

Allan MacRae, The Prophecies of Daniel: Lecture 7

We looked last time at this vision of deity in Daniel 7:9-10. We didn't have time to do much more than glance at it. I believe I mentioned that the translations "thrones cast down" which is in the King James is not accepted by anyone I know of today. Perhaps when they wrote "casting down the throne," they meant "putting a throne in place." The same verb is used in Daniel for putting Daniel in the lion's den, and also for putting the other people in the lion's den after he was taken out. And also for putting the men in the fiery furnace. And in all of those the meaning "cast" might better be translated "placing." But there is a reference in Ezra which seems to settle it--that it means "placed"--where the King says "They shall not place [the same word] upon them a tribute or tax." And that is accepted by, I think, all interpreters today as showing here it should be "The thrones were set up" rather than "cast down."

Then we noticed in this the symbols of the thrones, the plural of the word throne. It's pretty hard to find a very conclusive answer for why it should be plural there; certainly everyone else that is mentioned here in the passage is standing before God. There is no mention of anyone else sitting but God, and the whole impression of the passage is that of the tremendous power and glory and authority of God.

I got a question from someone: "How do we know that this term 'Ancient of Days' here stands for the Triune God." I believe we should feel that in the Old Testament, where we read the word "God," it is definitely the Triune God who is referred to unless there is something in the context that clearly shows that it is to be taken as referring to only one person in the Godhead. Most of the statements in the Old Testament referring to God would certainly refer to the Triune God. And in this case the picture of God's power, majesty and authority is the thing that is stressed in verses 9 and 10 of Daniel 7.

There are thrones, but there is no mention of anyone other than God sitting upon any throne in this picture. The great emphasis is on his absolute purity, his great knowledge, his tremendous power, the fiery stream issuing from him, thousand upon

thousands serving him, ten thousand time ten thousand standing before him. This, I would say, does not give at all the impression of being a judgment scene. In Revelation we find all the dead brought before God and we find that books are opened and they are judged according to what is written in the books. That is a judgment scene of individuals. But here Daniel sees the great and the terrible situation on earth with this awful beast and one horn that came out of the beast that is described as such a terrible anti-God figure. Then we find that Daniel turns his eyes, or his attention, away from that, and sees the great unseen reality, the tremendous power and knowledge and wisdom and authority of the Triune God. And it is not a matter of God's needing to decide whether the beast deserves to be punished or not.

The evidence is very clear. There is no question that this beast deserves to be destroyed. It is a destruction not of individual human beings who were there judged for their acts, but it is certainly God's judgment upon this great, ungodly figure which represents so many of the characteristics of human government all through the ages. In a world of sin, government is needed. We would all kill each other off if we did not have government. We need government to keep order, and when we read about these great empires we think of them as great beasts, as creatures of terror, as indeed they established their will by force.

But when we think of a world of sin there's another way that we can reasonably think of these beasts or empires. They were a tremendous improvement over the situation that existed before them. Because before these empires took over control of their respective areas and in those areas they established a great deal of peace and considerable amount of justice--you had little tiny provinces constantly fighting against one other. And no one's life was safe for very long because there were all those cases of fighting and confusion between these various small regions, each with its own sovereignty that was fighting against other regions. One conquered another, and then a third one attacked and was repulsed and so on. And so the establishment of empires is a necessity in a world of sin.

And we are not told anywhere in the Scripture that God is going to establish a condition of anarchy in the world in which no government is needed. But we are told that all the wicked features of human government are to be completely destroyed and that the One will rule who is absolutely just and true and free from all sin. And so in this picture, this vision of deity, it seems to me that it is a picture of the power of the great God as over against the wickedness of these great empires. It is not a deliberative body in any sense of the word. This is a sign of God's judgment in the sense of God's pouring out his wrath upon ungodliness, rather than a picture of judgment of individuals.

However, it is quite common to speak of it as a judgment scene, and although I am quite convinced that the general bearing of the whole passage of these two verses is definitely different from a court scene, yet there are arguments on both sides here. And all recent translations that I have looked at take it as a court scene, which seems to me to go against the general impact of the passage. But in favor of its being a scene of judgment is the placing of thrones, which looks as if they might be meeting for a judgment, for a court.

Admittedly, Daniel sees thrones which are in place there with the great God represented by one sitting there, and a strong argument in favor of judgment is the last phrase of Daniel 7, verse ten: "books were opened". That suggests that they are looking for evidence in order to decide whether the beast needs to be punished. That, however, does not seem to me reasonable for there certainly is no evidence in the passage that this is a judgment of individuals. So I feel that the books being opened here is rather simply a symbolic statement of God's complete knowledge of everything the beast has done and everything that is happening on earth at the time that is here pictured.

One must say that this passage (Daniel 7:10) does suggest a court but all recent translators of the Bible have taken as the key phrase in question the phrase the King James version translates, "The judgment was set". And that translation seems to me to fit with the general tenor of the two verses. Here was the mighty God, the sovereign God

there with all these fiery flames going out from him, the wheels of burning fire, the thousands of thousands ready to perform his will, and his judgment was set. His judgment against the beast has been determined for long before the time when the beast ever came into existence, and it is set. And even though you see the little horn speaking his great boastful words and making war with the saints and seeming to win against them, and things look hopeless from a human viewpoint, God's judgment is set and will be carried out in his own time.

Now in favor of that interpretation is the fact that this word "judgment" here is a word which does not mean a court. It means that a "decision," or the "judgment" was set. All the recent commentaries that take the interpretation that this is a court scene translate that phrase, "The court was seated and the books were opened." It seems to me this is quite out of relationship to the general tenor of the two verses. And they say the word "judgment" here means "decision" or "judgment," but they say the abstract is here used for the concrete. Well, that can be done, but I would like some proof that it is done before I accept it. I would like some other passage in which it is done. This word "*din*," in Hebrew here means judgment; it is used in the Jewish writings and in the Talmud a great deal. And there when they refer to a court they call it "*beth-din*"--the "house of judgment." And if this meant "court," it would seem to me that "place of judgment" or "house of judgment," something like that would be more appropriate than the word which means "decision," rather than a body to make that decision.

However, the problem remains that it does say "it sat." It uses the ordinary word "to sit," and that seems at least to our modern minds to fit more with a court, than the fact that the judgment was set, that it was sitting so from all eternity. And so I would not be dogmatic on this. I state my opinion to you about it, but as I say, all the recent interpretations that I've seen take it the other way.

I had a very interesting question that was turned into me right at this point. "In the French judicial system the judge is also the jury. Could this be the type of scene in Daniel

7:10 with the court being an audience, or followers, or a crowd as in a monarchy.” And it seems to me that fits more the situation if you say the court sat, and by that you mean that the Lord’s court was sitting to which He gave His decisions, rather than a court in our American sense of a body in which the judge is just the impartial arbiter and the lawyers fight it out. It would seem to me to fit better the monarchy model.

So much for this half of the vision of deity; on to F in our outline: "The son of man." I do not believe I will take much time on this now because we have discussed it rather completely in connection with your assignment at an earlier time. We mentioned that in Daniel 8:17 the angel addressed Daniel as "son of man," and in Ezekiel dozens of times the Lord addressed Ezekiel as "son of man." So the expression itself merely means a human being. And “One like a son of man” could mean just one who looked like a man, but it is interesting that he doesn’t say a man-king; he says one like a man. Some find in that a suggestion of the fact that Jesus Christ was not only man but was also God. Whether that is valid, I couldn’t say. But the interesting thing is that Jesus Christ himself so frequently called himself "the Son of Man." He was certainly not there saying he was a human being. It is agreed, I believe, by all interpreters when Jesus called himself the Son of Man He is connecting Himself with this one Old Testament usage of that term and referring to himself as the Messiah, as the coming one, the Son of Man.

We noticed that this picture of the Son of Man coming in the clouds parallels in chapter 2 that the judgment upon the beast is brought about by the coming of the stone cut without hands, which destroys the statue and which grows till it becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Here is the picture: “One like a son of man coming like the clouds of heaven”. Now this whole passage is figurative, or symbolical, and the natural interpretation of this would be that the son of man stands for the church, or stands for a group, or the Jewish nation, something like that in the context. If it were not for our clear evidence in the New Testament: Jesus applied it to himself as something that would specifically happen in relation to one individual. Therefore we have, I believe, conclusive evidence that here in the midst of a highly figurative passage we have a literal

picture of something that is to happen. The Son of Man is to come with the clouds of heaven as the angel said to the disciples: “This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as you see him go” (Acts 1:11). And this is here right in connection with the statement in Daniel 7 verse 11 that the beast is slain and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. The destruction of the image in chapter 2 is tied with the coming of the stone. Here it is not quite so tightly tied to that, but it is given in connection with it, and it leads to the result, which was there in Daniel 2 of building a great kingdom.

Right at this point this other question that asks “Is it not possible that Jesus received the authority at the time of the Resurrection, figuratively reigns at the right hand of the Father, but only receives the Kingdom upon his return to the earth? Much as an ancient ruler would travel to the capital to receive the kingdom from the king as in Luke 19:12.” And it seems to me that is a very good statement of what the situation is here. “He approached the Ancient of Days, he was brought near to him and he was given dominion, glory and a kingdom that all people, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; his kingdom shall not be destroyed.” It seems to me the second thing stated here happens before the first. He sees the one coming that has been brought near to the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days has given him the authority and so he is sitting at his right hand waiting until his enemies be made his footstool. And so Jesus combined the two passages, putting them in the chronological order. “Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62).”

And so much for the time order there then, and the next point we look at is G: “The new kingdom.” We are told then that his kingdom is that which shall never pass away, which shall not be destroyed. It is an entirely different kind of regime. It follows the destruction of the beast. It would seem quite definite in the picture. It is an entirely different kind of regime: it covers the entire earth; it is given to the saints. We find that brought out in verses 18, 22 and 27. It nowhere says that the saints are going to destroy the beast. It nowhere says that the saints are going to establish the kingdom. It says that

the Son of Man is to come in the clouds of heaven and he will establish the kingdom. And I believe that God wants us to do everything we can, as an incidental part of our activity on this earth, to make it a better earth for all men to live in. But if we take an objective to make a perfect world or to set up the kingdom of God on earth, I think we have disappointment ahead. God has never promised that human beings will succeed in doing that. And we have had wonderful people starting out to establish a perfect society, time after time. And it always has degenerated and has proven in the end a fake. God is interested in the development of individuals who will live forever. And He has the individuals here in the midst of a condition on this earth which is a condition where sin is on the earth, where human government is necessary. But where human government has these many evil features, it will be completely destroyed.

The new regime is to be indestructible and at that point I read in some commentaries that this is not the millennium. This is an eternal kingdom. But I don't believe you can find any Scripture that says this situation that is established when Christ comes back is going to go on and on forever. We don't know what God has way ahead in His plan, but we do know that the kingdom which He sets up will be indestructible. No one can destroy it. God can change certain features of it if he chooses. And so I take it that pre-millennialism means that man is not expected to establish a perfect regime on earth here or destroy all wickedness. God is going to do that at the end of the age.

Some think of pre-millennialism as very pessimist, that it means everything is going to get worse. I don't think that is a proper interpretation. Whether things are going to get a great worse or a great deal better I don't think God has told us. But He has told us that at the end of the age there will be a period when things will be very bad. Where the little horn will seem to be about to utterly destroy the saints and will be winning victory over them. They will be given their victory not by their succeeding in establishing a perfect world and in destroying all that is wicked, but by our Lord coming back and setting up his kingdom of righteousness and peace. And this is an indestructible kingdom.

We call it a millennium because in Revelation chapter 20 the word “millennium,” or thousand years, is used six times in relation to it. Whether we have to take that thousand years as literally meaning exactly a thousand years, or a long period of time, I don’t think we should be dogmatic about it. But we are not told that this millennium is to be destroyed. But after a long period of time God will make certain changes, and the exact nature of those changes, what will happen then, we have not been told, and there are many things in the future that we have not been told. But these few specific features which are called pre-millennialism seem to me to be very clearly taught in the Scripture. Now we’ll have to stop there, and don’t forget to get the assignment for next week, which I will have up here for you.

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