

As we look towards tonight and the new year, there are tons of things that run through our minds. We look back on the previous year and try to remember everything that took place, both in our lives and in the world around us. You may remember some of these things, and some you may have never heard of. Some are good things, and some are NOT so good, while others did not make a difference in anyone's life. Here are a few; you may remember some of these and some you may have never heard of.

Wow, what a year 2023 was. There is no way that any of us could have known how this would turn out. There have definitely been some ups and downs, but here we all sit, eagerly awaiting the new year. I don't know what kind of plans you all have for tonight: a family fun night that ends directly following the ball drop, an adult night out that may or may not end at the strike of the new year, or maybe you plan to just go home and go to bed like you normally do and wake up to the new year. No matter what your plans are, tomorrow is coming, and so is the new year.

As mere humans, we can not see into the future to know what 2024 will hold. We all have plans and aspirations that we hope to see come true. But there is no way we can be sure about much; 2024 is an election year, so that always makes for a crazy year. However, there are a few things that we can be sure of: Jesus is Lord, He loves us, and He is coming back. We do not know the timing of that last one, but we know it is true.

Man tries, and the "Son of Man" triumphs.

Man tries

(V 1) Daniel chapters 1-6 are about the life and experiences of Daniel. We read about his abduction, training, his faithfulness to God, interpreting dreams no one else could, and even being thrown into the lion's den.

Chapters 7-12 are visions Daniel had. This first vision actually took place long before this place in scripture. This vision would have been back around chapter 4 or 5. Back when Nebuchadnezzar was still in control. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a tree; Daniel interpreted it, and then it came true. Then, in chapter 5, during the party, they see a hand writing on the wall, and no one can read it but Daniel.

Daniel has four visions between chapters 7 and 12; this first one is more of an overview, and the following three go into more detail. This is exactly how God works for us, too. We read and study, and God gives us what He wants us to get at this time. Some, I think, is because He knows too much at once will fry my brain, but for the rest, it is because we need this piece to understand something in another section of scripture. But we need to understand some other verse to get the next piece out of this one.

It's kind of like when you meet someone, and the more you get to know them, the more little pieces start to fall together. You begin to understand why they react the way they do, and you figure out the things that upset them or make them happy. As you get to know God, all the puzzle pieces start coming together, and the more time you spend with Him in His word or in prayer, the more He will reveal to you. You say you do not know much about God... that is on you. He is ready and willing to start putting the puzzle together whenever you are.

(V 2-3) This starts the description of the vision, talking of stirring up the great sea. This great sea was most likely the Mediterranean, as each of the empires we will read about has a connection to it.

There are areas of the sea that, even today, we do not understand. Imagine how confusing and how scary the sea was for them. For Daniel to have seen four big aggressive animals come up out of the sea, even in a vision, would have been very confusing.

(V 4) This first beast must have been majestic! An "eagle," come on! That would be something to see, with the lion and the eagle being the kings of their respective domains. This first beast would demand respect. Like King Nebuchadnezzar, they have majesty and authority in their reign.

But just as Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, so was this first beast; its wings were plucked off, and it was made like a human.

(V 5) The second beast was not one of authority or majesty but one of strength and power. A bear has a greater thirst to thrive. This represents the Medo-Persian empire that took over Babylon. The Medo-Persian army was not always looking for a quick victory. Remember how they took Babylon? They took their time rerouting a river to create a void under the city wall so they could walk right in. When they showed up for the fight, they came in huge numbers.

Daniel, seeing the bear on one side, is showing that the Persian army was the stronger side of the Medo-Persian empire. Comparing the Persians to the bear was fitting due to their cruelty and desire to devour. This is also depicted through the three ribs in the bear's mouth. This represents their three great military victories: Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia. "Get up and eat your fill of flesh" reminds us of the Medo-Persian's vast dominion and the inhumane practices they used to conquer them.

(V 6) So we see a lion and eagle, with majesty and authority, who devours its prey. Next is the bear, who, with its great strength, crushes its prey. Next is the leopard who suddenly attacks its prey. This empire is the Greek empire. Alexander the Great basically ran through all the known world, defeating everyone in his path, all in only 12 years. This was an amazing feat, nothing like it has ever been done before or since. After his death, the massive empire was divided into four parts and run by four people representing the leopard's four heads.

Now, I'm sure that Daniel, knowing what he knew and having the experience he had, could have made an educated guess that the Medo-Persian army could take over Babylon. But how could he have known that in just over two hundred years from then, someone would spring up like a leopard and take over as a world leader and then, in only a few short years, be divided into four parts? Wall Street cannot even read trends that far into the future.

We do the Greeneville parade every year, and it is a lot of fun getting to build the float and drive through, seeing everyone out to watch the parade. I have not seen the parade in several years because we are in it. This year, Jenn showed me a video that someone took from a rooftop of the whole parade. It was the first time I had seen the other floats in the same parade we were in. I knew the few floats that were directly in front of us, but that was it. As I watched the video, I eagerly anticipated seeing when our float would come by. As each float passed and another approached, it got to the point where I could not remember all the ones I had seen, and I had no idea of what was to come. How much more would there be in front of the Freedom Fellowship Narnia float? We can only see what is right in front of us; We have no idea of what is coming. God sees the beginning and the end all at the same time; none of it surprises Him. And He reveals certain details to us as we are ready. God does not live on the same timeline we do.

(V 7) Notice how the three before this were able to be described; even though they were a little weird, Daniel knew what they were. A lion with eagle wings, a bear, a leopard with wings like a bird. But this fourth beast was indescribable. All he could say was ...terrifying, frightening, had iron teeth (which is pretty scary), and had 10 horns."

Horns in those days exhibited power and fearlessness. How many deer hunters do we have in the room? What kind of deer have the most horns? The older, wiser, stronger deer, right? The same with this beast. It showed its power through its horns. Some depictions of this make it out to be two five-pointed antlers, while others are all separate.

This beast clearly represents the Roman empire, which was the largest and strongest and lasted the longest of all. The Roman Empire also represented the iron legs of Nebuchadnezzar's statue; this could be the mention of the iron teeth.

(V 8) Three horns are uprooted and replaced by one smaller horn. The ten horns represent a religious system. The little horn has human eyes and a mouth, indicating this beast has intelligence and confidence. Most of the time, when someone is boastful and speaks with dominance, it is not conducive with the thoughts of a nation. The Ten Horns plan was not only to rule the nation, but to change how the nation viewed the laws.

The Roman Catholic church intended to change the law. They thought they were given the authority to change what they saw fit, like changing the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday or adding annual days of worship instead of the Holy days from the bible.

Intelligence and confidence do not make you wise. We have talked about the difference between intelligence and wisdom.

Intelligence is having the knowledge of how to do something or simply how to take it apart without destroying it. Wisdom is knowing how to use that knowledge, how it works, and, more importantly, how to put it back together. Intelligence, to me, is not one who speaks against God and His people.

Our first point was Man tries, our second point is Son of Man triumphs

(V 9-10) If you are reading the KJ version, it says, "Thrones were cast down." this makes it a little more confusing as it seems like thrones are being cast out of Heaven. Instead, these thrones were established or put in place, not cast out.

The Ancient of Days is obviously God. Down in verse 13, we will see a distinct difference between the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. So, the Ancient of Days is indicating God the Father, not God the Son. Ancient of Days is also reinforcing that He has seen every single day. No one else can say that they or their God has created time and has been there since the beginning of everything we know.

There are only a few places where God's physical description is given. They are all very similar. Fiery appearance, white clothes, and white hair. In Exodus 33, God says, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

His throne was flaming with fire and flowing like lava. God's judgment is ferocious, and His power is endless. He is always working; the fiery wheels are always turning.

Thousands of angels surround Him, and the ten thousand times ten thousand is humanity standing before Him. As He opens the books, we know a few books this could have been any combination of, or it could have been all three. The Book of the Living, the Book of Remembrance, and the Book of Life.

(V 11-14) The little horn is the Antichrist; we know and understand that these things must happen for the prophecies to come true. This will be the transition from human rulers to a divine ruler. The previous beasts' reigns were cut down, but they were allowed to live past their empire. The final beast will not have that opportunity. The Son of Man will completely crush his empire. For a Christian, there is no better news than this: when Jesus comes back, He will reign forevermore. There will be a 1000-year period when Satan will be bound, followed by the new Heaven, which will last forever.

What does this mean for the unbelievers? If you have not trusted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, then like the Antichrist, your time will be up as well. There are some biblical truths that I feel I must share at this time.

The Bible is clear that there is only one way to an eternity in Heaven and it is through the blood of Jesus. No one knows when Jesus will return. It says, like a thief in the night, you will not have time to prepare for His coming. He has gone to prepare a place for us, so we must be ready and waiting for our bridegroom to return.

God is proving that He is not only in control over Daniel's time or Medo-Persian time, but He is sovereign over all rulers of the past, present, and rulers to come.

Jan 8: The Brazilian congressional palace was stormed after a new president took office. This did not make a difference. The new president did not give it to the old guy because they felt bad.

Jan 27: Trump gets his Facebook account back. This was great news; what would we do without the insightful post from our former president.

Feb 1: Tom Brady announces retirement. This one could have made a difference for you, but for me, it made no apparent change to my life.

Feb 2: The defense department announces they are tracking a Chinese spy hot air balloon.

Feb 3 Hazardous train derails. If you lived in Ohio, this was a big deal....if not, then probably not so much.

Feb 4: Airforce shot it down. Us following it made no difference, but shooting it down sent a message that we are not taking this mess. I feel like if it would have flown over Texas or East Tn it would not have made it 2 days.

Feb 12: Chiefs beat the Eagles in Superbowl 57. Again, before I read this I could not tell you who played in the Superbowl. No I do not know who is on tract to go this year either.

Mar 2 NASA sends astronauts from three countries to the space station for 6 months.

Apr, one of our sons graduated college. Big deal to us not so much for you all.

May 5: World Health Organization declares COVID-19 is no longer a global health emergency. Glad they finally decided what I had made my mind up on years ago.

Jun 18: civilian sub disappears. If you knew the five people who where in the sub then it was a detrimental event, if not then it marked off one thing from your bucket list.

Jun 26: my dad passed away. It is devastating when you see areas of your life and in your family where you could have shared the love of Christ better.

Aug 8 Wildfires in Maui. If it was hard on you... you will just have to find another place to vacation this year.

Oct 1 Jenn has put up being married to me for 13 years. For me, it is a great milestone; for her, it is another year to attempt without heavy meds.

Oct 8 Israel declares war on Palestine. Look out.

Nov 8 Vatican changes guidelines for baptisms for transgender and babies of same-sex couples. This just shows us how corrupt the Christian religion is. If this does not bother you, you may want to decide if you have a religion or relationship.

Dec 25: We celebrated the birth of our Lord and Savior, A wonderful day that should be celebrated more than just this day.

Dec 31 Freedom Fellowship looks to the future.