

The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

Of Troubles (Near And Far)

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Daniel 12

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Introduction:

Well good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Daniel 12. I mentioned last Sunday that the last 3 chapters in the Book of Daniel – chapters 10,11 and 12 – together tell the story of the last and longest vision in the book. Chapter 10 contains the preamble – as I said, it might be the most interesting chapter in the entire Old Testament. We learn things in that chapter that are not taught in any other chapter of the Bible. There we discover that behind every delay and difficulty that we face down here – there is a corresponding conflict in the spiritual realm.

The throne room of God is not under siege. Before the throne of God – everything is as a sea of glass.

But beneath that peace – beneath that unassailable power and security – between heaven and us down here – in Daniel 10 we discover there is CONTEST. There is CONFLICT. There are battles and therefore – there may be difficulty and delay.

Things dispatched from heaven – may be contested and delayed in the spiritual realm – though never denied. God’s grace and God’s will press and sink through that opposition and inevitably produce the the outcomes that have been DECREED and RECORDED in the Book of Truth.

That’s what we learned last week in Daniel chapter 10.

Now as I mentioned, we aren’t planning to go through the minute details of the vision in Daniel 11 largely because it is essentially a further ZOOMED in version of the vision we already looked at in Daniel 8, which was itself a further ZOOMED in version of the dream that Daniel interpreted in Daniel 2. All of this retelling is featured in the Book of Daniel so as to acquaint us with the general paradigm and pattern of antichrist. Out of the chaos and conflict between two of the surviving Greek kingdoms, a little horn will emerge who manifests a particular demonic ANIMUS toward the people of God. He will oppose the Word of God and cast down the worship of God and for a season – a short, determined season – he will succeed. He will be given leash. And then, when his purpose has been served – when he has chastened, purified and tested the people of God – his leash will be withdrawn and he shall be thrown down and made desolate.

That’s the pattern and the paradigm and now here in chapter 12 we have the conversation and encouragement that was given to Daniel after the trauma of that revelation.

We’ll maintain the approach that we’ve made use of now for several weeks. We’ll walk through the passage at ground level then we’ll hop into our hermeneutical hot air balloon and survey the forest as a whole in order to make note of the various insights and instructions that it contains.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

The Time Of The End:

1 “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

Now let's pause and get our bearings – what is meant here by “At that time”. At what time? Are we talking about the time roughly 370 years from Daniel's time when the Old Testament antichrist shall arise and harass and harry the people of God or are we talking about the time much further down the road when the ULTIMATE antichrist shall arise and do the same?

Which of those great difficulties is here in view?

Many commentators, actually, believe that it is both. Tremper Longman III for example says:

“We are still dealing with a conflation of Antiochus and the greater terror that follows in the future”¹

Scholars refer to this as “prophetic telescoping”. We are looking at two events – brought together – that's what the word “conflation” means. This is a common prophetic device. In the old days you used to make a telescope by putting two magnifying glasses inside a rolled-up piece of stiff leather – so that by looking through those TWO LENSES you could see things that were very far away – that is exactly what this is! The CONFLATION of TWO SEPARATE EVENTS considered TOGETHER for maximum CLARITY.

So we're talking about the NEAR FUTURE tribulation under Antiochus IV Epiphanes AND the FAR FUTURE tribulation under the final and ultimate Antichrist.

We jump back into the text in the second half of verse 1:

But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

This is considered by many to be one of the most remarkable paragraphs in the entire Old Testament. W. Sibley Towner in his commentary on Daniel for example exclaims:

¹ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 287.

“There it is, the first and only unambiguous reference to the double resurrection of the dead in the entire Old Testament!”²

There are other hints and indications surely, but as Towner says, this is the first and only UNAMBIGUOUS reference to the double resurrection of the dead - some to everlasting happiness and some to everlasting contempt.

Now verse 2 says that “many shall awake” but most Old Testament scholars agree that the Hebrew word translated here as “many” generally means “all”. Joyce Baldwin for example says:

“the use of the word ‘many’ in Hebrew is not quite parallel with its use in English. Hebrew *rabbîm*, ‘many’, tends to mean ‘all’, as in Deuteronomy 7:1; Isaiah 2:2, where ‘all nations’ becomes ‘many peoples’ in the parallel verse 3; and in Isaiah 52:14, 15; 53:11, 12, where this key-word occurs no fewer than five times, with an inclusive significance.”³

So Daniel is being told that in the end, God shows up and he wipes ALL EVIL and ALL CAUSES OF EVIL off the board such that the righteous will shine in the kingdom of their father FOREVER.

Jesus repeats this teaching nearly word for word in Matthew 13. He says:

“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom **all** causes of sin and **all** law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matthew 13:40–43 ESV)

This is why you’ve got to take the long view brothers and sisters, because Old Testament and New, the Bible says that a complete upheaval and reversal is coming. The wicked shall be thrown down and the saints of God shall be raised up – and they will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father FOREVER - thanks be to God!

We jump back into the story at verse 4:

² W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel in Interpretation*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 166.

³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 226.

4 But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

The idea of “sealing” here means to write down and keep safe – because apparently, the usefulness of this vision will increase the closer we get to the end. And that certainly seems to be the case.

We jump back into the text at verse 5:

5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. 6 And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?” 7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.

So here we are told about a conversation between three heavenly messengers that Daniel was permitted to listen in on. One of the angels asks another of the angels, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?”

Now keep in mind, that the wonders in view here include overlapping realities - near history and far history - so this is a complicated question and it receives a complicated answer: “a time, times and half a time.”

Well to state the obvious, it would be difficult to enter that into your calendar. Tremper Longman again is helpful here, he says:

“The intention is not to give a precise time period but rather to indicate that just as wickedness seems to be gaining momentum, it will be slowed and then stopped. Such cessation will happen at a time of great distress, since it will be at the moment when the power of the holy people has been finally broken. Deliverance comes at the most unlikely time.”⁴

Are you hearing that?

⁴ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 286.

See, that's the beauty of symbolic language – only symbolic language can speak about two separate realities under one set of numerical terms.

That's what this. Its heaven saying: "It will last as long as it lasts and the second duration will be analogous to the first."

And that's useful because the tribulation under Antiochus IV Epiphanes lasted about 3.5 years. It was long – but it was not terribly long. And then when it had served its purpose – it was over fast. The leash was yanked, the idol fell and the reign of terror came to an abrupt and inglorious end. So shall it be IN THE FUTURE.

We jump back into the story at verse 8:

"I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?"⁹ He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end."¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.¹¹ And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.¹² Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.¹³ But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." (Daniel 12:8–13 ESV)

So Daniel doesn't fully understand – and Daniel doesn't get to fully understand!!

Hear that!

Heaven is not terribly concerned with the full extent of your understanding when it comes to these prophetic details. Andrew Hill says marvelously here:

"Full understanding of the vision is reserved until the time of the end".⁵

⁵ Andrew E. Hill, *Daniel in The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition Volume 8*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 210.

Full understanding will only be possible AFTER prophecy has become HISTORY – so don't waste your time trying to work out all the minute details.

Just do what you're told!!!

That's what the angel says to Daniel. He asks for further clarification and he is told simply to return to his post.

Life is going to go on Daniel – that's all you need to know. Many will purify themselves, make themselves white and be refined - that is to say that they will RESPOND APPROPRIATELY and IN FAITH to these particular challenges. The tribulation will do its work, Daniel. It will chasten and sanctify the saints while allowing the wicked to expose and condemn themselves.

And from the time of the abomination of desolation there will be 1290 days – which is just another way of saying 42 months or 3.5 years – or a year plus two years plus a half year - or a time, times and half a time. Meaning – they don't give him any more information they just repeat what has already been said.

The process will go on.

The end will be hard but not long.

And the outcome will be exactly as it has been ordained and recorded in the throne room of God.

So live your life and do your job.

“And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”
(Daniel 12:13 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

That is the end of the LAST and LONGEST vision in the Book of Daniel.

Insights And Encouragements

Now, as I said last week, this vision was given to provide insight and encouragement to God's people living and serving in troubled times. So let's zoom out, as it were and make sure that we've received the intended benefit of the text.

The most immediate take away I think is this – we need to understand that in the Providence of God, NEAR troubles can help us ANTICIPATE and PREPARE FOR FAR TROUBLES.

1. Near troubles can help us anticipate and prepare for far troubles

I mentioned last week, that I am convinced that part of what is going on NOW behind the scenes with respect to THIS PARTICULAR TRIAL is that God is graciously waking us up as a church and putting us back on a war time footing.

I suspect that in years to come we will look back on this event and declare it to have been the END OF PEACE TIME CHRISTIANITY – thanks be to God! Peace time Christianity is WEAK, FLABBY and CONFUSED.

In times of “WAR” Christians tend to limit themselves to the things that matter most.

In the 16th century – a century in which Europe and much of the world was wracked and ravaged by plague - Martin Luther said famously:

“After the preaching of the Gospel, the office and charge of a true and faithful pastor is to be mindful of the poor.”⁶

Those were simpler times weren't they?

But in the last 100 years or so things have changed – for pastors and for churches. We have bigger budgets, fewer urgent needs and most significantly of all, far higher standards and expectations.

⁶ Martin Luther, *Commentary On Galatians* a Modern English Edition, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 79.

We have a lot of plates in the air now – we have our fingers in a lot of pies – or at least we did before COVID-19.

And I wonder if this present crisis will result in a complete reevaluation of the pastoral task – and more importantly –in a complete reevaluation of our life and ministry as a church.

I wonder what we will consider DISPENSIBLE in 6 months time?

And I wonder if spending the next several weeks – or even months isolated together in family units won't REMIND MOM AND DAD that in fact they are primarily responsible AND PERFECTLY CAPABLE of discipling little Johnny and Susy.

I wonder if being DEPRIVED of the experience of face to face community won't have the effect of REAWAKENING our appetite for face to face community?

I wonder how much will change?

And I wonder whether or not one day not too long from now we will look back on this spring and summer of 2020 as the SEASON THAT RESUSCITATED and RECOMMISSIONED the evangelical church in North America?

I wonder if we will say that this was the year that God enrolled his people in the School of Affliction and gave them a crash course in focus, priority and simplicity?

And I wonder whether we will say that THIS CRISIS was the one that prepared us just in time for THAT CRISIS – THE CRISIS – the one that this crisis in Daniel was looking forward to?

You see – sometimes events have to be CONFLATED with other events before they can be fully understood and appreciated.

So who knows what lies ahead and who knows whether or not this present difficulty is really just a dress rehearsal for trials and tribulations in the future?

And that leads very naturally to the second thing I want you to see. I want you to understand that trajectories are not ultimate in the economy of God.

2. Trajectories are not ultimate in the economy of God

Now, of course, we should already know this just from watching the seasons. The average temperature in March in this city is 3 degrees – 3 degrees Celsius. The average temperature in April is 11 degrees. The average temperature in May is 18 degrees.

That's a steep curve!

That's an encouraging trajectory!

But if you live here then you know that it does begin to level off, doesn't it?

Just because there is a 500% increase in temperature between March and May doesn't mean that the temperature in July is going to be 107 degrees Celsius – thanks be to God, we'd all be dead.

Trajectory isn't destiny and history isn't linear for the simple reason that outside factors inevitably come into play.

Remember, this vision was given originally to encourage Daniel. Daniel was discouraged because of the difficulties and delays being faced by the Jerusalem delegation. They appeared to have hit a wall. Their progress was entirely stalled – but the vision says, “Daniel, settle down. There are many twists and turns in this story that have yet to be written. Things are going to get better, brother. And then worse – and then a lot worse. But then better again. And then worse and then really, really bad. But then all of the sudden – BETTER! Infinitely, entirely and eternally better, thanks be to God.”

Brothers and sisters, we above all people should know that history is not linear. As Bible readers we read every year about the downward trajectory of Old Testament history and then we see -

every time we turn the page to Matthew chapter 1 – how that trajectory was completely OBLITERATED and changed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That's what the Gospel is!

It is a nuclear BOMB dropped directly upon the arc of human history. You were DEAD in your trespasses and sins:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4–5 ESV)

That's the Gospel right there!

The Gospel is the Good News that trajectory is not destiny. God intervenes – he intervenes to save and he intervenes to sanctify, purify and preserve.

So – just because the church has been in a season of decline – and just because our culture has been cratering – and just because our friends and neighbours have been increasingly disinterested in the Gospel for the last 3 generations – does not mean that this state of affairs will continue indefinitely.

God knows how to stir the pot.

God knows how to rattle the cage.

God knows how to PENETRATE APATHY.

God knows how to CLARIFY PRIORITY

And God knows how to REFINE and RECONSECRATE the UNQUALIFIED.

In short, brothers and sisters, trajectory is not destiny – because God CONSTANTLY interrupts the game.

Hallelujah!

The third thing that I want you to see here is that:

3. How we respond to tribulation reveals our essential character and nature

Look at verse 10:

Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. (Daniel 12:10 ESV)

Do you see that? When trouble comes it affects people in a variety of ways.

Now remember, these three chapters are all telling one story. This is a unit and so we don't expect NEW CONTENT to be introduced here in the concluding section – and this is not new content.

Look back in your Bibles to Daniel 11:35. It says:

“some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.” (Daniel 11:35 ESV)

So all of these various trials and tribulations throughout history – right up until the end - have as their purpose to SHAKE and STIR the WISE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE. Some of God's people will be shaken and wakened unto salvation through this present trial – do you believe that brothers and sisters? I believe that with all my heart.

I believe that 10 years from now – 20 years from now should the Lord tarry, we are going to be hearing story after story and testimony after testimony from brothers and sisters who were shaken and stumbled by this present difficulty. They were wakened and shakened and rattled right to the

very gates of the Kingdom of God. They will say – “I was living my life and doing my thing with never a thought for eternity – and then a crisis struck and all of the sudden everything changed.”

Some of God’s people – some of the elect – are going to respond WISELY in this cultural moment. They’re going to realize their insecurity and they’re going to immediately take shelter under the blood of the Lamb. I’m praying for that. I’m praying for that to happen in China, Iran, Italy, America and Orillia, Ontario, Canada.

But even as I pray for that I am aware that:

“none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.”
(Daniel 12:10 ESV)

The Puritans used to say: “The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay”.

So expect to see both reactions to this present crisis. The church will be strengthened – and so will its stubborn despisers. What you won’t see much left of is the middle ground.

Each time the world shakes there are fewer and fewer undecideds after the dust settles.

Fourthly and lastly it is important for us to understand that every difficult season comes with an expiration date.

4. Every difficult season comes with an expiration date

Just like a good cook, God knows that fine line between heating things up and burning things down. He knows when to lengthen the leash and he knows when to pull it back in again. In Daniel chapter 11 verse 45 we were told:

And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him. (Daniel 11:45 ESV)

The Little Horn – the HATER and HARASSER of God’s people will make REMARKABLE PROGRESS! His victory will appear INEVITABLE and his ADVANCE will appear INCONTESTABLE! He will come half-way to destroying the people of God.

AND YET.

Out of the BLUE.

God will intervene and he shall come to a sudden end with none to help him.

That’s how the story ends in Daniel 11 and that’s how the story ends AGAIN, apparently in the next great cycle of lawlessness and tribulation. The Apostle Paul picked that pattern up from Daniel 11 and cast it forward into the ultimate future. He says in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:7–8 ESV)

Do you see that?

Things will simmer along for a while but then – the heat will be suddenly turned up!! The opposer of God’s people will be given permission and LENGTH OF CHAIN. The Lawless One – the Antichrist – will make remarkable progress. He will raise himself up and pitch his tent halfway up the mountain of Almighty God. And then – at the height of his arrogant ascent – the Lord Jesus will appear and he KILL HIM WITH THE BREATH OF HIS MOUTH.

And he too shall come to his end with no one to help him.

You see, every evil season comes with an expiration date. And there is encouragement in this passage even for those who don’t survive this particular season. The angel says:

“at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall

awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:1–3 ESV)

I love what Old Testament scholar Andrew Hill says here, commenting on the promise of “deliverance” in verse 1. He says:

“Understood in the context, the term suggests some of the Jews will be kept safe through the “time of distress”, while those who perish during the intense period of persecution will be rewarded with the “deliverance” of resurrection from the dead (v.2).”⁷

And that is the exact same promise that I can offer you today. If you are wise – if you respond to this crisis the way you should – by humbling yourself and making peace with God through the blood of the cross – then you will be delivered from the present distress. Some of you will be kept safe – I pray all of you will be kept safe – and some of you will be rewarded with the deliverance of resurrection from the dead.

That’s all I can say for sure – but what else do you really need to know?

Daniel asked if he could know more – in verse 8 he asked the messenger:

“O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?” (Daniel 12:8 ESV)

You’re probably wondering the very same thing – but all I have for you is what the angel said to Daniel:

Go your way.

You’ve already heard enough. Over the last 3 months we’ve been told that God is large and in charge. He has a plan. He knows how to protect, promote and preserve his people. He’s playing a long game and he is using every single tool in his toolbox. He’s going to shake things up and

⁷ Andrew E. Hill, *Daniel* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition Volume 8*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 205.

knock things down – but don't you worry brothers and sisters because all things WILL WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD for those who are called according to his purpose.

So go your way.

Be wise.

And turn many toward the path of righteousness.

And when this is all over – however it ends for you – be assured of this: you will arise from the dust and shine like the stars in the kingdom of your Father – forever.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.