

God's Promises Sustain His People

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Unlike the world's temporary kingdoms, God is forming an eternal kingdom that is for all people under the reign of King Jesus.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Daniel 7–12

Ever play with the Magic 8 Ball®? The Mattel toy company developed the game in the 1950s to give kids a fun way to ascertain “the future.” When children shook the ball, one of twenty different answers would pop up as a response to yes or no questions. With ten positive responses, five that were non-committal, and five that were different ways to say no, odds were you would receive the reply you wanted. When that was not the case, most children learned to reword the question till they got their confirmation.

Perhaps it was our insatiable desire to know the future that led to the toy's popularity. Though the Magic 8 Ball was a lot of fun, we quickly learned that it was not an accurate predictor of the future. Grown-ups have their own strategies to pinpoint what is ahead, but our attempts to know what is coming are also futile. Thankfully, efforts like these are unnecessary. When we search the Bible, we discover there is no need to predict the things that God has already revealed partly but nonetheless sufficiently.



In what ways might the current climate in our world make people fearful of the future?

Group Time

Point 1: The world's kingdoms are set against God and are temporary (Dan. 7:1-8).

¹ In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. ² Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' ⁶ After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸ I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

Daniel recorded a dream he had of four beasts, which symbolized the succession of world powers from Babylon to Medo-Persia to Greece and then to Rome. The succession implies that these empires are temporary—each one will fall.



What are some joys and concerns that come from knowing earthly kingdoms are temporary?

The World Opposed to God: This evil world force operates under _____ control, displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by _____ in the _____.

Point 2: The world's kingdoms are under the authority of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9-12).

⁹ “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. ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

This magnificent vision of the Ancient of Days is the calming reassurance we need as we look to the future. White clothing points to God’s absolute purity, while white hair speaks of His eternity. The fire surrounding His throne communicates the swift judgment He intends to execute on the wicked. One day He will rid the earth of the nations’ wickedness forever, but not yet.

God Is Infinite: God’s infinity means that there are no boundaries on His qualities and existence. For instance, God is infinite when it comes to space and time, meaning He is not confined by material space nor is He restricted by time since He is timeless. God’s infinity also extends to His _____ of things as well as His _____ to do all things according to His will.



How does God’s infinite existence as the Ancient of Days strengthen us as we face uncertain days?

To exemplify God’s judgment of the wicked, Daniel saw the pinnacle of earthly evil in the fourth “beast” with the arrogant “horn” being killed and destroyed by fire. The horn rises up to oppress the holy ones of God, and he will prevail over them, for a time (Dan. 7:21). But this entire satanic rebellion only exists for as long as God allows it. The devil and his minions are bound according to whatever limits God sets until the final crushing of the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 20:10).




How are you affected by God’s promise of judgment for His enemies?

Point 3: An everlasting kingdom for all people will be given to the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14).

¹³ “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. ¹⁴ 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.

These verses not only give us a glimpse into the culmination of Daniel’s vision but also of redemptive history. Daniel described the eternal dominion of “one like a son of man”—who is indeed the Son of Man—over a vast kingdom and the glory that will encompass it, all of which commences with what the Bible refers to as a new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). At that time, the Lord will once again dwell among His people in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of Man.

 How should the future exaltation of Jesus enhance our worship of and service to Him now?

Contrary to the fallen empires throughout history, including those represented by the beasts in Daniel’s vision, the future kingdom of God will bring joy and blessing to all its inhabitants forever. While it is true that the kingdom is a present reality in the heart and life of every Christian, the contentment of living for Christ now is but a foretaste of the endless satisfaction that will accompany being with Him forever. As the nations experience healing in His presence (Rev. 22:2), He will wipe away every tear, and mourning, pain, and death will be no more (21:4). And with the curse removed, God will make all things new (21:5).



Voices from Church History

“What we proclaim is not one single coming of Christ but a second as well, much fairer than the first. For the first presented a demonstration of longsuffering, but the second wears the crown of the kingdom of God ... He adapted himself when he came then and taught humankind by persuasion, but this time it is they who will be forced to bow to his rule, whether they will or not.”¹

—Cyril of Jerusalem
(c. 313-386)

My Mission

Because we have been brought into the kingdom of God through Christ, we recognize and stand against the systems of the world that are in opposition to Him as we place our hope in Jesus, the everlasting King of kings.

- **How will confidence in the coming kingdom of God in Christ change how you live today?**
- **How can your group live with increased anticipation of Christ's coming?**
- **How is the certainty of God's kingdom an evangelistic tool to reach those who are rattled by the political realities of the present?**

Voices from the Church

“If we are Christians, God will sustain us. The unchanging God has revealed his plan, and his plan is to sustain and to preserve his people in him ... In Christ’s sacrificial work of atonement on the cross, [God’s] power and mercy are made most clear. In the end, that is our only hope for survival.”²

–Mark Dever

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Daniel 7:1-8

As we move into the prophetic material of Daniel, God's future reign over the kingdoms of the earth becomes apparent. The four beasts described in these verses represent the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Because these nations war against God's agenda for humanity, the world's hostility toward Christianity and Scripture should not surprise us. Rather than be dismayed, however, we ought to rejoice knowing that today's satanic influences are temporary. Though the whole earth is under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19), the Son of God gives us eternal life. The accelerated wickedness we see today is but a forerunner to God's final word of vengeance.

Until Christ comes, we must be diligent to resist the lawlessness that is already at work around us. Knowing that rebellion will increase before the Day of the Lord due to the spirit of antichrist, we should be careful to hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Ours are not hopeless days, but we cannot afford to be careless either.



What evidence do you see of Satan's influence in our world today?

Day 2: Read Daniel 7:9-12

Do you ever feel weary due to the wickedness of our world? These verses remind us that though God has a purpose for allowing the evil around us, He will not allow it to continue forever. Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days reminds us that God's reign is eternal and that He will smite the nations who rebel against Him with swift judgment. Though Satan's kingdom is extensive and damaging, the Lord will exercise His authority over His sinister enemies as He rids the earth of all unbelievers and demonic forces. Christ will rule over all creation as the King of all kings.

Daniel's message is just as encouraging today as it was to ancient Jews who lived in captivity outside of Israel. Despite the dismal forecast on the nightly news, God's victory is coming without delay. Our great Savior will restore our fallen home for His glory.



How should you respond to the injustice of this world in light of God's future victory over it?

Day 3: Read Daniel 7:13-28

The glory of a new heaven and new earth is often lost on us. Contrary to the fallen kingdoms chronicled in Daniel's vision, the glory of our eternal dwelling place is unparalleled. With a dominion that will last forever, Jesus Christ will restore what was lost in the garden of Eden. He will dwell among us as our God, and the wounds of our fallen past will be wiped away. With the curse removed, we will enjoy the presence of our God like never before. Through Daniel's interpretation of his vision, we learn that earthly realities will get much worse before they improve. But history is working toward the day when the Lamb who died to take away our sins is enthroned on high for all to see.

How are we to live in the meantime? What do these realities mean for us today? First, they remind us that no sacrifice is too great in order to follow our King. Second, we rest knowing that our heartaches and troubles are temporary and soon will pass. Finally, we devote our lives to helping others discover the hope and rescue that is ours in Christ Jesus.



How do your temporary trials strengthen your perspective about eternity?

Day 4: Read Daniel 8:1–9:27

With a second vision regarding the demonic kingdoms of history, Daniel learned of the coming hardship God's people were going to face. By focusing on the harsh reigns of Medo-Persia and Greece, the need for God's sovereign authority over the nations once again comes into focus. Realizing the depth of Israel's sin, Daniel repented before the Lord and pleaded for mercy. Because of the interpretation from Gabriel, we understand the revealed seventy weeks to be only partially fulfilled at this stage of history.

How should we live in light of challenging verses like these? Despite the difficulty of these prophecies, again we observe the clear, abiding sovereignty of the Lord over the affairs of history. God disciplines His own and condemns those who reject Him. Though He uses the destructive agendas that dominate the earth, He will also bring them to a screeching halt as Jesus is exalted over all creation. We should take comfort in the fact that the God who rules the universe is also in control of the daily events in our lives.



How does the certainty of history's conclusion give you peace about your present challenges?

Day 5: Read Daniel 10:1–12:13

This final vision in the Book of Daniel again speaks vividly about future events. Because the angel speaking was initially unable to communicate with Daniel due to demonic resistance, we know that Satan aggressively opposes and resists God's agenda for His people (10:13-14). We also learn from these verses that God sends His angels to influence the world's political realities for His kingdom (11:1). Again the Lord reveals numerous leaders who would influence the trajectory of history toward its conclusion. The vision culminates with a description of the coming Antichrist who will compete for God's glory by attempting to hinder His work. Though the timing of these events remains unclear, Daniels' vision established their certainty.

Living with conviction and faith requires believing in what we have yet to see (Heb. 11:1). Daniel's words prod us to remember that we will win in the end precisely because our Savior will not be denied the glory due His name. Though the challenges of life can often leave us shortsighted, we should lift our gaze to the hope of our coming Lord and home in the eternal new heaven and new earth.



How does recognizing the satanic resistance to God's kingdom help you frame the evil you see in the world today?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The world's kingdoms are set against God and are temporary (Dan. 7:1-8).
- The world's kingdoms are under the authority of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9-12).
- An everlasting kingdom for all people will be given to the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



When do you feel most discouraged about the rebellious kingdoms of this world and their negative effects?



What steps can we take to remind one another that earthly kingdoms are only temporary?

Notes

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Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world's view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ's power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God's faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.