

The sermon

Intro

Christian movies loved the Antichrist in the late 90's and early 2000's. When some of you think Antichrist, you think a character in a movie. Are visions of Nicolae Carpathia coming to mind?

Reformation leaders Martin Luther and John Calvin, who recovered truths like Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, the movement to whom the Protestant church is indebted, firmly believed the Pope was the Antichrist.

What shall we make of the Antichrist? What does the Antichrist mean for us today? Let's read Daniel 7.

READ PASSAGE

Body

BIG IDEA: Following Jesus requires self-denial, but following Jesus ends in rescue!

Recap

- 1) Apocalyptic visions were given specifically to encourage God's people.
- 2) Daniel's vision teaches us God wins.

We haven't attached ourselves to a loser. Beastly rule is temporary.

- 3) Daniel's vision teaches us God is in control.

Beastly rule is appointed and removed by God. The duration of beastly rule is determined by God.

- 4) Daniel's vision teaches us that it's worth it to stand firm and persevere in the faith.

We may feel like outsiders. We may want to fit in. People may laugh at our beliefs. People may get angry about our beliefs. Our faith may make our life uncomfortable at times, but it's worth it to stand firm.

- 5) The Son of Man who comes to receive the kingdom is Jesus Christ.

Jesus returns physically and visibly after a period of tribulation to "*gather his elect from the four winds*" (Matt 24:27-31).

This morning we'll identify the four beasts. Then we'll begin to identify the little horn. We'll seek to understand, but not just for understanding's sake. We'll try to connect the truth to our lives. God wanted us to know these things!

Interpretation: the four beasts (2:36-45; 7:1-8, 17, 23)

'These four great beasts are four kings who shall rise out of the earth.' – 7:17

The four beasts represent four earthly kings. And they represent four kingdoms.

'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.' – 7:23

The 4th beast is a 4th kingdom.

Can we identify these four kingdoms?

Chapters two and seven both describe four kingdoms (2:37-40; 7:17). Similarities indicate the chapters are discussing the same kingdoms. In 2:39, Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "*Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you.*"

Indicating these kingdoms follow after each other.

In chapter two, all four kingdoms are destroyed by Christ (2:34) when the kingdom of God arrives (2:35, 44-45). In chapter seven, the fourth kingdom's destruction coincides with the arrival of Christ and the kingdom of God (7:13-14, 21-22, 26-27).

1st beast = Babylon

2:37-38 identifies Nebuchadnezzar as the first kingdom. Both Nebuchadnezzar and the first beast are described like an eagle (4:33; 7:4). In 4:33, Nebuchadnezzar's "*hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.*" In 7:4, the first beast "*had eagles' wings.*" "*And the mind of a man was given to it*" (7:4) recalls "*and my reason returned to me*" (4:34).

2nd beast = Medo-Persia

Medo-Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC. The second kingdom follows Babylon (2:39). Chapter eight reveals more correspondence.

3rd Beast = Greece

Greece conquered Medo-Persia in 331 BC. Chapter eight reveals more correspondence.

4th Beast = Rome

Rome conquered Greece in 63 BC. Both fourth kingdom and fourth beast are characterized by iron, and both break things in pieces (2:40; 7:7, 23). **2:40** says, "*And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes it, it shall break and crush all these.*" In 7:7, the fourth beast "*had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.*"

Furthermore, the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 "*shatters all things*" (2:40) while the fourth beast "*shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces*" (7:23). Same composition and same activity = same kingdom.

Interpretation: the little horn of Daniel 7 (7:8, 20-22, 24-26)

7:8 says of the fourth beast, "*and behold, there came up from among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*"

Daniel had a particular interest in the fourth beast, its ten horns and its "*other horn*" (7:20).

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, – 7:24

The 10 horns are 10 kings which spring up from Rome. The "*other horn*" springs up and defeats three kings (7:24). Note what's said about the "*other horn*":

- 1) He's greater and different than the other kings.

"seemed greater than its companions" (7:20); *"he shall be different from the former ones"* (7:24)

- 2) He speaks against God.

"and a mouth that spoke great things" (7:20); *"He shall speak words against the most High"* (7:25)

- 3) He attacks God's people.

"this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them" (7:21); *"and shall wear out the saints of the Most High"* (7:25)

- 4) He will attempt to rule the world and overturn the law.

and shall think to change the times and the law – 7:25

Times = periods of time, eras. Law could mean the Law of Moses, laws of the state, God’s sovereign rule.

Options include he’ll attempt to overturn Jewish festivals and customs. He’ll attempt to change a period of history by changing state laws. He’ll attempt to oppose what God predestined to take place.

Given his war on the saints, changing a period of time by changing state laws seems likely.

5) The duration of his war on the saints is limited by God.

and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. – 7:25

Who gives the saints to him for a period of time is unstated. It’s God. He’s on God’s leash.

With time allocated and the law at his disposal, he’s free to make war on the saints.

6) He’s burned up.

“the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire” (7:11); “and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end” (7:26).

7) His destruction coincides with a court hearing.

“the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (7:10); “But the court shall sit in judgment” (7:26)

8) His destruction coincides with the arrival of God’s eternal kingdom.

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. – 7:21-22

The kingdom given to the saints (7:27) follows his destruction (7:26). This means the little horn is present at the end of time.

New Testament data

Here we’ll see how the Scriptures come together.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Paul wrote this because Christians were afraid they missed the return of Christ. Christ came and I wasn’t gathered? That’s what they were hearing. We learn several things here.

- 1) We're gathered to Christ when he comes.
- 2) Christ's coming is the day of the Lord.
- 3) The "rebellion" must happen before Jesus comes.

That's professing Christians abandoning the faith in massive numbers because of persecution. Many within the church will turn away from Jesus at this time. In turning from Jesus they will show themselves to have never belonged to Jesus at all (1 John 2:19). False believers will fall away when war is made on the saints.

- 4) The man of lawlessness must appear before Jesus comes to gather his people.
- 5) The man of lawlessness will speak against various religions and proclaim himself to be God.
- 6) The man of lawlessness will be killed and destroyed when Jesus appears.
- 7) The power behind the lawless one is Satan.
- 8) The lawless one deceives through signs and wonders.

The Antichrist does what Satan does. Satan deceives. Satan destroys. Satan's deception takes many forms: Satanic miracles, natural selection explains our existence, if you serve Allah you'll get 70 virgins, follow your heart, God loves everyone – he'd never send anyone to hell. Satan's destruction takes many forms: drug/alcohol addiction, suicide, child abuse, pursuit of pleasure, pursuit of possessions, Christians in labor camps, places of worship burned to the ground. Aligning with Satan ends with destruction in hell.

The human plight is deception. We don't see the beauty of Christ in the gospel! We find beauty in other places.

Christian rejoice! Jesus will put an end to Satan's deception and destruction.

Revelation 13:1-10

*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" ⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. – **Revelation 13:1-10***

Did you catch the similarities with Daniel 7?

In Revelation, the beast rises "out of the sea" with features of each of the four kingdoms in reverse order: ten horns, leopard, bear, and lion (Rev 13:1-2).

What's said about the beast?

- 1) The source of the beast's power was the dragon = Satan (Rev 12:9).
- 2) The beast was powerful such that no one could challenge its power.
- 3) The beast uttered blasphemous words.

- 4) The beast was allowed to exercise authority (by God) for 42 months = “*a time, times, and half a time*” (Dan 7:25).
- 5) The beast was allowed (by God) to make war on the saints.
- 6) The beast was given authority (by God) over the whole earth.

In Daniel 7:23, the 4th beast “*shall devour the whole earth.*”

Where I’ve been going is the little horn/man of lawlessness/beast = the Antichrist who appears just prior to Jesus’ return.

But the Antichrist isn’t just a figure at the end of time. “*If anyone has an ear, let him hear*” (Rev 13:9) was an appeal the church in the 1st century. “*If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain*” (Rev 13:10) was an appeal to 1st century churches whose blood was being spilled. “*Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints*” (Rev 13:10) was an appeal to 1st century churches who were tempted to turn their backs on Jesus. Rome “*was drunk with the blood of the saints*” (Rev 17:6).

I’m saying the “*beast rising out of the sea*” (13:1) was present in the 1st century.

Beasts come and go throughout history. In Daniel 8 we find a little horn arising in 2nd century BC. A final little horn arrives at the end of history.

As for us, if God has willed my captivity so be it. If God has willed me to be slain with the sword so be it. If God has willed me to be an outsider who doesn’t fit in with the crowd or my friends or my relatives so be it. If God has willed me to be mocked or shunned for my faith so be it. If God has willed me to suffer for my faith so be it. Opposition tests our faith and calls for endurance.

Conclusion

This shouldn’t shock us. Consider Jesus’ gospel invitation.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? – Matthew 16:24-26

God takes rebellion seriously. So God the Father sent God the Son to the cross to die as a substitute for sinners. If we trust in Jesus, we’ll be rescued from the wrath to come.

How do we trust in Jesus? By denying ourselves, taking whatever suffering comes our way, and continuing to follow Jesus. We lose our life by acknowledging Jesus is Lord, what he says goes!, confessing our sins, turning to God for mercy, trusting in Jesus’ death and resurrection, learning from Jesus in God’s word, and following what we learn.

Discipleship is costly. The costs are worth it. Jesus says endure whatever hardship comes your way because you’ll save your soul. When the books are opened, you’ll be welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom. You’ll be attached to the winner. You’ll be a victor forever!