

**Dr. Tremper Longman, God is a Warrior, Session 4,
Phase 3: God Saves Israel from Their Oppressors;
Phase 4: Jesus Heightens and Intensifies Spiritual
Warfare;
Phase 5: Jesus Comes Again to Win the Battle against
Human and Spiritual Enemies**

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So, we've looked at the first two phases, those times when God comes as a warrior to fight against Israel's flesh and blood enemies. That's phase one, phase two, and it overlaps, notice chronologically, with phase two, which is God fights Israel.

So, they're not sequential phases, it's more determined by Israel's obedience or lack thereof to God. But it is the case, as we ended phase two, with the description of God's judgment against Israel that manifested itself in the Babylonian defeat of Jerusalem in the exile, that phase three is sequential to that. And when I'm talking about phase three, and remember this is just a way of organizing the material as I see it, it's referring to those prophets toward the end of the Old Testament time period, during the exile and the post-exilic period, who understand because God has revealed to them that the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile is not the end of the story, because God gives them visions of the return of himself as the divine warrior to save his people from their oppressors.

And let's remember that the Babylonians after the Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC, they allowed the Jews who wanted, to return to the city of Jerusalem, that even though there is, in one sense, the end of the exile in 539, in another sense, the judgment continues because the Persians are now the overlords of Judah. And then when the Greeks defeated the Persians under Alexander the Great, now they were under the oppressive thumb of the Greeks. After Alexander's death and his vast empire was split up between his generals, there was back and forth between the Ptolemies and Egypt and the Seleucids up in Syria.

And then when the Romans entered the scene during the first century BC, now they were under the oppressive presence of Roman occupation. And of course, that's bringing us up to the time of the New Testament. But now going back to prophets

like Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, and others, but I'm going to use those three as an example, they are presenting visions that God has given them that he was going to return and save them from their oppressors.

So let me start with Daniel. Daniel is set in the 6th century BC, and while, you know, he's carried off as an exile to Babylon very early, even before the time that Nebuchadnezzar decides to destroy the temple and undergo a bigger exile. But Daniel lives in Babylon through most of his what looks to be a very long life.

And God gives him visions. Now, Daniel is an interesting book because it has two major parts. The first six chapters are accounts of Daniel and his three friends living in the Babylonian or Persian court.

The second six chapters are for apocalyptic visions, visions of the future. And I'm going to focus in on the first of those four, Daniel 7, probably the best-known one, but it illustrates well what I'm talking about here. First of all, I will say that all six stories and all four apocalyptic visions have the same basic message to their audience, which is, in spite of what it looks like out there, that evil is in control.

The reality is God's in control, and he's going to have the final victory. So live in faith, and don't panic, and don't think that evil has the ultimate victory. A message that can resonate with us today.

But let's look at how Daniel 7 presents that theme and how it also anticipates the coming of the warrior. So, Daniel 7 can be divided into two parts, verses 1 to 14 is a description of the vision that Daniel has. And then Daniel 7.15 and following is an angelic interpretation of that vision.

So, I'm going to read the first, the first, I guess it's 14 verses, and incorporate the interpretation into the reading here. So it begins, in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions passed through his mind. As he was lying in bed, he wrote down the substance of his dream.

Without getting into the technical discussion of how Belshazzar relates to a guy named Nabopolassar, who was his father and was also co-king with Belshazzar at the time, I will just simply say that we're toward the end of the Babylonian Empire here. And he goes, Daniel said, in my vision at night, I looked and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea, four great beasts, each different from the others came up out of the sea. Okay, so a lot of Daniel 7 is going to sound really strange to many of us who are living in the 21st-century West.

But I will tell you that it's really connected to pretty well-known, ancient Near Eastern imagery. And in this case, the idea that the sea represents chaos, and even

evil. And so, the vision begins with the scene of a very chaotic sea with four beasts arising out of it.

And since they're coming out of the sea, we can refer to them as sea beasts. And sea beasts are also commonly seen as anti-creation forces. Says the first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle.

I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being. And the mind of a human was given to it. And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear.

It was raised up on one of its sides, had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth was told to get up and eat your fill of flesh. After that, I looked there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back, it had four wings like those of a bird.

This beast had four heads. It was given authority to rule. Well, before I get to the fourth beast, let me make a couple of comments here that the angelic interpreter will later tell us that these beasts represent evil human kingdoms.

And so, a lot of people spend time trying to identify the specific kingdoms. One school of thought, a more traditional school of thought says that the first beasts are the Romans. And then, then secondly, it's the Medo-Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Roman Empire.

And another school of thought says, no, it's Romans, then the Medes, then the Persians, then the Greeks. And my own view is, I don't think we're to make those kinds of specific identifications. But rather, the big point is one nation after another will rise up and oppress the people of God.

So, we're not going to get hung up on identifying the particular kingdom. So even if one of those two is right, and if one of them is right, I kind of favor the more traditional view. But it's really not important to the point that I'm trying to make.

But what we can see is, that this imagery is kind of talking about just how terrifying, ruthless, cruel, and dangerous these nations are to the people of God. For one thing, you got to realize that, you know, Hebrews were really repulsed by hybrids. The first beast is a hybrid, described as a lion with the wings of an eagle that turns into a human being.

The second one is not a hybrid, but its cruelty is seen in its being raised up on one side, eating three ribs. And, then the leopard that has four wings like a bird is also, it's also a, what the Germans call a Mischwesen or a mixed essence. And again, terrifying, repulsive.

And it's making a point about the nature of these kingdoms that are oppressing the people of God. But the climax is on the fourth beast. It says after that, in my vision at night, I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast, terrifying and frightening and very powerful.

It had large iron teeth, it crushed and devoured its victims, and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had 10 horns. Okay, so what I often kind of, I often referred to this beast as Robo-Beast, even though of course, they didn't have a concept of robots back in the day.

But the only physical description we get is of iron teeth. And then later, the angelic interpreter will refer to the iron nails of this particular beast. But this beast is so otherworldly, that it's not even connected to an organic, regular animal.

And it's terrifying. And, and it has 10 horns. Now, horns are a symbol of power.

And of course, the number 10 is a symbolic number, it's saying that this is an extremely powerful beast that represents in the imagery, an extremely powerful nation. Then it says, while I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them. And three of the first horns were uprooted before it.

This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being in a mouth that spoke boastfully. So, the final emphasis is on a horn that probably represents some political, powerful person. Again, not going to get into the details of identifying them.

But at this point, just talking about how, in the first part of the vision, we're being just, what we're getting is a description of beasts that represent evil human powers that oppress the people of God, just like the people of God at the time of Daniel are being oppressed, first by the Babylonians, then the Persians. The second half of the vision changes scene. And no longer are we hearing about beasts that represent evil human beings, but rather, human beings who are representing the divine realm.

And it's quite an amazing passage, especially considering its Old Testament context, where there's not a lot of explicit teaching about the Trinitarian nature of God. We get glimpses that we can recognize when we're reading it from a New Testament perspective. But, but this is fascinating and often picked up in the New Testament as pointing to Christ.

It goes, As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow. The hair of his head was white like wool.

His throne was flaming with fire, and his wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him.

Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The seat was seated, and the books were opened. Okay.

Ancient of Days, which is a very profound and dignified way of saying a very old figure, but not old and decrepit, but old and powerful, sitting on his throne, ready to render judgment. This surely represents God, who's being attended by myriads of spiritual beings. Now, in verse 13, we read, Then I continued to watch, because of the boastful words the horn was speaking.

I kept looking, until the beast was slain, and his body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. The other beasts had been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time. In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the Ancient of Days, was led into his presence, and was given authority, glory, sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Okay, this is really exciting and dramatic, and kind of unexpected in this Old Testament context, that one like a Son of Man comes into the presence of the Ancient of Days riding a cloud. Now, already by the time of Daniel, in earlier scripture, we get pictures of Yahweh riding a cloud. Whether it's Psalm 68, Psalm 104, Nahum chapter 1, or Isaiah 19, we could go on and on.

And before that, in other ancient Near Eastern contexts, gods, even a god like Baal, who's a storm god, is pictured as a rider of the cloud. My point here is that a cloud rider is a divine figure, and this one is called one like a Son of Man. Now, in its Old Testament context, the phrase Son of Man means simply a human being.

Read the book of Ezekiel, and you'll see that God will frequently refer to Ezekiel as Son of Man, a human being. But this is not Son of Man riding, it's one like a Son of Man riding a cloud. So, in a sense, you might see what I mean by saying you seem to be getting some delineation of what we call the persons of the Trinity here.

And as we'll comment on later, the New Testament certainly recognizes this as in the anticipation of Christ, because Daniel 7:13 to 14, is quoted or alluded to probably a half dozen times in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation. So, bottom line, this picture that we're getting in Daniel chapter 7 is describing what I'm calling phase three. It's the vision of God that will come in the future, and he will deliver you from your oppressors.

The one like the Son of Man, at the behest of the Ancient of Days, will go and battle those kingdoms in order to save his people. And so, this vision is to give the people living under oppression hope and to encourage them to continue to live in faith even though they live in an oppressive environment. Now, I won't spend as long, but I just want to draw your attention to a couple of other passages where we get a similar message like Zechariah chapter 14, the final chapter of Zechariah, a post-exilic prophet.

He says A day of the Lord is coming. And this phrase Day of the Lord is referring to a future day of God's warring or his coming judgment. A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls.

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as he fights on a day of battle. On that day, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel.

You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with him. Now this reference to the holy ones is a reference to that angelic army that we talked about earlier.

On that day, there will be neither sunlight nor cold frosty darkness. It will be a unique day, a day known only to the Lord, with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light.

On that day, living water will flow out of Jerusalem, half of it to the Dead Sea and half of it to the Mediterranean Sea in summer and in winter. And it will, it goes on to describe the battle, skip down to verse 12. This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem.

Their flesh will rot while they're still standing on their feet. Their eyes will rot in their sockets. Their tongues will rot in their mouths.

On that day, people will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another. Judah too will fight at Jerusalem.

The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected. Great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.

So, again, I won't read the whole chapter, but we're getting a similar message that we saw in Daniel 7, which is, right now you're living in an oppressive situation, but in the future, God is going to come as a warrior, and he's going to save you from the oppression.

The final example will be from Malachi chapter 4, another post-exilic prophet, short chapter, says, Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace.

All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them, but for you who revere my name, the Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in its rays, and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked.

They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

It will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction. So again, again and again, we hear in these exilic and post-exilic prophets the vision of Yahweh the warrior returning to save them. And this vision echoes throughout the so-called intertestamental period, or the period between the Testaments and other Jewish literature.

We now turn the page to the New Testament, and what I will describe as phase four, which is when Jesus heightens and intensifies the battle so that it's directed toward spiritual powers and authority. But let's start with John the Baptist, Matthew chapter three. As you know, John the Baptist goes out into the wilderness near the Jordan River, anticipating the arrival of the Messiah.

And he says, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. And what I want you to see is what he says about this coming one, especially to the Pharisees and Sadducees and others whom he's calling upon to repent. He says in Matthew three, verse seven, I baptize you with water for repentance.

But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his

hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Now, I want you to see that what John the Baptist is doing, is picking up the language and expectations of Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, and the others. The one I will baptize will gather all the chaff together and burn it, and he'll take an ax and he'll chop out the rotten wood. So, he baptizes Jesus, John gets put in jail while Jesus begins his ministry, and Jesus, in his ministry, heals the sick, you know, exercises demons, preaches the good news, and John the Baptist, as I said, is in prison, and he's getting reports about what Jesus is doing, and he's thinking to himself, I may have baptized the wrong guy.

Now, how do I say that? Well, in Matthew 11, he sends two disciples up to Jesus, and they say to him, are you the one, or should you expect another? And basically, behind that question is, Jesus, where's the chaff burning? Jesus, where's the ax chopping? Well, Jesus responds by taking Matt on a little ministry tour and doing more of the same, healing the sick, exercising demons, preaching the good news, and he says, go back and tell John what you've seen. So, again, what message is Jesus trying to send to John? John, you baptized the right person, but I have heightened and intensified the battle so that it's directed toward the spiritual powers and authority, and John, he doesn't articulate this, I'm putting this together based on later scripture passages that I will now quote, but John, you can't defeat this enemy by killing, this enemy is defeated by dying. Now, we'll come back to the question in a moment, was John the Baptist wrong? The answer's no, but I'll tell you why he wasn't wrong.

But it is the case, you know, as Jesus gets arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, famously, Peter whips out his sword, and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus says to him, put away your sword. If I wanted to, I could have myriads of my father's heavenly army here, but my way is to the cross, and so Jesus goes and dies on the cross, and, of course, is raised and ascended into heaven, and isn't it interesting that Paul will occasionally use military language to describe Jesus' work on the cross, and the resurrection, and the ascension. Let me give you two examples of what I'm talking about, beginning with Colossians chapter 2, 13 to 15, when Paul says, when you were dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us, and condemned us, he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. Now, listen to verse 15 very carefully, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Theologians will call this the deus victor model of the atonement, and there are other models too, but here, Jesus' work on the cross is being described as a triumph, a military triumph, and the public spectacle is a reference to the practice during this

time period by the Romans, that after they won a great victory, they would lead prisoners on a kind of parade through the streets, and that image is used in another Pauline letter, namely Ephesians 4 verse 8, when Paul says, in reference to the ascension, this is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

Now, what's particularly interesting about Ephesians 4: 8, is that Paul is citing Psalm 68, you might remember we talked about Psalms that were connected to warfare in the book of Psalms, and Psalm 68 is such a divine warrior hymn now being applied to Jesus. So, Jesus heightens and intensifies the battle, and now is the time to ask the question, was John the Baptist wrong? And I've already said no, but let me explain what I mean. John the Baptist wasn't wrong, but like many prophets, he spoke better than he consciously knew.

As he talked about the coming of Christ, he didn't fully realize, or even realize at all, that Christ's coming was a two-part affair, that Jesus wasn't just coming once, but he was coming again in the future. And so, when we move to Jesus coming again in the future, we're now in phase five, that Jesus comes again in order to win the final battle against all evil, human and spiritual. So, I'll read a couple of passages, one briefly and one at more length.

Jesus spoke about his second coming, and what he said is recorded in Matthew, I mean Mark chapter 13, and also in Matthew and Luke, but I wanted to read this because in verses 26 and 27, he says, at that time people will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory, and he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. You can hear that echo of Daniel 7, 13, and 14 there, right? He's referred to as the son of man, which, by the way, a lot of people who don't know the Old Testament background think is some kind of allusion to Christ's humanity, where the son of God is an allusion to his deity, and I know these things are debated, but my understanding is we're all sons of God, and so actually, if anything, it probably emphasizes his humanity, whereas he's the son of man, which is linking back to Daniel 7, 13, and 14, but it's really in the book of Revelation that we see a number of different pictures of Christ's return, sometimes riding the cloud, but a return where he comes to win the final victory, and I'd like to draw your attention to Revelation 19, 11 and following, which is kind of a climactic statement of his return. There it says, I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True.

Now, obviously, this is a reference to Jesus on a horse. Then it goes, with justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns.

He has a name written on him that no one knows but himself. He's dressed in a robe, dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. Now, those who have eyes to see can hear that there are a whole bunch of little micro-quotations to Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy there, and Ezekiel, and so, and in a context where it's being ascribed to Yahweh, who is the divine warrior, they're now being applied to Jesus.

For instance, with justice he judges and wages wars, a reference to Psalm 98, which we read earlier. His eyes are like blazing fire, which makes you think of the vision Ezekiel had. He's dressed in a robe, dipped in blood, which makes you think of the picture of Yahweh in Isaiah 63.

Then it goes on to talk about the armies of heaven following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter, Psalm 2. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty, an allusion back to Isaiah.

On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. And I saw an angel standing in the sun who cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, come together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small. Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.

But the beast was captured and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs, he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake, burning sulfur.

The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds scorched themselves on their flesh. So here, as I say, is a description of evil human people, thinking here of verse 18, kings, generals, and the mighty, and then also of the spiritual powers with a reference to the beast and the false prophet who were described earlier in the book of Revelation. And so here we have a description of Jesus winning the final victory, which is anticipated by all the pictures of God as a warrior that were earlier in the Bible.

So now we're in a place where we can reflect a little bit on this picture of God as a warrior, both from a broadly theological as well as an ethical perspective.

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