

Daniel 7.15–28

The end is nigh... or is it?

Amington (Online)

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Daniel: Faithful in Exile [10]

False summits

Last week we learned history's secret – can you remember what it was? God is able to keep his people safe even through the turmoil and pain of history; *the Lamb wins*. That was the main point of Daniel's dream – but what about those beasts? The dream was terrifying for Daniel – but was it 'just a dream' or something more?

Once Jess and I walked up Snowdon – or whatever it's going to be called now, I'm afraid I can't pronounce it – and the peak was visible the whole way up,. I was excited: I thought I was going to see the view from the top of Snowdon for the first time!

But, true to form, when we were only a few hundred metres from the top, the clouds descended, and so when we reached the top, as normal, we had a lovely view of the inside of a Welsh cloud.

We could see the top of Snowdon for almost the entire walk – but what’s more common are *false* summits. You think you’re almost there, you struggle on, you get to the top of the rise... and then you see *another, even steeper* climb ahead. Sometimes there are several of these, before you reach the actual summit.

Have you ever had that experience? How did it make you feel? Deflated, exhausted, frustrated, maybe even a bit angry!

Yet it’s all forgotten when you get to the top.

Now imagine you are on the same walk, *but with someone who knows the way*. She is able to warn you about the false summits, so you don’t get too disheartened, but keep on going until you reach the top.

History is beastly (15-25)

Daniel’s dream is a bit like that friend: warning us of what’s to come. He wanted to know what it meant, so he got over his inner ‘macho’, and decided to ask for directions:

‘I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this.’

Daniel 7.15-16 (NIV)

The man – or angel, it doesn't say – replied, '**The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth**' (17). In that sense, the meaning of the dream is clear: it's about actual kings who rule actual people in actual places. Let's not pretend or try to make this more complicated than it actually is!

As to who those four kings are or were – well, as I said last week, the first three are often identified as Babylon, Persia, and Greece – the first empires. And I tend to agree – I see echoes with the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream back in chapter 2 (2.31-33).

But what about the fourth beast, the fourth king? Would that not be Rome, the empire that conquered Greece? Maybe, but I'm not so sure.

Three times in this chapter we read this about the fourth beast:

'It was different from all the former beasts' (v7)

'The fourth beast... was different from all the others' (v19)

'The fourth beast... will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth' (v23)

Daniel 7.7, 19, 23 (NIV)

The fourth beast is *different, different, different*. It is not like the other kingdoms: terrible though they were and would be, Daniel was told *this* one will **devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it**. It is **uncompromising** in its opposition to God, **unrelenting** in its reach, and **unstoppable** in its savagery.

And that's why I think it's still to come. Rome was pretty bad, but really it was meet the new boss, same as the old boss. So Rome can't be the fourth kingdom because the fourth is something else, something new, something *worse*.

So the meaning of the beasts is this: history is beastly. Those three empires – Babylon, Persia, and Greece – kicked off 2,500 years (and counting) of empire building, destruction, and exploitation on an ever-increasing scale.

They were the first false summits, but there have been many more since; they kickstarted the pattern we see throughout history. As Barbara Tuchman said, '**Revolutions produce other men, not new men**'.¹

History is beastly, and it is hurtling towards a terrifying end: a king and kingdom that stands utterly opposed to God and his people.

His story is better (26-27)

History is beastly – but *his* story is better. *Repeat*

Why?

First, there is a load of stuff about the fourth beast having ten ‘horns’ (a sign of authority) – and then a ‘**little horn**’ grows among them and uproots three of the other horns: **this horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully** (8).

Again the explanation is pretty clear: the ten horns are ten kings, and the little horn is a last king, the worst king, the most evil of the lot (24). He sums up all human opposition to God.

All these horns and kings – evil is scary and powerful, but it is also *fractured* and full of *infighting*. You’ve seen the films and the TV shows where the baddie has lied to and betrayed so many people he can’t trust anyone any more – and with good reason. Evil may devour the whole earth, but it can’t hold itself together, it can’t last.

And, notice how many kings God’s kingdom has: *one*. In verse 13 **one like a son of man** arrives in heaven and is made King. All those beasts, all those kings – they keep trying, but not one of them can last, not one of them can stand before Jesus’ throne.

And so second, his story is better because he wins. Verse 26:

‘ “But the court will sit, and [the] power [of the beast and the king] will be taken away and completely destroyed for ever.” ’

Daniel 7.26 (NIV)

Again, there's no *Lord of the Rings* style cosmic battle. God's enemies are ready for one, but he doesn't even need to fight them: he simply announces his judgement and they lose and are **completely destroyed for ever**.

And then God's people – brought safely *through* the beastly history, are given security, power, and authority, and reign with God for ever in his **everlasting kingdom** (27). Amen to that! History is beastly, but his story is better: evil can't last, and God *wins*.

Warning and encouragement

Now all this has already started, but we don't know *when* it will end; God didn't give Daniel this dream to tell us *when*.

Notice how long the last and final evil king will reign for: **a time, times, and half a time** (25). The time is set, but it's for God to know and us to find out. God lifts the veil – but only so much. He reveals the truth, but also leaves some mysteries hidden.

God gave Daniel this dream to **warn** us: if you thought Babylon was bad, just you wait... even after the horrors of the twentieth century, we haven't yet seen the full extent and power of evil. To be warned is to be prepared for the evil we face in the world.

But God also gave Daniel this dream to **encourage** us: history is beastly, but his story is better, because he *wins*. God is able to keep his people – God is able to keep *you* – safe.

Whether or not the end is nigh, *this* is what matters: our God is the God Most High, and he alone is able, he alone can carry us safely through history; so trusting in him is the only way to remain faithful in our exile.

¹ Quoted in Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, 97.