

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Daniel's Vision of Change

Read Daniel 7:9-14

Key verse: "His rule is an everlasting one—it will never pass away!—his kingship is indestructible" (Daniel 7:14b).

"There are, in every situation," said Sam Shoemaker, "two factors: There is what happens, and there is how we take what happens. How we take what happens goes back to what kind of person we are and what kind of belief we have about life as a whole. If the whole scheme of life is not a scheme at all but a chaos, if there is no thread of purpose running through it all but only confusion, then our misfortunes are just part of the general mess. But if God *is*, and if life is His creation, with meaning in the middle of it, then we may hope to discover a pattern which will give coherence to it all..."

What happened to Daniel and the people of Israel looked like pure chaos. Their country had been conquered by the Babylonians and many Jews, including Daniel, had been taken into captivity. Other world powers—the Medes and Persians—had arisen as a threat to the Babylonian empire. The captives in Babylon and the remnant left in Israel were at the mercy of foreign kings and powers.

In his dream, Daniel saw in this chaotic context four terrifying beasts emerging from a churning, threatening sea (Daniel 7:1-8). Many Bible interpreters see the four beasts as representing four specific empires (the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Romans empires). Whether or not one agrees with that interpretation, what happens next in Daniel's dream—and its meaning—is clear. Amid the volatile, chaotic mix of human experience—marked by oppression, war, and chaos—the sovereign God rules. And God will have the final word in all of human history:

"As I was watching, thrones were raised up. The ancient one took his seat....the authority of the remaining beasts was brought to an end....His rule is an everlasting one—it will never pass away" (Daniel 7:9,12,14).

How do you see life—meaningless chaos or the creation of a sovereign God with "meaning in the middle of it"?

Daniel 7:13 adds another intriguing element to Daniel's vision: *"As I continued to watch this night vision of mine, I suddenly saw one like a human*

being [other translations say 'one like a son of man'] coming with the heavenly clouds."

Traditional interpretation has identified this "one like a human being" or "one like a son of man" as the Messiah. Jesus used this title, Son of Man, to refer to himself:

"In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64).

"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

"I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51).

For the Christian, life and life's misfortunes are not meaningless. Through it all, we trust in a sovereign, loving God. One day, God has promised, all of human history will be brought to culmination under the rule of God. Christ will return. Everyone, from average Joes to powerful kings and rulers, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

All will give an account for what we have done with our lives. Most importantly, we will be judged by how we have responded in this life to the question, "What have you done about Jesus?"

Such passages as these in Daniel, with their talk of end times and judgment, offer great hope. But they may also bring a measure of fear. Here's some good news in the words of author Frederick Buechner:

"The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will bring down the final curtain on history. And there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully."

Thanks be to God.

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)