



## **MAN V BEAST**

Yesterday I got the chance to watch a movie I've been waiting to see since end of 2023: *Godzilla Minus-One*.

Now, in case you know nothing about the past 60-years' worth of Godzilla movies, Godzilla is a Japanese pop-culture phenomenon, a celluloid way of dealing with the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The premise is this: nuclear tests in the Pacific result in the disturbing and mutating of a huge reptile. Taller than a skyscraper, it emerges from the sea off the coast of Japan and proceeds to destroy everything in its path. But the point of all this is to reflect human beings at their worst; to remind us of what can happen to us all. In short: we can become monsters.

Why open with this? Well, in today's chapter Daniel enters serious Godzilla territory. And makes a similar point.

## **Daniel 7**

At this point in the book there's a shift in style, one we've already had glimpses of, but now comes into its own. It's a style called 'apocalyptic', from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning 'to unveil.' Apocalypses typically use picture language to communicate a secret message to the reader. A code.

In this particular chapter, Daniel is troubled (vs15 and 28). In part because he realises things are not going to get better any time soon. But also, because he realises something about *himself*.

What does he see? In a nutshell: 4 bad things, 1 very good one!

**1) World at its worst.** Daniel has a vision of the sea, which in the Bible usually refers to the Mediterranean. But it can also be used as a metaphor, a symbol of the world (Psalm 65:7; Isaiah 57:20). That's the context here.

And this is no calm sea. This is a stormy, churning, unstable one. Because this is a world that has rejected God, and that makes it a chaotic place, where fear and uncertainty take over. Without God, we have no sense of where we've come from, where we're going to, why we're here, even who we are. And that can lead us to try to control as much as we can, no matter what that means for the rest of the world, or for the people around us.

But in spite of all that, the world has a future. Because there's one figure who is not confused. Who is not chaotic. Whose kingdom stands forever.

God Himself.

**2) Nations at their worst.** Out of the sea come 4 beasts, a picture of 4 successive empires that were scheduled to rise between Daniel's day and the coming of God's kingdom:

- A winged lion: Nebuchadnezzar II / Babylon.
- A lopsided bear: Cyaxares & Astyages / Media.
- A 4-headed leopard: Cyrus & successors / Persia.
- An indescribable beast: Alexander / Macedon.

Human history has been full of empires vying for a bigger piece of the pie. And every one of them, from the empires of the past to the empires of today, have used oppression / exploitation to get it (that goes for both East *and* West, by the way). What Daniel is saying is: if you treat people in an inhuman way, then that is what you become; if you act like an animal, then in God's eyes ... you *are* one.

God, however, calls His people to something higher. To *someone* higher.

**3) Individuals at their worst.** The last beast has 10 horns (matching the 10 toes in ch2), and these represent 10 kings. But then there's another, a little horn or insignificant king, who goes on to conquer the eastern Mediterranean.

Some think this is a reference to Rome (or even a revived Rome). But it makes more sense, especially in light of ch8, to see this as the Seleucids – the Greek rulers of Syria following the death of Alexander the Great – and eventually, 200 years later, a guy called Antiochus IV, who was so full of himself he called himself *Epiphanes*: 'God-Revealed.'

In a world where uncertainty reigns, where everyone lives for what they can get out of it, it isn't much of a step to put ourselves in the centre of things. These guys did it. And we do it, too. Problem is, we are not powerful enough to deserve it; humble enough to handle it.

There's only one who is, in fact!

**4) Sin at its worst.** Antiochus Epiphanes was the Adolf Hitler of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. He ruled everything between Turkey and Egypt and was guilty of some pretty horrific crimes, for “a time, times, and half a time” (3½ years). He was:

- Murderous (saw the death of 2 kings / killed 1).
- Blasphemous (placed a Zeus-statue in the temple).
- Oppressive (outlawed Judaism / persecuted Jews).
- Permissive (encouraged idolatry and immorality).

All pretty evil, yes? Yes. But again, this isn't just true of Antiochus – it's true of all of us. Well, I know it's true of me. Left to my own devices, I know I have a propensity for wrongdoing. And I reckon that, given the right (or wrong) set of circumstances, you could say the same. Like Antiochus Epiphanes, we are all fallen people.

But praise God, that's *not* the end of the story ...

**5) Jesus at His best.** Following all this chaos, Daniel has a vision of someone else – ‘One like a Son of Man’ – approaching the throne of God. And this person receives all power, all glory, and a kingdom that never ends.

‘Son of Man’ or *bar anash* in Aramaic is a Jewish way of referring to humanity in general (e.g. in Ezekiel), Israelite kings in particular (e.g. Psalms 8 and 80). But notice it says ‘*like* a Son of Man.’ This is no ordinary human – this is a *true* God-Man. Hence the gospels use this of one person in particular: Jesus.

But there's a twist. When Jesus finally arrived, instead of trampling the world, He allowed the world to trample Him. To redeem and restore it. As Tokyo missionary Roger Lowther puts it: “A broken world is healed by a broken Christ on a broken tree.”

And then, He rose from the dead to prove it.

### **What We Were Made To Be**

Daniel 7, then, is a reminder that the human race is not as it should be. Far from it. But it's also a reminder that one day, it will be – when Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’, brings everything to completion. In the meantime, He calls us to follow Him. Not in the footsteps of Godzilla, but in *His* footsteps.

Now if, like Daniel, you see monsters in the world but also in yourself, understand that this is the very reason Jesus died. He didn't die for the best about us (why would He need to?), but the worst. World at its worst. Nations at their worst. Individuals at their worst. Sin at its worst.

Jesus died to save us and transform us.

Jesus died for *monsters*.