

A MAN AMONG BEASTS

Today's Text: Daniel Chap. 7

Extracts:

Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts ... saying, "I saw ... *four great beasts...* The first was like *a lion*, and had eagle's wings... And suddenly... a second, like *a bear...* was raised up on one side (with) three ribs in its mouth... and there was another, like *a leopard*, which had on its back four wings of a bird... After this I saw ... *a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong...* And behold, One like *the Son of Man*, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" [Dan. 7: 1-7, 13-14]

*If you are a creationist, you will believe that God made man in His image and likeness. If you are an evolutionist, you will claim that man evolved from the apes. In both cases, you may agree that man is superior to animals. Yet, the way we glorify animals suggests otherwise. For example, in sports, teams are named after animals, such as the Chicago **Bulls** (basketball), the Saint Louis **Rams** (American football) or the Nigerian Green **Eagles** (soccer). When somebody is bold and stubborn, they say he is **lion-hearted**. An unreliable person is a **snake** under the green grass. A coward is a **jelly fish**. Are humans really superior to animals?*

Perhaps our fascination with animals comes from the Scriptures. In visions shown to Daniel and John concerning human kingdoms and events, God used the symbol of beasts. In most cases, beasts are used to represent human kingdoms and powers that have an expiring date but lingering impact. On the other hand, there is another kingdom established by the 'Son of Man' that is everlasting. For today's study, any human who lives by the rules of human kingdoms shall be called a beast. Anyone who abides by the principles of the kingdom of the Son of Man shall be called a man. Look around you. Look at yourself. Would you call yourself a beast or a man or a man among beasts? Is it possible to change from beast to man?

Let us find out from today's study.

1. Background: Daniel's visions

Ordinarily, Chapter 7 of the book of Daniel is an elaboration of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chapter 2. In Daniel's case, God used four beasts in place of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image with the head of gold, the chest of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze and the legs of iron and clay [Dan. 2: 31-33]. Both dreams are prophetic messages about earthly kingdoms through human history and how they will all end and be replaced by an everlasting kingdom of God.

Here is a brief summary of the chapter. God showed Daniel four types of beasts: a lion with the wings of an eagle [Dan. 7: 4], a bear that was raised up on one side [v. 5], a leopard with four heads and four wings on its back [v. 6], and an unnamed dreadful and terrifying beast that spoke pompous words [v. 7]. Daniel also saw in the visions thrones put in place and the "Ancient of Days" was seated and being ministered to by "a thousand thousands" while "ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him." Judgment books were opened. The pompous beast was slain and cast into the burning flame while the other beasts had their dominion taken away even though "their lives were prolonged for a season and a time" [vv. 9-12]. As Daniel watched, he saw "One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven." He came before the Ancient of Days who gave Him [Son of Man] "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him [and] His dominion is an everlasting dominion" [vv. 13-14]. This kingdom "shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High" [v. 27]. One of those who stood by the throne of the Ancient of Days explained the visions to Daniel. The four beasts represented successive kingdoms/empires through history [vv. 15-27] which experts in interpreting bible prophecies have equated with (a) Babylon, (b) Medo- Persia, (c) Greece and (d) Rome.¹

In describing His Second Coming, Jesus Christ said [Matt. 24: 30]:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

At His trial, when the High Priest asked Jesus to tell them who He was, whether He was the Son of God, He replied, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" [Matt. 26: 63-64]. Somewhere else, John the Baptist before his death had told the Jews with reference to Jesus, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand" [Jn 3: 35]. Clearly, in Daniel's vision, the Ancient of Days is God the Father and the Son of Man to whom He gave the everlasting kingdom is Jesus the Christ. The beasts represent "all the greatness and the strength and the beauty of nature" while the Son of Man

¹ See, for example, Laverna Patterson's "Lesson 8: Four Beasts from the Sea (Daniel 7)," www.teachinghearts.org/dre17hdan07.html

represents “all the greatness and strength of the Ancient of Days.”² The saints of the Most High that were persecuted by the pompous beast [**Dan. 7: 25**] are the followers of Christ who still face persecution today in the hands of the successor regimes of the pompous beast.

Even though the Ancient of Days took away dominion from the first three beasts, He prolonged their lives “for a season and a time” [**v. 12**]. In other words, the behaviour traits of the beasts can be found in contemporary human values and conduct. When Esso (whose logo had a leopard) changed its name to Exxon in January 1973, its advertisements said, “We’ve changed our name but not our stripes.” The Roman Empire used Greek as its official language. Western civilization is essentially refined Greco-Roman civilization that has been spread around the world through European colonization of the Americas, Asia and Africa. So, my intention in this study is to identify some of such traits and how they affect believers today as they try to walk in the ways of the everlasting kingdom of God. That way, we will realize that Daniel is not talking over our heads; that the times are already here; that we need to wake up!

2. The four beasts in our midst

You may have come across one or some of the following types of beasts:

a) *The proud one*

The first beast “was like a lion and had eagle’s wings.” The wings were plucked off and the beast “was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to him” [**Dan. 7: 4**]. The lion is king among all the beasts while the eagle is king among the birds. Power intoxicates and so the lion and the eagle are arrogant. This beast represents Babylon. You will recall that God punished Nebuchadnezzar’s arrogance by turning him into a beast (with the heart of a man!) for seven years until he acknowledged God’s glory [**Dan. 4: 13-16; 28- 34**].

The beast of pride is in all of us. God has given us talents, just as he gave to the Babylonian kings. When God wanted to punish the disobedient children of Israel, He allowed the Babylonian kings to carry them into exile and plunder the temple in Jerusalem. In no time, Nebuchadnezzar and his descendants began to behave as if they had attained great heights on account of their own powers. They built idols in the form of the golden image or wicked laws or drinking orgies to defile God’s sacred vessels or chosen people. In like manner, many of us have been blessed with material success, honour or promotion. The blessings get into our heads and we become pompous. We no longer respect our mentors or serve the true God. We neglect to pay our tithes and vows. We perpetuate injustice against our subordinates and lord it over

² “The Four Living Creatures,” www.bibletopics.com/biblestudy/1.htm

the poor and needy. We become too big to apologize when we offend but refuse to forgive when we are offended.

Take the case of Uzziah who was made king of Judah at the age of sixteen [**2 Chron. 26: 1**]. He started well by seeking God's face and listening to God's word through the prophet Zechariah. As a result, God made him prosperous [**vv. 4-5**]. However, "when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord." He went to the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. When the priests whose duty it was to burn incense confronted him, he became furious and defied them. Immediately, "leprosy broke out on his forehead" and he was disgraced out of the temple [**vv. 16-19**].

Many young believers have been trampled by the beast of pride. If you find yourself too big to learn, too self-centred to acknowledge or reward others' contribution to your success or too self-righteous to apologize for errors, the beast of pride and arrogance is knocking at the door of your heart.

b) *The devourer*

The second beast was "like a bear (that) was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth." It devoured much flesh [**Dan. 7: 5**]. Thus, the bear went about devouring others until it was itself destroyed. The Medes and Persians destroyed the Babylonian kingdom as well as other kingdoms of the ancient world. The Medes were in turn destroyed by the Persians until they were themselves destroyed by the Greeks.

The devouring nature of this second beast can be seen in the kind of culture that it induced in the children of Israel during the reign of King Darius the first Mede to succeed the Babylonians. Speaking to them through the prophet Haggai, God said, "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, and you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." They neglected God and His temple for personal pursuits [**Hagg. 1: 5-6**].

You are dealing with the beast of the devourer when you have insatiable greed. You can never be satisfied with what you have and each success fuels your greed. It can also take the form of addiction- for work, drugs, drinks, sex, stealing or whatever. Do you know how many workaholics have dropped dead on the job? Do you know how many gluttons have become obese from overeating? Do you know how many nymphomaniacs have lost faithful spouses? Do you know how many lottery winners are now paupers? The devourer is at work and you need to be aware of it.

c) *The predator*

The third beast was “like a leopard which had on its back four wings of a bird” [Dan. 7: 6]. This is said to represent the Greek empire under Alexander the Great. A leopard with the wings of a bird is in top flight, just as Alexander conquered the then known world at top speed and died in his thirties. The leopard preys on other animals. It does not take captives! It kills and eats and pursues more as and when necessary.

What company do you keep? Are you preying on other people’s property? When you cheat on taxes or cook your company’s books or steal with your pen, you are preying on other people’s property. When you use or steal other people’s ideas without their approval, you are preying on other people’s property. When you enjoy other people’s problems, you are preying on their welfare. When you peddle damaging rumours against others, you are a predator.

The word of God says [Prov. 1: 10, 15-16]:

My son, if sinners entice you. Do not consent. If they say, “Come with us; let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause...” My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil; and they make haste to shed blood

You do not have to shed blood only with a weapon, such as the gun or knife before you see yourself as a killer. How about killing with your mouth through slandering others? Kill the beast instead of others!

d) *The robot*

The fourth beast shown to Daniel had no name and “it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.” It was said to be “dreadful and terrible” and “exceedingly strong.” It had “huge iron teeth” and “the nails of bronze,” with “the eyes of a man” and “a mouth speaking pompous words.” With its strong feet, it trampled the residue of what its iron teeth had broken into pieces [Dan. 7: 7-8, 19]. It represented the Roman Empire and its modern variants, characterized by brutal and cruel (and where expedient, subtle) use of force.

This beast has the features of a machine and of a person. It spoke pompous words against the Most High, persecuted the saints of the Lord and would even “intend to change times and law” [v. 25]. Does that not fit the description of the robot that mimics human beings? The pompous speech comes from the heart of its maker, human beings that are fools. A fool has said in his heart that there is no God [Ps. 14: 1]? This beast’s world view is anti-God and antichrist. With the help of sophisticated scientific and electronic gadgets, it

parades evolution as the explanation for the origin of life and promotes false values, such as same-sex marriage, as civil right.

This beast is a major threat to the believer in that it can kill your sensitivity to the truth of God. You are branded conservative or an extremist for upholding your Christian values, especially in the public arena. If you are other-directed, you may be lured to go with everyone else under the guise, “If you can’t beat them, join them!” The fact is that everybody is not doing it, and those who deny Christ before men He will deny before His Father [**Matt. 10: 33**].

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the Son of Man but are you among His saints?

The four beasts could not go that far because any conduct that contradicts the word of God will face His judgment. In Daniel’s vision, he saw the Ancient of Days set up the judgment seats. The four beasts, representing human dominions were judged and their power was taken away from them [**Dan. 7: 9-12**]. Then, he saw the Son of Man coming on the clouds. The Ancient of Days gave Him all the dominions. He would establish His own kingdom which would last forever [**vv. 13-14**]. The Son of Man would in turn give the kingdom to the saints of the Most High “forever, even forever and ever” [**v. 18**].

Who are these saints? John was given the following description in the book of Revelation [**Rev. 7: 14-17**]:

(They are those that have) come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them... (and) the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

You may find yourself among beasts or you may once have been one of them. Now, by virtue of your having accepted the Son of Man as your Lord and Saviour, you have become a living saint and a man among beasts.

Congratulations. Keep it that way and never ever lose it!