

May 23, 2021

12. The Ancient of Days and a Son of Man — Daniel 7:9-18

Approaching this week’s study text from Daniel 7 may leave many feeling a bit like Daniel himself in this passage—troubled, or maybe even terrified. What do we make of Daniel’s graphic and confusing visions!? How do we interpret them, and how do they speak into our time and place?

Wendy L. Widder in “[Five Tips for Reading Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible](#)” says that this genre was meant to evoke emotion, and our *Salt & Light Leader* guide invites us to pay attention to the feelings that surface in us as we read it (p. 70). My feelings moved from a sense of security when I first read of the Ancient One on the throne, to fear as I read of the fire issuing from his presence, to awe as I imagined the thousands serving in the court of the Ancient One. I had a sense of curiosity and disgust as I read of the beast being destroyed, and then comfortable familiarity at the coming of the human being. The description of the human being presented with glory, dominion, and everlasting kingship felt victorious and jubilant, and the interpretation Daniel receives at the end of the passage left me anticipating justice with a sense of hope. If this is intended to evoke emotion, it certainly is successful! In the participant guide, Leonard Beachy notes that most scholars agree that the beasts and rulers referred to in Daniel are representative of rulers and kingdoms oppressing the Jews at the time of writing. He goes on to ask, “But when in human history have there not been beasts? Power, arrogance, oppression, and suffering have always done their dance of death, and this continues in our time” (*S&L*, pp. 70, 72).

Does it ever. At the time of writing, the world is watching in horror as violence escalates again between Israel and Palestine. We read of state oppression in Colombia and of a violent coupe and civil war in Myanmar. We see political posturing and demonstrations of military power from countries like Russia and China. While we are distanced from the context of Daniel’s writings, we are familiar with power, arrogance, oppression, and suffering. So we, like Daniel and his readers, take comfort in the reminder that the Ancient One is seated on the throne and will bring justice through the promised reign of the coming Son of Man. We know that this is the title that Jesus most often took for himself, and that Jesus spoke frequently of the coming kingdom or reign of God. In fact, these two images in Daniel evoke the first two lines of the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10).

I take comfort in the promise of Daniel 7, in Jesus himself, and the visions in Revelation of the kingdom that is to come. And I celebrate that it comes not through violent power, but via the humble death on a cross that leads to a victory over death itself. In the meantime, as I observe the suffering of this world, I just keep praying, “Thy kingdom come. . . .” Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

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Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.

Resources for this session

- **Hunter Hess** is the presenter for unit 3, God. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session.
The videos are free and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).
- "Commentary on Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18," Working Preacher, November 7, 2010, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=714
- "The Book of Daniel," BibleGateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/intro/?search=Daniel&version=NABRE>
- Adam Ericksen, "Daniel, God, and Apocalyptic Nonviolence: Bible Matters," Patheos, September 15, 2016, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/teachingnonviolentatonement/2016/09/daniel-god-and-apocalyptic-nonviolence-bible-matters/>
- "Apocalyptic Literature," Encyclopedia of The Bible, BibleGateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Apocalyptic-Literature>