Order Out of Chaos
Daniel 7:1-14

Introduction
There are multiple genres that make up the Bible; there is historical narrative, poetry, the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, the epistles (New Testament letters), and prophecy. Another popular genre that has been fodder for countless end-times conferences and books is apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature concerns itself with the end times; the books of Daniel and Revelation are considered to be a part of that genre.

We are fascinated with end of the world scenarios. Predictions of the apocalypse and the end of the world have been made for hundreds of years, and the anxiety people feel over such matters leads them to Amazon or the local Christian book store to buy the latest on the plight of humanity or where the antichrist might be living (Christian books stores are notorious for this).

Four of the top five selling books on the apocalypse on Amazon.com are novels inspired by the book of Revelation. The number two best seller is a book written by Jonathan Cahn titled Harbinger II: The Return (published September 1, 2020). Cahn is considered by many as a modern prophet who is, “…known for opening the deep mysteries of Scripture and bringing forth messages of prophetic import.” His first book is titled; The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America’s Future was first published in on September 3, 2011. It remained on the New York Times Best Seller list for over 100 weeks and has since sold more than 2 million copies. Why? Because the unknown future can cause a lot of fear and anxiety for people.

There has always been an interest in the future and how the world might end, but the pandemic and recent events in our world seems to have caused a greater interest in what the Bible says about the apocalypse. Daniel was written to provide hope for God’s people in times like ours today.

Like much of apocalyptic language in the Bible, Daniel 7 is describing things and images the prophet Daniel has not seen before and in an effort to describe things and images he has never seen before, he uses the only language he knows that strains to make sense of what he has seen. The point of Daniel 7 is not to provide a specific and detailed account of future events, but more of a broad stroke of what is coming to move us into a confidence in the God who governs times and seasons for the purpose of finding our comfort and safety in the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man.

Darker Days Will Come
In chapter five, we were introduced to King Belshazzar who threw a party and praised the gods of Babylon while he, his wives, concubines, and lords drank from the golden vessels stolen from
Solomon’s Temple that were supposed to be sacred and used only in the worship of the God of the Hebrew people. It was in the first year of Belshazzar’s reign that Daniel had a dream and visions while in bed that left him anxious and alarmed (v. 15).

The dream begins with the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. The four winds represent the North, South, East, and West; the fact that the winds come from heaven is an indicator that the winds come at God’s command and discretion. The sea represents chaos, confusion, and conflict; in the case of Daniel’s dream, the chaos, confusion, and conflict are where the four kingdoms come from. Isaiah 17:12 describes the nations in a similar way: “Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!”

Out of the great sea, Daniel saw four great beasts emerge that were different from each other. It would seem that these four beasts represent the same kingdoms we were introduced to through Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. The first beast was like a lion and had eagles wings would appear to be a reference to Babylon and the reference to its wings being plucked off and then made to stand upright on two feet like a man may be a reference to the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar III in Daniel 4.

The second beast that came out of the sea was like a bear that was, “raised up on one side”, which appears to be a reference to the Mede and Persian empire. The reference to the bear being “raised up on one side” with “three ribs in its mouth between its teeth” may be a description of the dominance that the Persians would have over the Medes. The three ribs in its mouth could be a reference to its consumption of Babylon (539 BC), the Lydian Kingdom in Asia Minor (546 BC), and the kingdom of Egypt (525 BC).

The third beast that came out of the great sea was like a leopard, with four wings and four heads. Of the four predators in Daniel’s dream, the fastest is the leopard, whose speed was further increased by his four wings. This beast was given dominion, which is the reason why it was able to do so much in so little time. This beast seems to be a reference to Greece while under the rule of Alexander the Great who conquered the known world up to India in thirteen years until his death at the age of 33.

The fourth and final beast to come out of the great sea is described as terrifying, dreadful, and exceedingly strong (vv. 7-8). This beast is remarkably different than its three predecessors in that it had iron teeth and “devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.” This beast emerged from the sea with ten horns, with an eventual eleventh horn that came up among them that had eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things. This beast is the Empire of Rome and the horns may be a reference to rulers or kings within Rome. Also, what sets this kingdom apart from the other kingdoms is the personalization of the eleventh horn with eyes and a mouth like a human who speaks great things of who Daniel also says will, “make war with the saints and prevail over them…” (v. 21). For this reason, I believe that this beast is Rome and more (I will address this in the next sermon).

Each beast that rose out of the sea of chaos, confusion, and conflict in Daniel’s dream is a predator that is more terrible than its predecessor that culminates into something terrifying and
dreadful. Yet each beast that is described is intentionally ambiguous for a reason. Even today, the great nations of our day are assigned predatorial descriptions such as the Russian bear, the Chinese dragon, and the American eagle. As intimidating as the beasts that have and will arise out of the sea are, the point of Daniel 7 is not that we might fear them, but that we can take comfort in the Ancient of Days who will judge the nations and ultimately destroy the final beast.

The point of the beasts is not the progression of godless kingdoms or that darker days are coming (although they certainly point us to that reality), but the Kingdom that the people of God will possess forever, forever, and ever.

**God’s Reign and Judgment is Sure**

As Daniel continued to look on in his dream, a scene appears that is radically different than the appearance of the beasts, and it is what he sees next that is the point of his dream. What Daniel sees are thrones and “the Ancient of Days” who takes his seat. The Ancient of Days is God the Father who alone is able to change times and seasons (2:20-23, 47), who alone is eternally sovereign with no need to improve upon himself (4:3, 34-37), and whose kingdom endures forever and shall not be destroyed (6:26-27). As the Ancient of Days takes his seat, Daniel notices his appearance:

> As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7:9–10)

His clothing speaks to his perfect holiness and righteousness. His hair that is white as wool speaks of his eternality and infinite wisdom. The flames of his Throne speak to his unescapable, unlimited, and perfect judgment. This is not the only description of God upon his throne given to us in the Holy Scriptures! In Isaiah 6, we are given a description of what the prophet Isaiah witnessed in a vision:

> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1–4)

In Revelation 4:5-11, we are given a description of the activity surrounding the Ancient of Days:

> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six
wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:5–11)

Then in verses 11–12, we learn that the terrifying, dreadful, and exceedingly strong beast will be killed and destroyed by the One upon the throne who is also responsible for taking away the dominion of the three other kingdoms. The point of Daniel’s dream is that although darker days are coming, the Ancient of Days will execute his fair and equitable judgment upon the nations that not even the terrifying beasts of the sea will be able to escape. With just the word of his mouth, even the greatest and most terrifying of the beasts will be destroyed. We are told in verse 26 of the judgment the final beast will face: “But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.”

**The Coming of a Better Kingdom is our Inheritance**

There was someone else that Daniel saw in his dream. We will look at this person and the little horn that Daniel describes next week in verses 15–28, but permit me to share three observations from Daniel’s dream.

First, the point of Daniel’s dream is not the beasts, but the Ancient of Days who will send the Son of Man who will reign over a coming kingdom where all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Consider what Daniel saw in contrast to the other kingdoms: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14). We are told that in this kingdom, “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isa. 65:25).

Secondly, after Daniel was understandably anxious and alarmed over what he saw in his dream, he was told by one of the angels in his dream: “These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever” (vv. 17–18). The point of the four beasts, is not that we have something to fear, but that we can take comfort in what we will one day receive, which is the Kingdom of God that we will inherit from the One who will come on the clouds of heaven, namely Jesus!

Third, the only players on God’s redemptive stage that have anything to fear are the kings of the earth and all who have set themselves against the Ancient of Days and the King he has appointed to rule the nations. Our inheritance as followers of Jesus is not fear, but freedom that can only be
found in the Son of God who has promised all who belong to him: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). This is why Daniel concludes with verses 26-27, “And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

In closing, I want to read something that written by a theologian on these verses that I could not say any better:

How is Daniel to convey to us the greater reality of the world to come? The answer lies in his graphic descriptions of the true nature of this world and the world to come. The rewards that this age offers to us are empty prizes, the golden baubles of a Belshazzar whose time is already up. The horrors of this age are equally empty of power to do us real harm, though. The monsters that we so dread are as toothless as the lions in Daniel’s den, for God is our judge. It is his tribunal before which we must ultimately stand, and it is what is written about us in his book that will determine whether we reign with his saints forever, or spend eternity in the fire with the beast. It is that black and white. The stakes are high, but when we weigh life in this world against life in the world to come, it becomes evident that faithfulness to the Lord is the only way, no matter what the cost. The earthly tribunals may have the power to condemn us to burn at the stake or to die in the gas chamber, or to suffer some other beastly fate, but they have no power over the soul. When the beasts have done their worst to our physical body and we take our leave of them, we are simply going from them to God. As Jesus himself said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).¹