

The Ascension and Reign of Jesus Christ – *Dan 7:1-18*

Introduction – Everybody celebrates Christmas it seems. Many remember the crucifixion (Good Friday) and celebrate the Resurrection – but they often get neglected. But the Ascension of Jesus gets lost in Mother’s Day or Memorial Day celebrations, graduations and summer vacations. But the Ascension is a real, historical event in which Jesus was bodily lifted up from the earth into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty (Acts 1:9-11, fulfilling Psalm 2:6-8, 110:1, which Jesus declared (Matt 28:18). The Good News, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not end with His resurrection. The Gospel includes the ascension and reign of Jesus Christ while sitting at the right hand of God until all His enemies have been made a footstool. Jesus Christ is Lord of every individual, every family, every church (or religious institution), and every civil authority. Someone might have a bumper sticker on their car that says, “I didn’t vote for Him” but that doesn’t change reality. Every knee will bow. And what we know as Christians is that this is Good News.

Outline of the Text – Daniel 7 gives the Old Testament prophetic vision of the ascension event as seen from heaven. And it is given *in the context* of earthly kingdoms and rulers. This is important to note and is what I will be emphasizing on this pass through. Daniel records a dream he received where the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea (vv1-2). Heaven was moving upon the Gentile nations. Four great beasts came up from the sea, representing different world empires that would come successively: Babylon (v4), and suddenly Medo-Persia (v5). These two Daniel witnessed in his lifetime. Then Greece (v6) and finally the Roman empire (vv7-8). All of this occurs under the sovereign rule of the Ancient of Days, seated in judgment over the nations (vv9-10). The final beast was slain and the dominion of all the beasts were taken away (vv11-12).

“The beasts were not autonomous; they only had the power that God had sovereignly chosen to give them for a time. This amazingly accurate and detailed prophecy of Daniel shows that history really is God’s story. History is under God’s control and direction. God causes empires to rise and fall, as He wills”- Lusk).

Dominion is then given to “*One like the Son of Man*” who came up to the Ancient of Days (v13). And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him (v14a) and unlike the other kingdoms, this kingdom would be an everlasting and indestructible kingdom (v14b). Daniel is troubled (v15) and asks for an interpretation (v16) which is that the beasts were four kings which arise out of the earth (17) in contrast to kingdom which will last forever which, by the way, “*the saints of the Most High shall receive...and possess forever, even forever and ever*” (v18).

What Happened? – In Acts 1:9-11, when Jesus went up into the clouds, He ascended into heaven. This was not because Jesus was done with His work here on earth. Calvin states, “*...though he departed from us, it was that his departure might be more useful to us than that presence which was confined in a humble tabernacle of flesh during his abode on the earth.*” When we hear the phrase, “*coming on the clouds,*” we have been trained to think of the Second Coming. But Dan 7:13 is referring to Jesus coming into His crown rights and enthronement over the nation/beasts. He comes into the throne room of heaven and is given universal dominion. This is the sign of the beginning of the generation that will see all the events of the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:30, 32-34). This is what Jesus was referring to when He spoke to the high priest and Sanhedrin (Mark 14:61-64). The high priest knew that Jesus was referring to Dan 7, and was claiming to be God, taking the name of God, “*I AM*” for Himself. Christ’s death was going to overthrow those very powers that put Him to death. This would be accomplished in His death, burial, resurrection, AND ascension to a throne. The high priest did not comprehend this (1 Cor 2:7-8).

Crown Rights – His departure from the world was to take the throne of the world (Rev 11:15-16). This throne is in heaven before God. Hence, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus – by His ascension to that throne – where He rules until all His enemies are put down (Psalm 110:1).

Spheres of Government and the Lordship of Jesus Christ – Besides the individual sphere of self-government, we believe God established three communities or spheres of government – family, ecclesial, and civil. All of these governments are dependent on the grace of God, common or special. God has given specific responsibilities to each of His ordained governments and they are not to be set against one another, but together be used by God to govern His world, His kingdom. Each individual is to love God and his neighbor as himself. Each family is to provide for the health and welfare of its people. Each church is to rightly administer the Word and sacraments. Each civil authority is to protect its citizens and punish the evil-doers. All of these governments answer to the Lord of the governments. And Jesus sits on the throne over all authorities.

Let's Consider Civil Government in Particular – Civil governments are often beastly as they rage against God and tyrannize their citizens. Throughout history, they have persecuted God's people and disregarded His law. But the ascension means that there is a new Adam reigning over the beasts. Like Daniel, we might look around at these beastly nations and be troubled (Dan 7:15), but the Ascended Christ will slay them with the sword of the Spirit that comes out of His mouth (Rev 19:15). We are citizens of the kingdom of God which cannot be destroyed. Jesus, the Son of Man, reigns over all kings, presidents, legislators, judges, and county tax assessors, whether they acknowledge it or not. This was illustrated for us and for Daniel in the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar and the transformation of the Babylonian kingdom (Dan 4:34-37).

Later, under another king, Daniel understood that his devotion to God was not simply a private matter. Despite the decree to pray only to the state-sponsored god, Daniel faithfully served King Darius (Dan 6:4) but also prayed to the true God and did so with open windows in public (Dan 6:10). For that, Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. We also may suffer at the hands of beastly rulers, but it is not suffering to the ultimate defeat of the kingdom of God. Every earthly kingdom will rise and fall, but there is one kingdom that will last forever: the kingdom of the Son of Man, and we are kings in union with Him (Rev 1:6, Eph 2:6).

The Lie of Secularism – There is always a god of the system, civil government included. Why do we have three branches in the Federal system, and why did we develop a republic-system of representation, and why did we establish limits on government? Because Christians were thinking as they wrote the constitution. They knew what a tyrant was and they knew the heart of man was depraved. These were principles gathered from Bible study, from being Christians, and the government was formed from those principles. Without explicitly stating it (and it should be argued that we should have explicitly stated it) America, from its founding, was bowing the knee to Jesus Christ, acknowledging Him as Lord of America.

People get nervous at the idea of “Christian Nationalism” or calling a nation Christian. But consider – do you think it's a good idea to have a Christian marriage, a Christian family, a Christian church? Some argue that Christian nations have existed and ruled with some terrible laws and outcomes. But disobeying the Word of God in one of His spheres is not a reason to abandon the God we are disobeying. There are unfaithful Christian husbands, Christian businessmen, and Christian churches as well. We want obedient spheres, and those spheres obey by bowing the knee to Jesus.

The Kingdom's M.O. – The Kingdom is growing, expanding, maturing, from glory to glory, through its obedience in all spheres of government. There is a separation of church and state, for they are different spheres. But they both submit to the same God, either obediently or disobediently. God speaks authoritatively to all governments – and so there is a prophetic duty of the church to speak to the other governments. And what are we to say to the individual, to the head of the family, to the leader of a church or denomination, and to the leaders of a civil government? At the name of Jesus, every knee must bow. The church does this with the tools it has been given: Word and water, bread and wine. “*And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it*” (Rev 21:24).