it is not hospitable. It isn't an encouragement to Christian faith and spirituality. In fact, I was just part of a conversation within the last week talking about teaching that has taken place in the last 40 or 50 years that has been recorded.

Only in recent decades have we had this wonderful recording technology. You think about Charles Haddon Spurgeon, probably the greatest preacher of the 1800s that we know about, greatest certainly in terms of his fame in the Baptist world, but his sermons survive only in manuscript. They were published in the newspaper and those things survive.

You can get a Park Street pulpit or a set of Spurgeon's sermons and they can sit on the shelf

and you can take them down and read them, but so much of it is lost in a text form. Beginning in the 1950s really at the popular level you had recordings and so you've got wonderful audio recordings of great Bible teachers and evangelists, Billy Graham being an example. In the 60s you had radio preachers really started putting out tapes and so on.

Here's the point, now that great teaching, I always think of Major Ian Thomas, we had books and tapes by him and I remember hearing him and you think of the chaplain for the Congress that Peter, his wife wrote books about him, he had a very wonderful voice and sort of a Scottish accent, but you had wonderful teachers all down through there, you can think of your own. I think of Radio Bible Class and Dr. DeHaan, M.R. DeHaan, Richard DeHaan, you had in a little bit later times, McGee, J. Vernon McGee, a host of others. Here's the thing, these guys were talking, I was part of a conversation, how do you take wonderful teaching that was formatted for a culture that was slower, where people would take their time, they were accustomed to a lecture format, people would typically sit and watch entertainment that was in a lecture format, plays, and early television in the 1950s, the CBS Playhouse and so on, they took their time, they would develop a plot and develop a story and people would digest and process and think and reflect and come to an understanding over the course of 30, 45, 60 minutes or longer.

The culture now is 12 to 15 seconds, news comes in 12, you watch, look at it on the internet, look at it on television, 12 to 15 seconds is the attention span and everything is tailored to that now. So, if you want to archive or preserve an archive and try to bring forward teachers from the past, nobody will listen to them. It takes too long.

I'm taking too long right now. It needs to be quick, it needs to be rapid fire, it needs to be MTV, it needs to be, you know, 7 or 8 seconds, it's the elevator talk, you've got to catch them on the way to the elevator and make your case. And so much so that educators have a real problem now trying to cover material that requires concentration and requires lecture and requires processing and synthesizing and digesting because our newer generations can't do it, have no practice in doing it.

Why am I talking about all of this? Because in chapter 7 we have information and it comes to a man of God. Are we people of God? Yes. Do we get information? Yes.

Do we want information from God about the present and about the future? Of course we do. But can we digest it? Do we have the patience to reflect, to seek and to search and to chew on those things or not? We have an impatient culture, we have an impatient society. And what happens is when you get caught up in that, this was the danger for Israel.

The Babylonians had all of this new technology, all of this new culture, all of these new ideas and gods and places and the people of God get thrown into that mix and they're just going to get chopped up. What's going to happen to our children? They're not learning Hebrew anymore. They're learning Aramaic.

We can't go to listen to the scribe read the scriptures because they won't sit still for it and it's

not in a language that they understand. And that's what has happened to our Christian culture in this day. We don't have, it used to be so much of this was passed on from parents to children, but now when you try to pass it on, they've already walked off with their iPad or their phone or their texting.

We are handing something and there's nobody there to hand it to, they've been in many ways co-opted. And so the discussion I was a part of is, is there a way to repackage the great teaching and the content and the elucidation of the scriptures from these wonderful men of God that taught in decades past and make it usable? Or should we actually sort of leave that in the past, leave Haddon Spurgeon on the shelf, he was a man from the 1800s, these guys were men from the 1900s, and maybe there needs to be a new generation of teachers who can take the timeless truth of the word of God and present it in a way that is accessible to people who, through no fault of their own, have grown up in a culture that is hostile to reflection, hostile to meditation, hostile to concentration, and to detailed study. So I am taking a second look at guys that wear jute necklaces and walk back and forth on stages with microphones in their hands and there's a lot of hoopla going on because I think in some ways this is capturing attention.

Look at the size of the crowds that come. Something is bringing them and something is keeping them there and you can talk about the content in another context, but this is how it is done now. This is how people's attention is captured, not like what I'm doing here.

I say all that to say this, chapter 7 of Daniel comes hard on the heels of the lion's den and the reason this material comes is God is telling Daniel, your people, your nation, the children of Jacob, are going to be in the lion's den. And if they do not have the attitude of Daniel, if they do not have the faith and the focus of Daniel, they are going to be eaten like the ones who conspired to put Daniel in there. There is a danger.

So it is no accident. That's the background. Look at chapter 7 now.

In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, first year of Belshazzar, remember we talked about this, we've gone back in time before the handwriting on the wall now, but he's the last king of Babylon. There's about to be a huge change. Belshazzar is going to be conquered, deposed, killed, destroyed, and the Medes are coming in.

Darius is coming in, right? So in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, in advance, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. He wrote down the dream and got down the details, basically. Daniel spoke saying, notice he has the dream, he writes down the dream, now he is going to communicate the dream.

He spoke saying, I saw in my vision by night, and behold the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. We've talked about these beasts, we'll review them again a little bit later, it's not what we're going to talk about right now. Now, I watched them, verse 11, notice you have the beasts detailed in verses 4 through 8, and the first beast in verse 4 is like a lion.

What did we just have in the preceding chapter? Lions. What do lions do? They devour. What does Satan do? He roams the earth like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The whole idea of a lion is you get devoured. I don't want to be devoured. I don't want to be devoured by the world, by the culture, by the distractions of this life.

I don't want to be digested and excreted. I want to be on mission and on target, and all of us do. So the first is like a lion, and that just sets the stage for these others.

You have a bear. These are also carnivore-type animals that will attack you and so on. But after that, verse 9, thrones are put in place.

The ancient of days is seated, his garment as white as snow, hair is like pure wool. His throne is a fiery flame, wheels burning fire. Fiery stream issues comes forth from before him, thousand thousands minister to him.

Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and the books were opened. Of course, my question is, what books? It just says, the books.

Then in verse 11, Daniel says, I watched then, because the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking, this is from the preceding horrible beast, the fourth one. I watched till the beast was slain, his body was destroyed, given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

And we had just gotten to the cusp of this, I think, at the end of November when we left off our study, because there seems to be a time problem here. If you say the lion with the wings, that's Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, then you have the bear with the raised shoulder and the ribs between his teeth, that's the Medes and Persians, then you have the leopard and the wings of a bird, that's the Greeks, and then you have the terrible beast, exceedingly strong, iron teeth and so on, this is the Romans, and then in a traditional understanding, you have an interruption, we have the church age, you conclude the church age and paste everything back together, now you're in the last seven years of the age of Israel, and you have the revived Roman Empire, it's the Roman Empire again, and it is this terrible beast, continuing to be terrible, continuing to have iron, it's like the feet of iron mixed with clay, the shins of iron and all that. So that horn that comes up out of that speaks great words, but then it's like, well, God is going to intervene, and the thrones are set up, and here he is on his throne, and there's fire, and there's wheels, and there's ministers, thousands of them, the court is seated, and the books are open.

So what does it mean when it says the books are open, what does that mean to you? If somebody is sitting on a throne, and there's a bunch of servants all around, and we're in court, right? So what are the books? These aren't adventure books, they're not history books, they are books for judgment. Remember Revelation chapter 20? And the books were opened, and people were judged according to their works, what was written in the books, and another book,

the book of life, well the books are open, so it's judgment time, when it says the books are open, these are the judgment books. This is where the charges are recorded, the case is processed, the adjudication is made, the sentence is recorded, and the disposition, or the, what happens, is there punishment, is there acquittal, all of this is in the books.

So what's curious to me, and apparently to Daniel, he says, I watched them, I was trying to figure this out, because the sound of these pompous words, the horn was speaking, pompous words, we've had a lot of politics in this last week, and you know, speeches of various kinds, and I'll leave you to fill in the blank on pompous words, but this will be characteristic of the days of the antichrist, the false prophet, and great swelling words, it is persuasive, it carries people along, they become convinced, they become motivated, they become happy, but it's words, and he doesn't even say what he says, he just says it's pompous words. But the beast is slain, body destroyed, given to the burning flame, as for the rest of the beasts, so, point of confusion, if we're at the end times, and the revived Roman Empire has just been busted up, and the little horn with the pompous words has been slain, and carried off, the rest of the beasts, the historical Babylon, the historical Persia and Medes, the historical Greeks, how is it they're still around in chapter 12? As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I thought they were all dead, buried in dust, and you know, just coins and broken pottery, and the archaeological layers.

But Daniel goes on to say, I was watching in night visions, and one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven, came to the Ancient of Days, brought him near before him, he was given dominion, glory, kingdom, peoples, nations, and languages served him, dominion is everlasting, doesn't pass away, will not be destroyed. Now, here's the whole place we've been going for the last 22 minutes. Look at verse 15, I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit, within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.

Wait a minute, our whole understanding, our whole conception and perception up to this point is that the faithful people of God, I think Daniel represents your faithful people of God, are comforted and encouraged and strengthened and empowered and directed and guided by the revealed Word of God. You get a faithful believer, and you give him the Word of God, and they've got the world by the tail, they're ready to march on, right? Here you have a faithful believer in a historical circumstance, he gets the Word of God, he is grieved and troubled and distressed. I didn't think that was supposed to happen.

I thought that, you know, from the comfort of the scriptures we have hope and the promises of God and all the rest of it. So how did this happen? And by the way, if you get the Word of God and you find yourself grieved and distressed, don't panic. If it happened to Daniel, I can't feel too bad if it happens to me.

Sometimes when the plan and purpose of God unfolds and we see it before us, it can get us upset. It can cause troubled thoughts and a grieved spirit. I was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.

Remember the verse that says, Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and in my mouth they were sweet as honey, but when they hit the bottom, bitter as wormwood. Thy words were found, God's Word was found, sweet to take it in, but when I began to digest it, it gave me a tummy ache. Daniel understands symbolic communication.

That's his whole, that's his reputation, right? He's been interpreting dreams for people. So as he gets this dream, he doesn't figure it out. He doesn't understand it.

And so he is grieved and troubled. He was given Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation thereof. He's given the mene mene tekel ufarsin on the wall, and he figures that out.

Here he has a dream and a night vision, and it troubles and distresses him, and he can't figure it out. Mature believer, doing what he's supposed to do, being faithful, honored by God, gets the Word of God, and he's in trouble. He is troubled.

So we'll get to the details of what this all means directly. I am more interested in Daniel because he reminds me of us. We think there's something wrong if we think there's something wrong, right? We've been believers a long time, we've been studying the Word of God together for many years, and we think, well, if something's wrong, something must be wrong.

I'm not supposed to be distressed, I'm not supposed to be troubled, I'm not supposed to be confused, I'm not supposed to be thrown off my stride here. If it can happen to Daniel, calm down. It can certainly happen to us, and it's not a bad thing.

He hasn't done anything wrong. But look at him. My spirit is grieved within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.

He's in distress. And by the way, many people that have gotten the Word of God have been distressed. Nebuchadnezzar got the Word of God, and he was distressed.

Belshazzar got the Word of God on the wall, and he was distressed. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, many of the prophets have gotten the Word of God, and it caused them distress. Why is that? Well, we are little creatures made of clay, and the Word of God is coming from Almighty God in heaven, and as much as God scales it down and crafts it and diminishes it and takes the glory off of it so it doesn't roast us, it's a lot for us to take on.

We're just time-bound creatures. He's the eternal, infinite God. And when His Word comes to us, sometimes it's going to be a challenge, and it can distress us and even discourage us when we get it at first and we don't quite grasp it.

Point of application for this section of Daniel. Don't be distressed because you're distressed. Let not your heart be troubled because you're troubled.

When something new comes, when the Word of God is revealed, and it's difficult and it's a

challenge, let's be troubled and be distressed about the thing we're trying to figure out, but don't be distressed and troubled about being distressed and troubled. We just spiral ourselves and we think there's something wrong with our spiritual life, and we question our faith, and we wonder if we're doing the right thing, and are we in the right place, and do we associate with the right people, and we run all these questions through our mind. Notice that Daniel, although he is troubled and distressed, doesn't begin questioning the whole function, status, and purpose of his life.

What does he do? What does Daniel do when he is troubled and distressed? I think this is what we should do when we are troubled and distressed, as we are being faithful and taking in the Word of God, and yet we find ourselves in that mode. What does he do? Look at verse 16. I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all of this.

Notice Daniel didn't get down and say, Lord, you've given me the gift of interpreting dreams, why can't I figure this one out? He just went and asked. He is still in vision land, and there is somebody standing by in the vision, and he asks the truth. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things.

Ask, and it shall be given. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened.

Daniel looks, he sees, he's troubled and distressed, so he asks. When we are troubled, when we are confused, when we find ourselves taken aback, even in the realm of revelation of the Word of God, we stay calm and we ask. So, these beasts are about to be explained now by the one who stands by.

There are four kings which arise out of the earth. And you notice that, just like we found, if you watch the review, the archive lessons that were broadcast over the last weeks, when we were in Isaiah and we saw that there was the worm, Jacob, and the prince of God, Israel, and when you find those two juxtaposed, so often the descriptive content around them reflects a Jacob that is still all potential and hasn't entered into what God has promised him and what God wants to do for him. Everything is still ahead because he's having to learn the lesson of not trying to wrestle it into blessing for himself, not trying to scheme and manipulate and bring it about for himself.

He comes from a family that seems to engage in this. And he has to learn faith. He has to learn patience.

Faith and patience. And when he learns those things and learns that, even looking at the names, you have Yaakov, which means manipulator, wheeler-dealer, then you have prince of God. The wheeler-dealer, he's a wheeler-dealer, but that name doesn't tell you whether he is successful or not.

That was the question about Mr. Trump. You know, he's been in business a long time and he's made and lost several fortunes. Well, is he a success or is he not? Well, it kind of depends on when you look.

He's rich one day and bankrupt the next in the past. But he knows the art of the deal. And even as president, he uses the word deal.

These deals are going to be here. These deals will be handled by other people. Deal, deal, deal.

He's dealer. And that's really what Yaakov in Hebrew gets at. You're a dealer.

You're a dealer. You're trying to use leverage and make things happen. But it doesn't tell you anything about whether you're successful or not.

You can be a chiseler or a wheeler-manipulator, but did you succeed or fail? Well, it's all on you. His other name, Israel, is prince of God. Prince because God made him a prince.

If God makes you a prince, you are a prince. Who's going to undo the doing of God in bestowing royalty on you? Prince of God. So the actor in the first name is Jacob.

The actor in the second name is God. That's where the status comes from. That's where the accomplishment comes from.

So what does all that have to do with this? As soon as Daniel is given the key by this one who stands by, all he really needed was a few essential pieces of information. And the dream explains itself. The beasts are kings, or kingdoms.

Ah, okay. The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom. There are four kings, but the kingdom, and you get the idea that there is a kingdom that is being fought over.

This, by the way, tells you why the Babylonians and the Greeks and the Medes and Persians seem to survive the fourth terrible beast that gets destroyed and that they are around. Why is that? Because we tend to think, well, there was the Babylonian Empire. Then it went away and there was the Medo-Persian Empire.

And then it went away. No, there is one empire. There is one kingdom.

The Babylonians conquer it and try to hold on to it for a while and fall off their perch. They are conquered and succeeded by the Medes and Persians who try to hold that kingdom, and they fall off their perch. There are the Greeks who take it under Alexander, and they try to hold it for a while.

It's all one kingdom with different... Remember what Jesus said about people trying to force their way into the kingdom? People try to force their way in. This is the Jacob idea. By military might, by political prowess, by wonderful policies and great economic endeavors, we are going to make a kingdom, and we're going to inhabit it, and we're going to dwell in it.

That was the ancient world that was controlled by these succeeding entities. So the type of control is different, and that's represented by the different beasts, and we'll look at that in detail. But here's the big idea.

Here's the application. Notice it says in verse 18, the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, shall be the next ones after the lion with the wings, and after the bear with the ribs, and after the leopard, and after the terrible beast with the iron teeth. Then the saints will come in, and they will take the kingdom.

No. Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, Cyrus and the Medes and Persians, Alexander and the Greeks, all of the Caesars and the Romans, they are Jacob, having a zeal but not according to knowledge, if you will. They're going to take it by force.

They're going to conquer it and subdue it and overcome it. How do the saints get the kingdom? They don't... You know, there's a song that says we're marching to Zion. It doesn't say we're marching to go slaughter everything and take over the kingdom.

We're just marching to the capital. The kingdom's already been won. The saints receive the kingdom.

Hear me now. This is the point. Look at Daniel.

God is assuring him by his... And it was preceded and anticipated by the lion's den deliverance. But this vision tells him many are going to come and by various kinds of might and power and manipulation try to succeed, try to overcome, try to dominate, and try to make a life and an empire. But the saints of the Most High receive and possess from God.

It's Israel, not Jacob. It is what God does. The Ancient of Days, seated on his throne, opening his books, issuing his decrees.

He is the one who calls. He is the one who chooses. He is the one who blesses those who respond.

It's on him. My life, my success, does not depend on me. Thank the Lord.

When we place our faith in him, it all depends on him. And we receive. We relax.

We are diligent. We work hard. We serve.

We ask our questions. We seek and search with all of our hearts. But ultimately we rest in the knowledge that it is God who is going to create a kingdom.

Remember the big rock cut without hands that smashes the kingdom stacked up with the gold and the silver and the bronze? Without hands. Why didn't it just say a big rock came out of heaven? It specifically says a rock cut without hands. Human effort is not going to bring God's kingdom in.

It isn't going to bring God's blessing into our lives. It is our faith and obedience and our understanding that it is God who is at work in us to will and to do for his good pleasure. And we will receive and we will possess.

And didn't have to conquer anything. Didn't have to chew anything. Didn't have to bite any ribs.

Didn't have to have our wings snipped off or anything. So that's the big idea here in Daniel. Wonderful to find out about history, past and future.

Wonderful to have prophetic insight into God's expanding program in history. But in terms of personal application, just think Daniel. Things around me are confusing.

I get the word of God and I'm even more confused and distressed. I go ask. I am given the key to understanding.

And what is that key? The key is the saints receive from God and possess. Receive and possess. Got a problem? Got a challenge? Got decisions to make? Got transitions to work through? Receive and possess.

As soon as we start trying to go in and do the Jacob thing, we're going to end up like Abraham did with Hagar and Ishmael, like Jacob did with a lot of his defugalties. It's so much better to receive and possess. That's what Daniel does here.

So let's pause and take our break. When we come back, we'll see if we can finish chapter 7, at least an overview.