

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Daniel]

In Daniel’s vision the reality of Judgment Day is unavoidable, and perhaps with the vivid picture language it’s even a little bit scary.

To really understand what is going on here in Daniel’s vision we need to backup just a little bit and get some context.

- Daniel is living in exile in the land of Babylon.
- Because of her constant unfaithfulness, God sentenced Judah to be exiled to Babylon for 70 years.
- In the midst of those 70 years, Daniel and his associates had a lot of run-ins with the authorities.
- Remember how Daniel had been thrown in the lions’ den because he refused to pray to the king and only prayed to God? And yet God protected him.

During this time, God also sent many visions to Daniel, using a lot of imagery not unlike we find in the book of Revelation.

Many of them were glimpses of what was to come.

In chapter 2, Daniel received a vision of a great statue made of several pieces that depicted the current and upcoming world superpowers.

And again in Chapter 7, Daniel receives a similar vision.

He sees four beasts coming out of the sea,

- a winged-lion who would represent Babylon whose time in power was soon to end;
- a bear, a picture of the Medes and Persians who would overthrow the Babylonians and return Judah to Jerusalem and the surrounding area;
- a leopard with two sets of wings, who would be the swift moving Alexander the Great ushering in the Greek empire;
- and finally a beast that had no animal counterpart but was only described as being terrifying and having iron teeth, which would be none other than the Roman empire who would eventually stomp its way through much of the known world conquering everything in its path.

Why the emphasis on the coming world powers?

Because God's people are sitting in exile

- and they've been there long enough that it's easy to start to wonder if God really meant what he promised – His promise of bringing his people back home.
- It's easy to think that maybe he had forgotten about them,
- It's easy to think God was just a fable, an old wives' tale that has no basis in reality.

[Judgement]

Daniel's visions are, in part, a reminder that not only is God real, not only is God powerful, but everything that he's said is going to come to pass— even Judgment Day.

For as powerful as those four beasts were and for as terrifying each of them might have been in their own right, nothing even comes close to the description of God that we get here:

vv. 8-9: 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. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.

I don't know about you, but a man, gleaming white, sitting on a flaming throne, presiding over an entire river of fire is not someone or something I'd want to ever meet in my life.	And yet this is the God whom we will stand before in judgment. There's no avoiding it.
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Daniel's clear in his accounting here:

the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

There is going to be judgment taking place here.

When the Ancient of Days speaks, you listen;

when he judges, there's no going back on that judgment.

There are no appeals in God's court; all decisions are final.

And one of the worst things about this picture of God's judgment is that our conscience jumps up, wildly points its finger and says, "SEE?! I TOLD YOU SO!"

Our conscience is that voice
that reminds us to feel bad every time we've done something wrong.
Oh, we may try to silence that voice,
or dull it to the point that it doesn't really care what we do.

But in the end,
the conscience can read the law that God has written onto each of our hearts,
and it knows there's punishment for sin.

And so, when it sees a judge sitting on a throne over a river of fire the conscience
says, "YES THAT SEEMS ABOUT RIGHT!"

And the nauseating thing about what the conscience says is that it's right.

This is what we deserve! Not a break today! Not a silent, smooth ride.
God promised Adam and Eve that if they ate fruit from the forbidden tree,
they would certainly die.

And this fiery judge with his fiery judgment, this is the death that God had in mind.
Not a peaceful heart attack in sleep;
not a long, painful fight with cancer.
No, eternal death, everlasting suffering in the fires of hell.

To sin against the eternal God brings eternal punishment on that sinner.
And that's each and every one of us.

And so what do you say? What could you possibly do to change any of this?
There's not enough water in the universe to extinguish a flame like that.
There's no way to change our status.
We're guilty, and there's no plea bargain,
there's no way to bring the charges down to a misdemeanor.

In this court either you're perfect or you're not,
and if you're not – it means capital punishment.

And we see those powerful beasts, the nations who had ruled the world,
stripped of their power and their dignity.

Oh, some exist for a while, but the fourth beast especially is sent into that awful fire.

The Ancient of Days rules all things, bears all things and endures all things.

If not even the mighty Roman Empire can stand up against the authority of God, then what chance do we possibly have?

Daniel's clear in his accounting here:

the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

our deeds are recorded there,

and in them is recorded sin after sin after sin

that we cannot deny and that we cannot get away from.

There is nothing good in those books about us at all.

Or is there?

We're told that **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.**

This person is different from the four beasts that came before him
—as different as mankind is from the animals.

Who is this man that appears on these clouds and dares to approach the terrifying Ancient of Days and is even granted an audience with him?

This section of Daniel may not be super familiar to us,
but it certainly was to Jesus.

He referred to it over and over again.

In fact, it's one of the reasons that the Jewish leaders wanted him to be gone ...

because of this prophecy, and others like it,

foretelling the coming of one looking like a son of a man.

Jesus is the son of man who is wearing deceptive garb.

He has the appearance of a man and yet he is the glory of God – true man, true God.

These prophecies foretold the coming of the divine Messiah,

and in making use of that name,

referencing these events,

Jesus was not only claiming to be that long-promised Savior,

but even God himself.

For who could stand in the presence of the Ancient of Days
but someone who shared his holiness and his power?

In Daniel's vision, the son of man is given authority, unimaginable power.

The four beasts, powerful as they were, ruled for a finite time before the next
beast came up or before they were completely destroyed.

But this would not hold true for the son of man. Listen again:

**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.**

This is no new dictator, judge, and tormentor for sinners.

This son of man is the Savior of the nations.

This son of man is the one who would make peace –

peace between the sinful race of mankind and that imposing Ancient of Days.

This son of man will usher in an eternal era.

And he receives power and authority because he had completed his task.

[Conclusion]

That then turns Judgment Day on its head.

For your verdict is no longer guilty... but innocent!

Now, because of what Jesus, the Son of Man, has done for us,

when you look in those court records,

and when you find the pages of your sins, they are blank.

They've been blotted out, forgotten forever.

You see,

our verdict is not written in the sweat and strength that we've exerted in this life,
but in the blood of Jesus, our Savior.

And at this, the Ancient of Days smiles and

we realize that he is not the overbearing, terrifying judge that we had he feared.

He's OUR Heavenly Father,

whose flames of judgment have been completely extinguished.

In Jesus, there is no fear of hell from God, but only the embrace of his love.

Judgment day is real, is coming, and it will mean the beginning of everlasting life with our God ... who loves us, gave himself for us, and has made us holy.

In him... you are innocent! Thanks be to God! Amen.

You are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it! Amen!