



THE NEW SHOFAR

Then four massive beasts came up out of the water

Daniel 7:9-14 - Mark 13:24-32

Trinity 25

The Setting for the Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is an important literary source for understanding Judaism we find in our New Testament. It is set during the reign of *Antiochus IV Epiphanes* the Syrian (Seleucid) king who was the great promoter of all things Greek (175 B.C. – 164 B.C.). He and his brothers dabbled in Jewish religious affairs, appointing his own High Priest, took treasures from the Temple and set up an altar for the worship of pagan deities in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. These things showed up major factions within Israel. Some – particularly among the religious leaders and aristocratic and wealthy people of the land – took on Greek ways with great zeal. Others, led by the Maccabees, rose up in revolt and pushed for a more rigorous form of submission to the Law of God. Thus, Daniel emerges in a world of fire, of war, rebellion, zealots, diabolical pagan forces and the very real threat of disappearing from human history. Historical research has shown how from the time of Alexander’s invasion of Palestine in 333 and the arrival of the Romans in 63 there were more than 200 military campaigns undertaken! It is not difficult then to understand the fundamental question of the faithful Jews: Where are you God? How does a broken and crushed people find hope for the future?

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds”

Chapter seven marks the beginning of the central theological message of Daniel. It opens with a terrifying vision of a raging storm and up out of the chaotic waters emerge four great and terrifying beasts. From Daniel’s perspective, it is as if the whole of creation had returned to the chaos existing before God began the work of creation. The four beasts represent the four corners of the earth, suggesting there was no hope of escaping the evil coming their way. They represent world powers, all of which had defeated Israel in the past – as well as all the evils besetting human communities everywhere. One of these beasts had a massive *horn* a symbol of incredible, destructive and unstoppable power. Interestingly, though, the horn had *the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke arrogantly*. Evil then, always has a human face.

Into the middle of this dark vision came a second vision, this one more encouraging. It showed the *Ancient of Days* sitting on his throne in heaven, a throne that was not limited to one place but was able to move around on wheels. A devouring and cleansing fire flowed out from the throne and around him was a massive company of people. Most importantly of all, this Ancient of Days opened the books of life, books that held records of all men and women had done throughout their lives. He knew all. Had seen all. Was on top of what was going on and was never absent. He was seated on his throne – reigning. That he is *ancient* makes it clear he is full of wisdom and experience. For Daniel and his contemporary writers of apocalyptic literature creation was at war. Good (God) was under threat from Evil (Satan/Beasts). With whom then do men and women of faith align themselves? How do the faithful respond when their world turns dark? Their good deeds and faithful responses are never overlooked for God records them in the Book of Life.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

'At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise...' At what time? Daniel had been recording the way Michael was already hard at war, in battle against the Persians and the Greeks. Now he appears in the divine court hearing. He is here now because Michael is the one appointed by God to be the protector of Israel and his arrival means the long-awaited New Era is at hand. He was expected at the time of greatest anguish for God's people. He is a comforting and reassuring heavenly presence in a world of darkness and chaos for he (heaven) goes to war on our account. What better way to convey this message of life and hope than the promise... *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* What is the moment in life when all hope has gone? Where is there a total, absolute, unbreakable darkness? Death. The grave. It is the one thing men and women are unable to defeat. Massive beasts with gigantic horns are nothing as compared to the dust of death. To have power over death means to have power over every other dark force on earth.

"the Son of Man *is* coming in clouds"

In 63 B.C the Roman armies under Pompei took control of Palestine and it marked a period of conflict and unrest that continued through beyond the Jewish Wars, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. Rebels controlled the hill country and attacked caravans and assassins played havoc among the Jewish aristocrats accused of "selling out" to the Romans. Zealots called for a nation-wide uprising to throw off the oppressive yoke of Rome. For Mark's Church it is as if the whole world has returned to life before creation... *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light...* This is the universe before day four of creation.

In the traditions of Judaism this darkening of the earth was a sign the *time was right* for the arrival of the Messiah. What the Pharisees and the other religious leader failed to understand was that the Messiah had already come. The Messiah was there in the middle of the chaos of Roman rule. God had never been absent from the *heavenly throne*, was aware of what was happening and in the symbol of Michael the Archangel was still caring for those who remained faithful.

Jesus is offering those who gathered around him a promise of hope. Rome is not the complete picture of reality or human history, no matter how oppressive they may be at any one time in human experiences. The full picture of reality must include that which exists the other side of the grave. As Daniel declared... *those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake...*

Fire flows from the throne and Michael is in battle for God's people

The Gospels do not in any way suggest human beings are passive victims of powers and forces, spirits beyond their ability to control. Evil always has human face. The very worst of evil, wickedness, exploitation, persecution, and the sufferings of the people comes from the hearts of men and women. Not from beasts. Not from devils. Not from forces that are impossible to control or overcome. God reigns from his throne. The Son of Man *is* returning as judge. The challenge now is to find where and how God reigns and return to Gospel basics while we live in the time between the present and the coming of the Son of Man. Whatever the question or the challenge, for Mark the evangelist the answer is always Jesus, always begins with Jesus the Messiah.

Daniel and Mark both paint evil, particularly the challenges and threats facing the communities of believers as beasts but no matter how powerful the beast God reigns over all. There is always a *light shining in the darkness* and it is the responsibility of Christians to be the carriers of that *light* in a world that is searching and pursuing dead ends instead of the only Way to life.

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