

highlighting a different country each week in our e-news. A few weeks ago Voice of the Martyrs released its *World Watch List 2022*, listing the fifty countries in which it is most difficult, most dangerous to be a Christian.

God's path to victory is not the "nature red in tooth and claw" of the lion or the tiger. But the weak vulnerability of the lamb, who died in our place that we might have life. God in Christ submitted himself to the brutality of human empire, of the beasts. Jesus was crushed, devoured and trampled by the fourth beast of his day. But in the death of Christ on the cross evil exhausted itself. God had absorbed the very worst of evil. God had absorbed the full power of the beast against him. After that there was nothing worse that evil could do. On the cross God in Christ triumphed over all the evil forces. Not with the strength of a lion, but with the weak vulnerability of a

lamb. This is upside-down power. It is this upside-down power that the church is called to use and to proclaim.

We are called to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Our Lamb has conquered; let us follow him. To remind us that it is the Lamb that we follow we regularly take communion together, just like those Egyptian Christians.

1. William Blake, "The Tyger," *Songs of Experience* (London, 1794).
2. William Blake, "The Lamb," *Songs of Innocence* (London, 1789).
3. David Brooks, "The Dissenters Trying to Save Evangelicalism from Itself," Opinion, *The New York Times*, February 4, 2022.

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## THE LION AND THE LAMB

SERIES: ONE KING TO RULE THEM ALL

Happy New Year—Lunar New Year. Last Tuesday we moved from the Year of the Ox into the Year of the Tiger. The ox and the tiger are both animals of great power, unlike the rat the previous year and the rabbit next year. The ox is domesticated: its strength can be harnessed for human good. But the tiger is a wild animal, that can turn ferocious even in captivity, as Roy and Siegfried found out 20 years ago.

The English poet William Blake wrote a famous poem, *The Tyger*:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright, / In the forests of the night.<sup>1</sup>

That's a vivid image for me. I went to school in the jungle in Malaysia, where tigers prowled. A few years after I left, one of the staff painted a lovely mural on the wall of the dining room: a momma tiger and two playful cubs. But tigers are not safe: in my first year the school dog, a German Shepherd, disappeared, taken by a tiger.

Later in his poem, Blake asks:

Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Earlier he wrote the poem's counterpart, *The Lamb*, which begins:

Little Lamb who made thee? / Dost thou know who made thee?<sup>2</sup>

Blake seemed fascinated that the same hand would make both the tiger and the lamb: the one a symbol of ferocious power, the other a symbol of weak vulnerability.

Today we return to the Book of Daniel after a five-month break. There are no tigers in Daniel, but there are ferocious wild beasts: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a mysterious fourth beast beyond comparison.

Since it has been five months, let me give a brief recap of the book. The book has two halves. The first six chapters are six individual stories set within the royal court in Babylon. They feature Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They are Jewish exiles, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. The stories show how they stay loyal to their God in a foreign land.

The second half of the book, chapters 7–12, is a sequence of four visions seen by Daniel.

The book also divides another way: half the chapters are in Hebrew and half in Aramaic, the international language of the Babylonian and Persian Empires. The Aramaic chapters 2–7 have a chiasmic structure:

- A. Vision of 4-part statue: 4 kings/kingdoms (2)
- B. Three Jews in blazing fiery furnace (3)
  - C. Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (4)
  - C'. Belshazzar's humbling (5)
- B'. Daniel in lions' den (6)
- A'. Vision of 4 beasts: 4 kings/kingdoms (7)

The theme of this structure is not the faithfulness of the Jews but



Daniel 7:19-28

Eighth Message

Bernard Bell

February 6, 2022

the identity of the true empire and its ruler. The kings in Babylon think that they rule the world, but they must learn that there is a higher throne, and that their empire is not eternal.

The outer envelope, chapters 2 and 7, is two visions of a sequence of four kings or kingdoms: Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a four-part statue (2), and Daniel's vision of four beasts (7). The Babylonian Empire will fall, to be followed by further empires until, ultimately, God's eternal empire.

The middle pair, chapters 3 and 6, features faithful Jews defying imperial edicts to worship or pray to human emperors. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced certain death in the blazing fiery furnace (3); Daniel faced certain death in the lion's den (6). Yet God delivered them.

The inner pair shows the humbling of two kings: Nebuchadnezzar (4) and Belshazzar (5).

Who is truly sovereign? Is it the king of the mighty Babylonian empire or is it Yahweh, God of the Jews? To the human eye it seems that Babylon is supreme. Mighty Babylon has conquered Jerusalem, destroying the temple, palace, and city walls, and taking Jews captive to Babylon. But chapter 1 makes it clear that it is the Lord who has given Jerusalem, its king, and the temple vessels into Babylon's hand. Babylon is God's instrument of judgment upon his unfaithful people.

It takes three chapters (2–4) for mighty Nebuchadnezzar the Great to learn that he is not so great. By the end of chapter 4 he has learnt his lesson:

**"I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.**

**His dominion is an eternal dominion;  
his kingdom endures from generation to generation."**

(Dan 4:34 NIV)

But his successor King Belshazzar defied God, so divine judgment fell on him and on Babylon. Both king and empire were overthrown by the next empire.

Chapter 7 forms a hinge in the middle of the book. It closes the chiasm of the Aramaic section, looking back to chapter 2. But it is also the first of Daniel's four visions. It looks ahead to chapters 8–12, in which Daniel is shown what will happen far beyond the end of the Babylonian captivity.

Daniel saw four beasts rising from the sea. The sea is chaos and the beasts are destructive. The first three are like a lion, a bear, and a leopard: wild beasts that lurk beyond civilization and threaten life. These are also hybrid creatures, further emphasizing their chaotic nature: the lion and the leopard are winged, and the leopard has four heads. The fourth beast is terrifying beyond description: crushing and devouring and trampling. This beast has ten horns, from which emerged a little horn speaking arrogantly.

But Daniel also saw into the heavenly realm: the Ancient of Days surrounded by his court. The court ruled; the beasts were judged.

The first three were stripped of their rule; the fourth was slain. Then Daniel saw one like a son of man coming on the clouds into the presence of the Ancient of Days, where he was given eternal dominion.

Daniel asked for the meaning of what he had seen. The interpretation was given:

**“The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.” (7:17-18)**

It is the same message as chapter 2. There will be a succession of human rulers and empires. Oceans rise, empires fall. All human empires will pass away, replaced by God’s eternal kingdom, which is given both to the one like a son of man, and to the faithful saints of the Most High. God’s people are given hope for the future.

This much we covered five months ago.

But Daniel is not satisfied with this answer, and some of you were not either. You were disappointed that I stopped at this point. Daniel wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, the ten horns, and the little horn. So do many others. The fourth beast, the ten horns, and the little horn have long captivated people’s imagination. There has been enormous speculation over their identities. Much has been written. Some of you have studied this matter and are eager to see what I am going to say. So I am aware yet again that I am speaking to two different audiences here: those who are very familiar with this topic, and those for whom this is strange, foreign territory.

Three times our attention is focused on the fourth beast. First in Daniel’s vision:

**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. (7:7)**

Next in his request for the meaning:

**the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. (7:19)**

Finally in the interpretation:

**“The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.” (7:23)**

The fearsome destructiveness of this fourth beast is drilled into us. It is different from the other beasts. It is so brutal and destructive that it cannot be compared to any wild animal like the lion, the bear or the leopard. With iron teeth and bronze claws to crush and devour and trample, this is “nature red in tooth and claw” on steroids.

This fourth beast is a fourth kingdom. But which kingdom? Is it the Seleucid empire of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the early second century BC? Or is it the Roman Empire of the first century AD? This is the same question posed by the four-part statue of chapter 2. And I’ll give the same answer as I gave six months ago: it is neither. I think the number four is being used symbolically in two ways. Firstly, four represents universality: the universality of human empire. And secondly, four represents escalation: three, yea four. There will be a sequence of human empires: three, yea four, with the fourth being the human empire in its fullest state. Human empire is de-

structive, and the fourth empire will be destructive to the *n*th degree. It is human arrogant pretension to power reaching its *telos*: its full flowering, but also its terminus, its end-point. I don’t identify the fourth beast of Daniel 7 as any particular empire. But I’m sure that Jews in the year 167 BC rightly saw the Seleucid Empire as the fourth beast, and the Jews of the first century AD rightly saw the Roman Empire as the fourth beast.

This beast has ten horns which are ten kings. From their midst emerges a little horn, which is also a king and conquers three of the ten kings. Attention is focused three times on this little horn. First in Daniel’s vision:

**This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. (7:8)**

Next in his request for the meaning:

**the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them. (7:20-21)**

And finally in the interpretation:

**“He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands.” (7:25)**

The little horn follows a similar 3+1 pattern. The first three beasts yield to a fourth beast that is different and climactic. So, in the same way, the three kings yield to a fourth king that is different and climactic. The fourth beast is human empire in its climactic manifestation. The little horn is the individual human ruler in its climactic manifestation.

There is a disturbing new element here in this second half of Daniel’s vision. The little horn wages war against the saints of the Most High and defeats them. Moreover, the saints are delivered into his hands. Who delivers them?

God will allow his saints, his faithful people, to be attacked. Under Babylonian rule the Jews had suffered exile and captivity as divine judgment upon their wickedness, their unfaithfulness. But this is different. A time is coming when God’s people will suffer while being faithful. Indeed, they will suffer *for* being faithful. They will be martyrs, killed for their faithfulness to God.

This is what happened under the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire in 167–164 BC. He attempted cultural genocide: to wipe out the faith and practice of the Jews. He was the little horn. But this also happened under the Roman emperors of the first century AD, whether Caligula or Nero or Domitian. They were the little horn. Each viewed himself as divine, as God made manifest on earth. This is the meaning of the title Antiochus used to proclaim himself to the world: Epiphanes, God Manifest. The earthly manifestation of the great god Zeus. Certain Roman emperors did the same.

How long would God allow this to happen? Daniel saw the little horn

**was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. (7:21-22)**

He was told:

**“The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time,**

**times and half a time.” (7:25)**

How long? For a time, (two) times and half a time, usually interpreted as 3½ years. I think this is best understood as half of seven. It is not a full period of time (7), but is cut short. It may seem interminable but the time will be fulfilled. There will be an end. And then the Ancient of Days will issue his judicial ruling.

**“But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.” (7:26-27)**

There will be justice in the end. The divine court will sit. The Ancient of Days will rule in favor of the saints of the Most High, in favor of the martyrs. Such a verdict does not save them from death: they have already died at the hands of the little horn. But there will be justice beyond the grave, beyond the grave.

How does this justice happen?

It so happens that our women have been studying Revelation 13 this past week. There was no attempt to coordinate calendars to make this happen! But it is fortuitous.

The imagery of Daniel 7 permeates Revelation 13. The beast of Revelation is all four beasts of Daniel 7 rolled into one. It rises from the sea. It has seven heads, the total of the four beasts of Daniel. It is like a leopard, like a bear, and like a lion. But it is also specifically the fourth beast. It has ten horns topped with ten crowns, the diadems of rulers, for the ten horns are ten kings. It is also the little horn given a mouth uttering proud words and blasphemies for 42 months, that is 3½ years, the “time, times and half a time” of Daniel 7:25.

The beast is allowed “to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them” (Rev 13:7). Again, who does the allowing? It is God. Within the mystery of God’s purposes is allowing his people to be conquered by the forces of evil. “Conquer” is an important verb in Revelation and crucial to understanding the book. The beast conquers the saints (13:7), but they have conquered the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by their faithful testimony even unto death (12:11). They are the martyrs: faithful in witness, which is the original meaning of “martyr”; and faithful witnesses even unto death, which became the meaning of “martyr.” They follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who is the archetypal witness and martyr. This all makes sense, both in Daniel and in Revelation, only when seen through the lens of Christ.

William Blake juxtaposed the tiger and the lamb. The Bible knows nothing of the tiger. But it juxtaposes the Lion and the Lamb in the person of Jesus.

John, like Daniel, has a vision into God’s heavenly court. He hears, “See, the lion of Judah has triumphed [conquered].” He looks, expecting to see a lion. But he sees a lamb standing as though slain (5:5-6). Here, as elsewhere in Revelation, John hears one thing and sees another thing, yet the two are the same. The conquering lion and the slain lamb are the same! More than that, the lion has conquered *by being* the slain lamb!

At the beginning of Revelation Jesus is described as:

**the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (1:5)**

This is crucial. He is the faithful witness. He, who, before time, was in the Father’s loving embrace, gazing eye-to-eye into his face—

this very one has made God known in the world. But his faithful witness was rejected. It was rejected by his own people who entered into an unholy alliance with the fourth beast. For his faithful witness he was killed. But he is risen, and is the firstborn from the dead, and ruler of the kings of the earth. We are called to follow him in faithful witness, through death into resurrection life in God’s kingdom over which the risen Lord Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. To those who faithfully follow him Jesus promises:

**“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (3:21 ESV)**

Revelation includes many words of pastoral counsel. Among them are two calls for endurance and two calls for wisdom for how we should respond to the beast:

**This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people. (13:10)**

**This calls for wisdom. (13:18)**

**This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. (14:12)**

**This calls for a mind with wisdom. (17:9)**

All four words occur in the context of the beast. How do you resist the beast and his power? With endurance and by faithfully following the Lamb. And with wisdom to see the beast for what it really is: it is not worthy of worship, and is headed for destruction.

On Friday, after I had written this sermon, I read David Brooks’s weekly opinion column in *The New York Times*.<sup>3</sup> It is about the current divisions within the evangelical church spawned by three big issues: race, Trump, and sex abuse scandals. He writes, “The proximate cause of all this disruption is Trump. But that is not the deepest cause... Power is the core problem here.” Power is the problem.

Like many others, I have been listening to *Christianity Today*’s podcast *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*. Mark Driscoll, the senior pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, built an empire—it’s hard to use any other word than that. Many were blessed, but many were hurt. In Driscoll’s own language, those who got in the way of building the empire were thrown off the bus, run over by the bus, and joined the pile of dead bodies behind the bus. But this is like the fourth beast that crushes and devours and tramples. It emerges that Driscoll was a narcissist, just like the little horn. In 2014 the Mars Hill empire suddenly collapsed. Just like Babylon: “Fallen, fallen, Babylon the Great, in just one hour.”

Driscoll’s favorite image of Jesus was the rider on the white horse, eyes blazing, sword flashing (Rev 19:11-20). Unfortunately this image of Jesus nurtured a toxic masculinity in the Mars Hill culture. The central image of Jesus in Revelation is not the rider on the white horse, but the Lamb.

David Brooks sees signs for hope, citing a case from Fuller Seminary which has a very diverse and international student body:

after ISIS launched a series of deadly attacks against Egyptian Christians, some Americans at Fuller wanted to hold a memorial service. The Egyptian students said, in effect: “What are you talking about? This is a cause for a celebration. This is about acknowledging what it means to live as a Christian in a context in which you have the privilege of martyrdom.” That idea is foreign to most American Christians, but the Egyptians led a celebratory service, which was followed by communion.”

We continue to pray for the persecuted church around the world,