

10.09.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

Heavenly Rulers: Earthly Nations!

Bible Readings = Daniel 7:9-14 and 10:7-21.

Introduction:

- (1) Last week we saw that the covenant with Abraham meant that Abraham had to trust God (i.e. walk by faith) for three main things: vindication; daily provision; and the inheritance of the nations.
- (2) In passing, we saw how these areas were always stumbling blocks for God's Old Testament people, and how they sought some other means of obtaining them, only repeatedly.
- (3) However, we saw that the Seed of Abraham, the Great King, trusted his heavenly Father for all these things (e.g. in the temptations in the wilderness), and how he so unites us to himself that he leads us to come to the Father in faith.
- (4) We saw that the nations (not knowing the Father) seek and squabble over them, but that we were given the joy of knowing the Father's nature and his grace, so that we might rest in his love and care for us.

This week, without becoming either speculative or fearful, we aim to see that there are spiritual forces engaged in heavenly combat over the destiny of the nations, but for us we take refuge in the victory of the Son of Man, in whom our inheritance is guaranteed.

1. A Magnificent Vision; A Terrifying Context; A Great Assurance

(1) In Daniel 7:9-14 Daniel (and thence we) are given a magnificent vision of the throne room of heaven.

- There are many features of the vision that remind of us the book of the Revelation (e.g. Rev. 4-5); and clearly it is a vision which gives great assurance to Daniel, and to us.
- It emphasises the utter surety of the reign of God over the nations, and indicates the true hope of his people: there is an everlasting kingdom which cannot be shaken.

(2) At the heart of the vision is the revelation of the Son of Man.

- The phrase 'son of man' may be used simply to designate a mortal human being (e.g. Ezekiel 2:1-3), and while it clearly indicates the human nature of the figure in the vision, the New Testament use leaves us in no doubt that this is not a mere fallen human being.
- Jesus uses the title of himself, and in ways that reflect the authority that this figure has. See, for example, Matt. 13:41; 24:30; 25:31; 26:64 and parallel passages; John 5:27 and compare with Acts 7:56, where Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand (interceding for him).
 - This is the fulfilment of the promises contained in places such as Is. 9:6ff. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this

- The vision indicates that the Son of Man is receiving the kingdom from the one on the throne. The picture is of his ascension on the clouds of glory, with the final submission of the nations guaranteed on the basis of the definitive victory he has won on the Cross. *His coming again is on with the glory that he already has.* Psalm 2 we saw that the king had to live in dependence on God, and this was to define him as the Lord's anointed.
- (3) But the context of this vision, which brings *great assurance* to us, is *terrible*.
- See, for example the kingdoms described in the early part of Daniel 7. While the details of the pictures need not detain us, we can agree that the pictures of the four creatures emphasise their power, brutality, bloodthirstiness, and ruthlessness. \
 - It is clear from Dan. 7:17 that they represent four earthly kings or kingdoms. There has been much debate over the identity of the kings/kingdoms, and we do not want to speculate.
 - What is clear is that history is not static, and that kings and kingdoms rise and fall, with one overtaking another, sometimes with enormous brutality. These king/kingdoms may refer to the rise and fall of ones very familiar in Daniel's day (e.g. Assyrian, Babylonian, Medes & Persians, and Macedonians).
 - God's people are caught up in the midst of this action, which is not arbitrary (e.g. see Is. 10 for God's raising up Assyria and Habakkuk for his sending the Babylonians to Judah, etc.)
 - God's people should *take comfort* from what we see here. There is no doubt that evil kingdoms arise, and they have fell and foul intent, but that their operations do not at all contradict the rule of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man.
 - In fact Daniel is raised up for such a time as this. So for him, so for us.

2. The Nations' Links with Spiritual Powers

(1) In the Bible, the nations are not free standing entities. They are linked with their gods.

- Some example of this can be seen in the way in which the exodus is described as a victory over the gods of Egypt (e.g. Ex. 12:12; Numb. 33:4; Jer. 46:25; also compare with Is. 19:1)
 - Also see, for example, the role of Dagon in relation to the Philistines and Yahweh's defeat of him in 1 Sam. 5:3; 6:5. See Hector's exposition of this at the family camp.
 - We are no different: it is just that we have more sophisticated idols in which we trust!
- Commonly, in the ancient world, the nations looked to their gods for deliverance. There are many examples of this (e.g. Ex. 32:4, 8 compare with Jer. 2:27-28; Is. 44:17; 57:13), and many prophetic oracles related to the futility of trusting in false gods for deliverance (e.g. Is. 36:19-20; Is. 44; Jer. 10:3-5; Hab. 2:18-20; etc.)

(2) The link with gods through worship and the practises associated with it meant that, in fact, the gods were empowered by dark and demonic forces.

- See for example Deut. 32:17 compared with 1 Cor. 10:20. This is one of the reasons why Israel was not to serve other ‘gods’ in the manner of the nations (e.g. Deut. 12:29-31).
- The idols are ‘nothing’, but as they are given worth, they are ‘something’, by virtue of their link with malevolent powers .

(3) In Is. 24:21 we see a reference to the linkage between earthly kingdoms and spiritual entities. On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth (ESV); And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones *that are* on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth (NKJ); In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below (NIV).

- See the description of the battle in the spiritual realms in Daniel 10: 12-13, 20 in this light: the kings of the earthly nations are in spiritual league with powers in the heavenly realm.

(4) How can we understand these things? Perhaps by reference to Deut. 32:8-9, where one of the possible translations says When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage (ESV); When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods; the LORD’s own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share (NRSV). Some translations opt for the variant: “according to the sons of Israel”, but there is good evidence both in terms of context and textual support to go with the ESV. (See Lucas, *Daniel*, p. 276).

- In addition, there are many closely related terms used (particularly by Paul, many of which have their antecedents in Daniel), to indicate that there are intense operations of spiritual forces (e.g. the world, the flesh) and spiritual personages (e.g. demonic beings, Satan himself), expressed in a variety of terms.
 - ‘Principalities’ (*archai*) in Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; etc.;
 - ‘Rulers’ (*archontes*) in 1 Cor. 2:6, 8 cf. Dan. 10:21; 12:1); ‘Authorities’ (*exousai*) in 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 2:2, 3; etc.;
 - ‘Powers’ (*dynameis*) in Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21 cf. Dan. 8:10; ‘Dominions’ (*kyriotetes*) in Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:21; ‘Thrones’ (*thronoi*) in Col. 1:16; Eph. 6:21; etc.
- These have been created by God through Christ (e.g. Col. 1:15-16) and the Bible will allow no dualism (i.e. equal, permanent and opposing systems of ‘good’ and ‘evil’). Given the whole gamut of Biblical revelation we must say:
 - All things were created good, including the myriad of heavenly beings and angelic creatures.
 - These had a role to serve God and his image bearers (e.g. Ps. 103:20; Dan. 7:10; Heb. 1:14 cf. Luke 1:19; Matt. 4:12; Rev. 19:10; etc.).
 - There has been rebellion in heaven (see Rev. 12:1-10),
 - And we find that that the Dragon has deceived the nations (Rev. 12:9)
 - So that the whole world (as a system of evil, rather than the creation itself) lies in his power, (e.g. (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 cf. Eph. 2:1-2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:9-11; 20:2-3)
 - So there is an unholy alliance between the kings of the earth who take their stand against the Lord and his anointed, the idols, the demons who stand behind them and the whole iniquitous system of principalities and powers.

(5) No speculation at this point! Cannot go beyond what has been revealed, and the desire to know how all of this works can make shipwreck of our peace and joy! The evil powers love attention! The more we pay it to them, the more they play up to it!

3. The Great Deliverance

(1) Though these things are so, the victory lies with the Son of Man, as he comes as the Lamb of God, to the cross.

- See Col. 2:13ff. and note the way in which the spiritual forces of wickedness are disarmed!
- Wherever we are (no matter under which nation we live, or what the dominant idols or gods) as we are united to Christ, and seated with him in the heavenly places the gods of this world have lost their power over us! *We are not longer of the world* (e.g. John 17:14-16).

(2) Draw attention to a couple of small, but very significant verses in Daniel.

- Dan. 9:23 as Gabriel speaks to Daniel "At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision." And also in Dan. 10:11 where the heavenly messenger says "And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling".
 - Sometimes translated as 'highly esteemed'; 'precious'; 'specially chosen'.
- Do we see what the Lord has done for us, on our behalf, against the enemies which we had no hope of defeating (and indeed, to whom we were wedded and with whom we were in solemn league and covenant!)
- Do we really know that we are love, precious and specially chosen in his sight?

(3) Out of such knowledge the gospel is proclaimed to the nations, that they may be brought out of their bondage. The powers of evil all have the one object: silence the gospel!