

# Daniel 7.1–14

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## *History's secret*

Amington (Online)

Sunday 25 April 2021

Daniel: Faithful in Exile [9]

## The Sea

I love the sea. But mostly, I love *looking* at the sea, and I love *breathing in* the sea air. I don't mind swimming in it, as long as it isn't freezing cold. But what I really don't like, is being *on* it, in a boat or a ferry, being tossed about by the wind and the rolling waves – I have to stare at the floor of the boat, because if I see the horizon going up and down... well... you know!

In the Bible 'the sea' often stands for chaos and disorder. That's why in Revelation 21.1, as John describes his vision of heaven, he says '**there was no longer any sea**'. It's not that God will get rid of water, or that water is itself bad – after all, half of Jesus' disciples made their living on it! No, '**there was no longer any sea**' means God will get rid of the chaos, the nothingness, the untamed evil that the sea represented to the Israelites.

## The Beasts (1-8)

Did you notice from where the beasts emerge in Daniel's dream?

'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.'

*Daniel 7.2-3 (NIV)*

They came from **the sea**. These beasts stand for that which is against everything God has done: they are chaotic, destructive, evil – trying to undo the good things God has made. No wonder Daniel says, **'I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me'** (15).

I'll bet!

It's no secret that I don't sleep particularly well. I sometimes have dreams that are disturbing. But most of the time, they're just a bit weird. And I've certainly never had a dream like this.

But what do all these beasts mean? Well, actually, we'll think a bit more about that *next* week. People try and identify the beasts with kingdoms and empires – for example Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome – but actually I think that misses the point.

## The Secret (9-14)

Have you ever tried to find your glasses or sunglasses, and hunted all over the house – maybe even in the car! – only to realise they are already on your head? Have you ever looked for something in the fridge, stared at it for ages, only to realise it's right there, on the middle shelf? Have you ever totally missed the point in a conversation, and then felt like a complete numpty when you realised??

In case you were wondering, I have done all three of those things, on more than one occasion.

The terrifying beasts in verses 1-8 make it easy to miss the point in this passage – but the clue comes in verses 9, 11, and 13:

‘As I looked...

‘Then I continued to watch...

‘In my vision at night I looked...’

*Daniel 7.9, 11, 13 (NIV)*

As Daniel looked, in other words, *while* the beasts were rampaging on the earth, causing chaos and looking for all the world like they were undoing the good work God had done in creation – *as he looked*, something *else* was going on.

**‘As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat’** (9). ‘Ancient’ is not normally a compliment these days – I suspect if I called one of you ‘ancient’ you’d want to punch me on the nose. But here it means permanence, wisdom, depth and faithfulness over countless ages. This is not a decrepit old man but the powerful, almighty creator God sitting on his throne in heaven surrounded by countless worshippers.

And what is *he* doing? He is *sitting* in Daniel’s vision. He’s not out waging war against the beasts – *because he doesn’t have to*.

In the Lower Story, down here, those beasts, human kingdoms and empires, wickedness, depravity, evil – they seem unstoppable. I look at the news and the world, and it’s hard not to feel down, it’s hard not to give up hope, down here in the *Lower* Story.

But... ‘As Daniel looked’ –God lifted the veil on the *Upper* Story, and Daniel saw the secret of history.

‘As Daniel looked... **the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire**’ (11). Just like that. It reminds me of one of my favourite verses, 2 Thessalonians 2.8: **the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth**. *Breathe out*.

**That is all Jesus has to do to conquer the evil one. *Breathe out.***

Is that not incredible? Is that not amazing?

The secret of history is this: for all the power and bluster of evil in the Lower Story, they don't even compare to the authority and the power of God, the Ancient of Days, which Daniel saw as God lifted the veil on the Upper Story.

The secret of history is this: God is able to keep his people safe. Remember, Daniel was in exile, God's people enslaved, taken away from their families, their homes, the very land God had promised them. Some of them died without ever seeing it again.

This is not a promise that everything will be ok. It's a promise that even when things are very much *not* ok, God will keep his people safe – he will lose not a single one. Evil doesn't stand a chance, not even close. It's not a close fight. It's not 1-0 after extra time – it's a bazillion-nil before the match has even started.

Friends, *this* is the God we worship.

# The Encouragement

Daniel was blessed with a vision. It was a disturbing vision, but it showed Daniel what God's people need to hear.

God lifted the veil on the Upper Story, so Daniel could encourage those of us in the Lower Story, that even though we are surrounded by chaos and evil and pain and sadness – that is not all there is.

History is not random, uncontrolled chaos – God knows what's going on, and though all the 'beasts' of the Lower Story don't know it yet – their days are numbered, because the Lamb wins.

And that, my friends, is history's secret: the Lamb wins.

Alleluia.