

LESSON 21

CHAPTER 7

Last week I mentioned that Chapter 7 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. Chapter 7 is also one of the most important chapters in the Bible (where “importance” is defined by how often the chapter is relied upon by other Scriptures). Why? Because of verse 13 — “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the **Son of man** came with the clouds of heaven.” That phrase, *Son of Man*, occurs 84 times in the New Testament — it is the Messianic title most commonly used by Christ to speak of himself. Recall, for example, these statements of Christ:

- The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the **Son of man** hath not where to lay his head.
- But that ye may know that the **Son of man** hath power on earth to forgive sins.
- Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the **Son of man** be come.
- The **Son of man** came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.
- For the **Son of man** is Lord even of the sabbath day.
- And whosoever speaketh a word against the **Son of man**, it shall be forgiven him.

- For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the **Son of man** be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
- He that soweth the good seed is the **Son of man**.
- The **Son of man** shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.
- Whom do men say that I the **Son of man** am?
- There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the **Son of man** coming in his kingdom.

And those are just a few, all from Matthew. Each time that phrase is found it points us back to this incredibly beautiful Chapter 7 of Daniel. Each time Jesus used that phrase he was pointing his hearers back to Daniel 7. Of all the Messianic titles in the Old Testament it was this one that Jesus used most often. And what does this say about those today who would attack the historical veracity of Daniel? It tells us that their attack does not end with Daniel; they are attacking Christ and his Messianic claims. Make no mistake — an attack on the word of God is an attack on God.

As we leave the first six chapters and enter Chapter 7, we are leaving historical narrative behind. Instead, we will be reading about Daniel's visions, and much of the language we see will be what is called *apocalyptic* language. We have already seen some examples of this language in the descriptions of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, but we are about to see a great deal more of it.

For example, when we get to verse 8 of Chapter 7, we will read:

Daniel 7:8 — *I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

That type of language is very different from what we have seen in the historical descriptions of the events concerning Daniel and his friends, and we need to be prepared to treat it differently.

What is apocalyptic language?

Apocalyptic language is composed of symbols that are often lurid in color, violent in tone, and easily remembered. They strike the imagination and grab hold of the mind. Such language is found in Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Isaiah, and even in the gospels and epistles.

What is the purpose of apocalyptic language? It denotes conflict and victory and judgment. It is used when God judges and smites an oppressor and vindicates his people. It is used to describe times of crisis and judgment.

Why does God use apocalyptic language? Some think that the language is used to hide the true meaning from hostile authorities and thus shield God's people from retaliation. This view makes a little more sense with the book of Revelation than it does with the book of Daniel (although I don't think it is the correct view even for Revelation). Who are the hostile authorities in Daniel? The Jews were not being actively persecuted at the time this was written. Further, writing the message in Hebrew would no doubt have been sufficient to hide its meaning from the Chaldeans and the Persians (and the text switches back to Hebrew in Chapter 8). Also, Daniel *explained* some of the visions to the pagan kings.

I think the reason God uses such language is because of its *emotional* impact. Apocalyptic books have been called oil paintings from God. The vivid and violent language conveys emotional images while also conveying historical facts — just as a painting can convey emotions and facts. Of course, each word of apocalyptic language is inspired, just as with the historical narrative language, but that inspired language uses vivid symbols to convey emotional imagery. (In fact, each letter is inspired? How do we know that? Because Paul based an entire argument on whether a word was plural or singular (*seed* or *seeds*). Jesus based an argument on the tense

of a verb (*I am* the God of Abraham.) Numbers 12:8 reminds us that God does not always speak clearly, but sometimes uses dark language. Perhaps such language is reserved for times of conflict and judgment.

How do we interpret apocalyptic language? First, we need to pay particular attention to numbers and periods of time. They have symbolic meanings that must be deduced from the evidence.

- Three is the symbolic number for God.
- Four is the symbolic number for the earth or the creation.
- Twelve is the symbolic number for God's people.
- Ten is the symbolic number for completeness.
- Seven is the symbolic number for perfection.
- Six is the symbolic number for imperfection.
- Eight is the symbolic number for renewal.

These numbers can be combined. For example, how could we denote divine perfection? By combining the divine number three with seven, the number of perfection — and that might give us 777. So how then could we denote someone who thought he was divine, but who fell hopelessly short of divine perfection — not 777, but 666.

Sometimes numbers are raised to powers (squared or cubed) to add emphasis. For example, if ten means completeness, then 1000 means complete completeness! So if we found that someone was bound for 1000 years or someone reigned for 1000 years, then that would mean that that binding or that reign would be absolutely and totally complete.

As another example, how could we denote ALL of God's people? We could start with twelve for God's people under the Old Testament, and then another twelve for God's people under the New Testament. Then we could use ten to denote complete-

ness, and then raise it to the third power either to emphasize it or perhaps even to denote that these are God's people (with three denoting God). What would we then have? Twelve times twelve times ten to the third power, or 144,000.

If seven denotes perfection, how could we denote imperfection? We have already seen one way — we would use six as something that falls hopelessly short of seven. But we could also use a broken seven to denote imperfection — and a broken seven is three and a half, which is a figure that is often used for that purpose.

Some may complain that these numbers are sometimes used literally in the Bible — and that is absolutely correct. For example, here we see a literal four kingdoms, where the number four also denotes that these kingdoms are earthly kingdoms. Also, we will see a literal 70 years of captivity, and we will see figurative uses of 70 as well.

Is this surprising? Not at all. In fact, these numbers were not chosen at random. Their figurative meaning comes from their literal meaning! Why three for God? The trinity. Why four for earth? The four directions and the four seasons. Why twelve for God's people? The twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles. Why ten for complete? Ten fingers. Why seven for perfect? The seven days of the creation week. Why eight for renewal? The eighth day is the start of a new week.

In fact, sometimes the literal usage may arise from the figurative usage. For example, why are there four earthly kingdoms between the time of Babylon and the time of Rome? God could easily have used only three kingdoms or five or more kingdoms. Why four? Is it because of the use of four to denote the world? That is, these kingdoms are earthly kingdoms as opposed to the eternal heavenly kingdom.

And why did the captivity last 70 years? Is it because 70 also denoted the *perfect* and *complete* period of time in which they could learn the lesson that God wanted to teach them? And is it also because we will see the number 70 used figuratively in this same book?

Apocalyptic language always has historical significance, so we must study history to interpret it properly.

The *usual* approach to scripture is to understand a passage literally unless we are forced to do otherwise. How could we ever be *forced* to not understand a passage literally? In Matthew 5:30, Jesus told us to cut off our right hand if it offends us. Was this a literal command or should we interpret it figuratively? This usual rule of interpretation is *reversed* for apocalyptic language — we should understand apocalyptic language figuratively unless we are forced (or at least have a very good reason) to do otherwise.

Whatever we do, we should strive to be consistent. (Hal Lindsey says the 144,000 Jews in Revelation 7:4 are literal yet the locusts in Revelation 9:3 are cobra helicopters. John Walvoord says the ten days in Revelation 2:10 (before the vision) are figurative yet the 1000 years in Revelation 20 (during the vision) are literal.)

The following principles are helpful in interpreting apocalyptic language.

We should understand apocalyptic language figuratively unless we are forced to do otherwise. We should be consistent in our interpretations.

Similarity of language does not prove identity of subjects. (There are many judgments in the Bible, but the same language is used to describe each — Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Edom, Jerusalem, Rome, the world.)

Dissimilarity of language does not prove distinctness of subjects. (Sometimes the Bible views the same thing from different angles, and thus uses different language to describe the same thing.)

Easy to understand scriptures should be used to understand harder passages. The Bible is its own best commentary. This basic principle of hermeneutics should be used whenever we study the Bible. We should be very wary of any interpretation of apocalyptic language that conflicts with easier passages found elsewhere. (Premil-

lennialism is based entirely on Revelation 20 and as we know is in conflict with a host of other passages.)

The time frame is crucial in properly understanding apocalyptic language. Why? Because often the same language is used to describe different judgments or events, and so the time frame lets us know which judgment or event is in view. For example, the opening verses of Daniel 12 discuss a resurrection — is that the final resurrection at the end of the world, or is that a figurative resurrection? We will answer that question when we get to Chapter 12, but the opening words of the chapter will be very helpful to us — “And at that time.”

For another example, when we get to Chapter 8, we will read about a vision that Daniel received in 550 BC. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel was told to shut up the vision. Why? Because its fulfillment, he was told, was a long way off. When we get to Chapter 8, we will see that the vision was fulfilled 400 years later in 165 BC when the sanctuary was restored after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. Revelation 22:10 is an interesting verse to compare with Daniel 8:26. In Revelation 22:10, John was told just the opposite of what Daniel was told: Don't seal up the vision because the time for its fulfillment is at hand. By what theory do some argue that the “long way off” in Daniel is 400 years, while the “time at hand” in Revelation is 2000 years and counting? Does that make any sense?

The time frame is crucial to understanding apocalyptic language, whether that language is in Daniel or in Revelation — and we will see that there are many links between those two books.

But shouldn't we just take all scripture literally? Are the beasts in 7:3 literal or figurative? If you answer literal, then how do we explain verses 16-17, where the beasts are *interpreted* and we find that they represent *kings* or *kingdoms*?

NO ONE takes all scripture literally. Of course, when we say that we do not take all scripture literally we do not mean that we do not believe that all scripture is true. We know that God's word is truth and contains no inaccuracies — historical, sci-

entific, or otherwise. The question is not whether a particular passage is true. Instead, the question is whether God is using literal language or figurative language to convey the truth to us.

- To literalize **Genesis 3:15** is to reduce it to just describing a conflict between snakes and humans.
- To literalize **Zechariah 14:12-13** requires those that just had their flesh, their eyes, and their tongue consumed away by a plague to then lay their hand upon their neighbor and create a great tumult.
- To literalize **Isaiah 11:6-10** is to deny that Paul applied it correctly to the first century in **Romans 15:10-12**.
- To literalize **Ezekiel 16:53-55** would require the resurrection of the inhabitants of Sodom to their former prosperity despite what we read in Jude 7.
- To literalize **Ezekiel 37:22-25** would require that David and not Jesus be Israel's eternal king.

NO ONE takes all scripture literally (if they did, there would be a lot of one eyed, one handed people walking around!). Indeed, it is not logically possible to do so. Instead we need to approach the scripture with the common sense that God has given to us and that he knew we had when he gave us his word. God wants a thinking people!

One last example: Matthew 24:21 and Ezekiel 5:9, in reference to different events, both claim that the event in question will be a greater calamity than anything that has occurred or will ever occur. Logically, this could not be literally true of both events! The solution is to recognize the language as hyperbole and reject the literal interpretation.

Sometimes one hears or reads Deuteronomy 29:29 applied to apocalyptic language.

Deuteronomy 29:29 — *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong*

unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The idea is that we shouldn't worry about what books like Revelation and Daniel mean because they contain secret things that belong only to God. But does this make any sense? The word *apokalupsis* in Greek means unveiled, uncovered, or revealed! That is where we get the name "Revelation" for the final book in the Bible. Apocalyptic books do not contain secret things, they contain *revealed* things. The Bible is meant to be understood — and if we don't understand it, we shouldn't blame our inability on God. He wants us to understand his word. Apocalyptic language was often meant to convey comfort to those suffering captivity or persecution. What would it say about God if he offered us comfort but worded it in such a way that we could never receive that comfort? He wants us to understand his word.

Final comments before we begin: Many different interpretations about the following passages have been given. Without discussing all of the other opinions, I will largely confine my efforts to presenting and providing evidence for my own opinions.

While it is hard in some places to be dogmatic, it is not impossible. Also, our inability at some points to state with certainty what a passage means does not imply that it could mean anything. We can, even in those cases, often state with certainty what the passage does *not* mean.

Of course, it goes without saying that whatever is said about these passages should be checked carefully with the word. In Mark 4 and Luke 8 we find two commands of Christ:

Mark 4:24 — *Take heed what ye hear.*

Luke 8:18 — *Take heed how ye hear.*

Hearing is not passive. Jesus told us to be active hearers and to watch both how and what we hear. These commands are particularly crucial today when so many are twisting the scriptures to their own and their listeners' destruction.

Daniel 7:1

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.

Notice that chronologically this vision occurred before the events that we studied in Chapter 6. In fact, this vision occurred prior to the defeat of the Chaldeans by Cyrus. Belshazzar was killed at the end of Chapter 5 when the Medo-Persians conquered the city.

The first year of Belshazzar probably refers to the year 553 in the sixth century BC when Nabonidus left the city of Babylon for 14 years to live in north and central Arabia. Thus, the first year of Belshazzar's reign would refer to the first year of his coregency.

This book states very clearly that this vision was given to Daniel in the sixth century BC. The late-date crowd states just as clearly that this vision was made up by an impostor in the second century BC. Whom are we to believe? To believe the late-date crowd requires us to believe that the author of Daniel was guilty of a deliberate lie here in verse 1 (and in many other places). (And if he lied, then he certainly had Jesus fooled! See Matthew 24:15.) But this same late date crowd also once told us that Belshazzar in verse 1 never existed — and now they must admit that he did. You would think they would learn something from that, but they have not.

Daniel 7:2-3

2 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

In verse 2 we see wind and a great sea. The wind often denotes the action of God. Like God, the wind is invisible yet can have very dramatic effects.

Psalm 18:10 — *And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.*

Hosea 13:15 — *Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.*

The sea often denotes the restless nations of the world as they toss and churn.

Isaiah 17:12-13 — *Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.*

Thus, the wind on the sea denotes the actions of God on the restless nations of the world, which is exactly what we are about to see.