

Series Daniel

Scripture Daniel 11:21-12:13

Today is the last session we will have in the book of Daniel. This is our day to review, summarize, and wrap up several important strands of information, as well as cover the last chapter. Let me begin by putting the book of Daniel into a big picture context.

When God called Abram out of his home country and relocated him in the land of Palestine, it was for a specific reason. It was God's intention to raise up a unique people group from Abram's descendants so that they would be His witnesses to all the other people groups on earth. God unilaterally promised to guide and bless these descendants of Abram, who was later renamed Abraham, if they would trust Him and follow His ways. The plan was for the Hebrew people to be spiritual "lights to the Gentiles." They were to be priestly guides to lead the Gentiles out of the darkness of paganism back into a relationship with the Almighty God of Creation.

God revealed His presence and power to the ancient Israelites on numerous occasions. There was no doubt in the minds of the Israelites that they were chosen and called. They appreciated the favor and protection of God but they were often disobedient and did not fulfill their covenant responsibilities. Their inclination toward rebellion manifested itself shortly after their rescue from slavery in Egypt, and that tendency continued to be part of their national character through the centuries. God attempted to keep His chosen people in step with His ways so that they would be the kind of witnesses He wanted them to be. For example, He often disciplined them through adverse circumstances in His efforts to get them to stay focused on Himself, but they persisted in their rebellious ways, and the day came when God changed His approach.

Because the Jewish people had failed as the covenant people of God, forsaking their responsibility to manifest the Name of the Most High God to the Gentile nations, God placed them under the domination of the Gentiles. The "times of the Gentiles" became God's method of disciplining His chosen people. This method began with Nebuchadnezzar and, as we learned in the vision of the four empires, Gentile domination will not be concluded until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Daniel was given the responsibility to make God's method of discipline known to the Jewish people and, by extension, to all of God's followers. Through the study of Daniel's writing, God's people are able to recognize what God is doing. Individuals who are spiritually "wise" become aware that God is in control of history even though their circumstances might be negative and difficult.

In Daniel's lifetime, God made His presence and influence known in several ways: through the interpretation of dreams, the rescue of Jewish men from a blazing furnace, the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, from the granting of the decree which permitted Jews to return to their homeland, and in the protection of Daniel in the lion's den. These examples in the early chapters of the book revealed the pattern of God's activity

In the second part of the book, Daniel was given information about God's ongoing involvement in future events. The prophecies were given for two purposes: to provide assurance to future generations of Jews that God was in sovereign control of their lives, and second, to remind them that God was holding them accountable for their actions. The assumption was that individuals who had access to Daniel's writings and who were spiritually "wise" would understand God's expectations and how He had planned out the future so that His expectations would eventually be met.

God's sovereignty was proven as each detail revealed to Daniel was fulfilled and accomplished. Most of chapter 11 was focused on the 370 or so years immediately after Daniel's death. We can recognize from our vantage point in history that God has proven His determination to shape the attitudes of His people through His method of discipline.

We might assume that enough prophecy has already been fulfilled to cause both Jews and Gentiles to recognize that God is resolute and unrelenting in His ways, but, unfortunately, only those who have become spiritually wise understand this. Only those who are spiritually wise gain the confidence and hope that God will successfully bring to pass all the other events that He said would happen.

The first readers of the writings of Daniel were probably the Jews living in Babylon and those who had recently returned to their homeland from exile. All of these people should have been encouraged by the theme of God's sovereignty over the nations on Israel's behalf even though Daniel made it clear in his writings that Israel would be under constant threat and persecution.

The Jews who returned to their homeland should have recognized that they had a bright future based on God's covenant promises, if only they would be wise enough to keep their lives "refined, purified, and spotless."

The book of Daniel should also have been especially meaningful to those who lived during the time of the oppression and persecution of Antiochus, but, as we read last week, apparently only a small number of the Jews repented and turned back to God during that difficult time. Hopefully the Jews who will be living near the end of the age will be eager to read from Daniel's book since many of the prophecies he wrote about are of concern to the circumstances of that time.

Last week we learned about Antiochus, the ruler who severely persecuted the Jews in the second century BC. The last verses of chapter 11 then transitioned to a ruler who would come after Antiochus, a ruler who would be much more cruel in his treatment of the Jews than Antiochus. We were originally introduced to this second individual in chapter 7. We learned that he would be a product of the fourth and last of the world empires. We learned that he would inflict his mischief on the earth in the very last days of human history, just before God would intervene and bring all oppressive human governments to an end.

Last week I skipped over the angel's description of this future evil ruler, but I want us to think a little bit about him today.

Read Daniel 11:36-12:13

The first statement about this future ruler is that he "will do as he pleases." This king will not be subject to any higher human authority. The fact is that "He will exalt and magnify himself above every god" recognized by humans and will even go so far as to "say unheard-of things against the God of gods." This ruler will consider himself to be super human. He will "go where no man has gone before" in terms of arrogance, pride, and blasphemy. He will position himself to be the center of attention of all people and demand worship and respect from everyone.

Verse 37 indicates that he will not have any regard for the values of his ancestors, or women, or any god. In other words, he will have no interest in the traditions of his culture and ethnic heritage, but, rather, will "magnify himself above them all." He will, essentially, trade his birthright for a radically different kind of orientation.

Verse 38 explains that he will pursue power and strength with all the passion of a religious fanatic, even though he will not be a religious person in the normal sense of the meaning. He “will honor a god of fortresses” and will invest incredible resources in order to build up places of strength — that is, citadels of power.

Verse 39 explains the driving force behind this ruler. He will have the help of a foreign god, the “god of fortresses.” Other portions of Scripture indicate that this ruler will have the backing and support of evil spiritual beings, even the devil himself. Satan will empower this ruler and use him in an effort to eliminate every godly influence which would rival his own. Notice how Satan and the ruler encourage evil behavior: people who acknowledge them — those who submit themselves to their evil ways, will be rewarded for their actions. It will be an appalling time on earth. Benefits and blessings will be showered on evil doers while, at the same time, severe persecutions will be inflicted on the Jews and the followers of God.

The information given in verses 36 through 39 describe the general orientation of this last human king. Beginning in verse 40 there is a description of several specific activities in which this ruler will be engaged. The ruler will engage in many battles, and he will be successful in all his undertakings until he prepares for the final battle. Among the territories which the evil ruler will invade will be “the Beautiful Land,” the land of the Jews. Verse 44 states that reports from far away will alarm him, and, in a great rage, he will “pitch his royal tents” in the midst of Israel, between the Mediterranean and Dead Seas, near the holy mountain on which sits Jerusalem. This will be the place where he takes his stand against opposing forces.

Now we transition into chapter 12. This time of preparations for battle is declared to be “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” This time of intense distress is the context in which “Michael, the great prince who protects Daniel’s people, will arise” to do his special work. Michael will have the responsibility to protect those whom God has predetermined should be delivered. Everyone among those “whose names are found written in God’s book, will be delivered.”

There is a fast pace in the way the prophecies are announced at the end of this book. The preparations for battle, the demise of the ruler, the deliverance of the Jews by Michael, the awakening of those who have died — these announcements come pouring out of the mouth of the angel in rapid fire sequence, pointing to the application in verse 3.

The people who successfully cope with the distress at the end of the age will not be those who have the most endurance and courage, but those who are “wise.” “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens.” The word for “wise” also applies to those who share their wisdom with others. “Those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.” Taken together, these statements indicate that wise people have knowledge of God and His ways. The “wise” among God’s people will be those who believe and obey the words of God and have been active in persuading others to turn to and be faithful to God.

Obviously, individuals who are identified as the people of God might pay for their faith with their lives. Antiochus sought to eliminate such people. The evil ruler at the end of the age will be even more determined to wipe out God’s faithful followers. Scripture indicates that laying down one’s life for God is not foolishness and that there is no wisdom in denying God in the hopes of preserving one’s life. Jesus stated this truth this way: “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it” (*Luke 9:25*). People who are spiritually wise will do what pleases God even if their actions lead to physical and emotional abuse and martyrdom.

The wording in verse 4 seems to indicate that the interaction between the angel and Daniel was finished. Daniel understood that his people were going to have some rough times in the future, but he had received a basic assurance that everything would ultimately turn out OK. He had learned that God was committed to the preservation of His people even though He was obligated to discipline them, that God would remain firmly in control of human history, and that the “times of the Gentiles” would eventually come to an end. Daniel undoubtedly had many more questions, but at the end of verse 4 it seemed that he would not have the opportunity to ask them.

So it was probably a surprise to him that two additional angelic beings suddenly appeared, and one of them asked an important question which may have also been on Daniel's mind: "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" From the content of the answer which was given, we understand that the question concerned the oppressive actions of the evil ruler at the very end of the age. How long would be the period of intense distress just before Michael rises up to deliver God's people? The answer, "It will be for a time, times, and half a time." Almost all commentators agree that this statement indicates one year plus two years plus one-half year. From the answer, we can assume that the period of intense persecution and turmoil will be three and a half years or about 1260 days.

The next part of the answer indicates when the condition under which the distress will end: "All things will be completed when the power of the holy people has been finally broken." This is a very significant statement. This statement must be considered in the context of the main sub-theme of this book, the "times of the Gentiles." The thrust of this statement is that persecution will continue as long as it takes for the power of the Jews to be broken. In other words, the domination of the Jews by Gentiles will end when the Jews end their rebellion against Yahweh — when they call out to Him, and genuinely yield themselves to Him. When we fit the two parts of the answer in verse 7 together, we conclude that three and a half years of intense persecution and distress will be necessary before the surviving Jews finally, after many centuries of resistance, give up their stubborn self-sufficiency. This will be the moment that God has been waiting for since the time of Nebuchadnezzar. When the Jews collectively, genuinely turn to their covenant God, that's when Michael has the freedom to swing into action to deliver them.

I hope you recall some of our thoughts from the previous message. We said that God permitted all kinds of bad things to happen to His people down through the centuries. His purpose has been to get the Jewish people to end their persistent attitudes of rebellion and disobedience and to turn back to Him in dependence, sincerity, and purity of faith. In spite of the cycles of disobedience in the Old Testament, in spite of the episodes of oppression by individuals like Antiochus and armies like those of Rome, in spite of the Inquisition in the Medieval Ages and the Holocaust during World War Two, the overall attitudes of the Jews have not changed and apparently they will not change until the great distress at the end of the age. At that time, the historical attitudes of the nation of Israel will, at last, be "broken," and God will be able to restore His covenant relationship with them, and the "times of the Gentiles" will come to an end.

Daniel, like us, wanted more information. The words of verse 7 must have confused him. He said that he heard the words but did not understand. His question in verse 8 was not about time; it was about the “outcome” of the “breaking.” Literally, Daniel wanted to know about the “last part of the time of the end.” I think His question could be paraphrased, “What is God going to do after everything is completed?”

Daniel was not permitted to know the answer to his question. The explanation involved words which were closed up and sealed “until the time of the end.” In other words, there are aspects of what God will do, and how He will do it, that will not be known until they happen. We know from other passages of Scripture that Jesus will return with His saints to wipe out all evil opposition, and that He will set up His kingdom with His throne in Jerusalem. The angel was not permitted to get into these details with Daniel.

What Daniel needed to remember was given in verse 10: There will be, throughout all the years of history, those who “will become purified, spotless, and refined.” Back in chapter 11 these verbs were identified with individuals who were spiritually wise. During the persecutions inflicted by Antiochus, many of the Jews had a change of heart toward God, and they experienced cleansing, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal. Daniel was assured that there would be others who would have a similar experience. I think Daniel was perceptive enough to realize that such spiritual changes would probably happen only after God had softened the minds of people through His method of discipline. After all, people most often think about God in times of personal crisis.

In contrast to the individuals who would come to experience a relationship with God, wicked people would continue to be wicked because they would never come to understand the truth about God and His ways. Only “those who are wise will understand.”

The angel announced that Daniel would “rest.” This word “rest” might be a reference to death since the remainder of verse 13 speaks of his “rising to receive his allotted inheritance.” However, I think the word “rest” also refers to the freedom from anxieties that Daniel should have concerning the future of his people and concerning any confusion he would have as a result of the angel’s statements.

I think the angel was saying to him, “Don’t be anxious concerning what you have been told. Everything is in God’s hands. He knows what needs to be done. You should be satisfied with what you do understand, and must not agonize over what cannot be made clear to you at this time. Be obedient to all that has been revealed to you. Keep your confidence and hope centered on God and everything will turn out well for you.”

And of course, that is perfectly good advice for all of us who are followers of God.