

Chapter 52 Daniel 7-12

Daniel's Prophecy of the End

“There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” Daniel 12:1-3

Daniel's memoirs indicate that his dreams and visions preceded his well-known stories. His dream of four vicious beasts came in the first year of Belshazzar's reign in 550 B.C. and his dream of a ram and a goat takes place in Belshazzar's third year. Daniel's prayer, recorded in chapter 9, is dated during the first year of Darius' reign, 539 B.C. His vision of a man and the revelation of the kings of the south and the north came in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, 536 B.C. (Cyrus is either synonymous with Darius or his superior). The stories and visions are not only linked by date but by theme.

The Book of Daniel is divided in two, but the stories and visions share the same truths. God is sovereign; he will accomplish his purposes and save his people. Even in a world of unimaginable evil, God is in control and will prevail. The immediate present and the distant future interface in the sovereign will of God. The end of the world was on Daniel's mind. The God of Daniel is the personal Savior who delivers his own from the fiery furnace and the lions' den, and he is the Lord of the Nations who will declare his salvation among the nations and bring a just and righteous end to history. The horror of human evil will cease and the victory of God will be established. We believe these are not only true stories but true visions.

When Christians today speak of *vision* they often have in mind a business plan for the church. *Vision* is a five year plan for increasing numbers, enlarging facilities, promoting programs, adding staff, and providing more parking. But that is not the kind of vision that Daniel experienced. His dreams and visions were filled with horrific images of evil and glorious images of judgment and deliverance. Christians who have a secular marketing plan idea of vision tend to ignore Daniel's apocalyptic visions altogether or else they go wild with the text and read it as a futuristic scenario for modern day nations. They treat Daniel's visions as some kind of futuristic jig-saw puzzle or end-times calculus problem.

Other Christians see Daniel's visions as a highly imaginative literary creations. These so-called prophecies are really parables or allegories that Daniel thought up on his own, using his creative ingenuity and drawing from literary models in his culture. Daniel didn't really dream dreams and see visions. An angel by the name of Gabriel never came to him and spoke to him. He didn't actually receive a vision of a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold and a body of topaz and a face like lightning. He created all of this out of his own imagination in order to communicate the truth of God's sovereign control. A pseudonymous Daniel used fiction the way

any novelist or poet might use fiction to present truth. He was never actually told to seal up these prophecies “until the time of the end.” He just made it all up to promote certain ideas. This perspective has become so pervasive that biblical scholar Joyce Baldwin writes,

“With regard to prophecy as foretelling, the church has lost its nerve. An earthbound, rationalistic humanism has so invaded Christian thinking as to tinge with faint ridicule all claims to see in the Bible anything more than the vaguest references to future events. Human thought, enthroned, has judged a chapter such as Daniel 11 to be history written after the event, whereas God enthroned, the one who was present at the beginning of time and will be present when time is no more, may surely claim with justification to ‘announce from of old the things to come’ (Isa 44:7).” (Baldwin, 184-185).

Between these two extremes, there is a more humble and trusting approach to the prophecies of Daniel. We opt for a hermeneutic of submission over either suspicion or speculation. We accept the text as a description of Daniel’s actual experience and we seek to understand his prophecies without reading into them our own speculation. This approach takes seriously the apostle Peter’s spiritual direction, when he said, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Instead of seeing the last six chapters of the Book of Daniel as a collection of independent visions, dreams and interpretations, we see the conclusion as one great symphony of meaning. The score is best played and heard in its entirety rather than broken up in pieces and dissected. Each section builds on the next and is carried along by a momentum of truth. Even though Daniel’s visions took place over a span of fourteen years, the rhythm of these revelations was never very far from his mind. Daniel didn’t have a iPod connected to his ear, but he heard the dark and foreboding down-beat of evil and the bright pulsating melodies of hope everywhere he went. He was in tune with the big picture of God’s will. He was fully apprised of the dimensions of evil, comforted by God’s definite timing, and repentant of his own sin and that of his people’s. He was spared delusions of triumphalism because he was immersed in the centering reality of God’s rule and redemption. This was the symphony playing in Daniel’s heart and it gave him the courage to stand before the kings of Babylon and Persia with courage and confidence.

The End of Evil

The first vision consisted of four great beasts who emerge from a chaotic ocean driven by winds coming from all directions. There was a lion with eagle’s wings and a human mind, a flesh eating bear chomping on three ribs, a fast moving double-winged, four-headed leopard, and “a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful.” Each beast seems successively more hideous and cruel and vaguely reminiscent of the four parts of Nebuchadnezzar’s nightmare vision of a great statue (chapter 2). The number four—four winds, four beasts, four wings, four heads, and the fourth beast, represent evil’s all encompassing reality.

In Daniel’s vision, history is not getting better, it’s getting worse. The devolution of man’s inhumanity to man is terrifying. Daniel’s attention is focused on the ten-horned fourth beast that

“crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.” Among the ten horns, Daniel’s attention is drawn to a “little horn” that had “eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.”

Nightmares always end in terror, however in Daniel’s vision hope is the final truth. His attention is drawn to the Ancient of Days, whose purity is symbolized by his white robes, white hair and his flaming throne. Evil has met its match. The accelerating intensity and ascendancy of evil will be cast down. The boastful beast will be destroyed in the river of blazing fire. But wait there is more. Daniel explains,

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me as one like a son of man (a human being), coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (7:13-14).

This is the part of the vision that jumps out at us because Jesus used Daniel’s words to describe his coming. Not only did Jesus see himself as the Psalm’s Innocent Sufferer (Psalm 22) and Isaiah’s Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53), he saw himself as Daniel’s Son of Man (Daniel 7:13). We look back and are inspired by the history of the crucified and risen Christ, but we must also look ahead and be inspired by the vision of the coming Christ. “This great hope protects the church from all other futurisms, utopias, or dreams of the world’s destiny. . . Only the Coming of Jesus for Judgement can vindicate the divine silence over so much world evil” (Bruner, Matthew, vol.2, 513).

Our understanding of Daniel’s prophecies is not limited to what Daniel understood. He struggled to comprehend what he envisioned, because he prophesied better than he knew. His vision of the Ancient of Days bringing evil to a final end was not the complete picture. One like a son of man was included in this picture of the end, which must have raised all sorts of questions in his mind. Who is this person who is critical not only to the end of evil, but to the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdom of the Lord? Did this glimpse of the son of man remind him of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and “the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands” that destroys the kingdoms represented by gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay (Daniel 2:45)? Who is this Rock? Who is this Son of Man? Daniel’s visionary vagueness has now been eclipsed by the revelation of Jesus, the Incarnate One, so that his visions make even more sense to us than they did to him. What he saw as a distant hope is better understood in the light of Jesus’ first coming and futurist teaching.

The Time of the End

Two years later Daniel received another vision. Through his praying imagination he found himself in “the citadel of Susa,” located 200 miles east of Babylon, a city destined to become the center of the Persian Empire (Nehemiah 1:1). This time, instead of an ocean spuing out hybrid monsters, Daniel has a vision of a two-horned ram and a single-horned goat. For a time the ram had free reign until the goat suddenly flew across “the whole earth without touching the ground”

and attacked the ram, shattering its horns. Then the goat's single horn was replaced by four prominent horns which "grew up toward the four winds of heaven." According to the interpretation given to Daniel, the scope of this second vision includes the kings of the Media and Persia (a two-horned ram) followed by the kings of Greece (a goat). The history envisioned in Daniel's prophecy encompasses Alexander the Great's swift conquest from Italy to India, and the division of his empire into four parts. It also predicts Antiochus IV, the stern-faced king and master of intrigue, who desecrated the Jerusalem temple in 167 B. C. But there is much more behind this vision than can be explained by the history of Antiochus Epiphanes. The trajectory of evil launches forward and encompasses a global perspective. The historical Antiochus may be a paradigm for this reign of terror, but not even he can be said to fully accomplish what is described here:

"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty warriors, and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes."

The escalation of evil is so great that it reaches "the host of the heavens" and the supernatural power of this rebellious king is compared to that of "the commander of the army of the Lord." Evil prospers everywhere and truth is thrown to the ground.

The question at the heart of this vision is raised, not by Daniel, but by "a holy one:" "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?" (8:13). This compounded list of catastrophes adds up to the worst possible situation for the people of God. When will this awful day occur? When will the people of God receive the full brunt of this evil rebellion against the Lord? The answer comes back, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

Is this a literal number that describes 2300 days of persecution or a symbolic number that defines the limit to the persecution that will come at the end? We are told that this number "concerns the distant future" (8:26). This same period of time seems to be referred to in the first vision, when the fourth and final king will "speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws." Daniel is informed, "The holy people will be delivered into his hands for *a time, times and half a time*" (7:25). Some have interpreted this enigmatic phrase to mean three and half years ("one year, two years, and half a year"). Perhaps this is a literal reference to Antiochus Epiphanes' reign of terror in Jerusalem (168-165 BC) or a literal reference to the future time of the Antichrist. However, the phrase literally reads a "year, years, and a half a year" which reinforces the notion that the persecution is contained within a definite time period, but retains the sense of mystery that surrounds this time of the end.

The remaining references to time throughout Daniel's prophecy reinforce the idea that the Lord has set limits on the time of persecution *and* retained sovereign control over the time of the end which no human being knows. Set boundaries and open-ended

mystery characterize the end—the end of sin, the end of persecution, and *the end of the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people*. In response to Daniel's prayer, Gabriel introduces a third way of designating the time of the end: "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place" (9:24).

This compounded list of blessings parallels the compounded list of catastrophes referred to earlier (8:13). Prompted by his Bible reading in Jeremiah (25:11-12; 29:10), Daniel turned to the Lord in repentance for Israel's sins and in supplication for an end to the punishing 70 year exile. Gabriel was sent to answer Daniel's prayer, but in a way that Daniel never would have expected. The end of the seventy-year exile begins a new era that will last for seventy "sevens," or weeks of years. Daniel is instructed to look out on a whole new horizon of fulfillment, not just the end of the Babylonian captivity, but the very end of sin and the new Holy of Holies. The number can be understood literally as 490 years, but the way it is said seems to underscore its symbolic character. Seven multiplied by ten, combines two numbers of completeness. The number seems to be based on Leviticus 25:8 and the description of the Year of Jubilee as "seven times seven years" (49 years). This history of seventy "sevens" is divided into three phases, described as *seven 'sevens'* then, *sixty-two 'sevens'*, followed by *one 'seven'*. Within these three periods Jerusalem is rebuilt, the Anointed One is put to death, and intense persecution brings about utter desolation.

In his end times sermon Jesus drew on Daniel's vision: "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand. . . . For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (Mt 24:15-21). Does Daniel's description of "the abomination that causes desolation" refer to the pagan altar that Antiochus Epiphanes built atop the altar of burnt offering in 168 B.C.? Does Jesus' reference to the abomination of desolation refer to the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD.? As awful as these atrocities were, they do not live up to the catastrophic events that will come at the end when evil will have free reign. Daniel's prophecy sees evil building to an horrendous climax, under the leadership of one who is variously described as the imposing horn (7:20), a master of intrigue (8:23), and a tyrannical king (11:36). The abomination of desolations corresponds to the defeat of holy people (7:22), the destruction of true worship, the total collapse of God's moral order (7:25), the dragging of truth through the mud (8:12), the success of deceit (8:25), astounding devastation (8:24), and a last stand against the Prince of princes (8:25). The end "will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (12:1) and the "power of the holy people" will have been "finally broken" (12:7).

The time of the end remains a pressing question and a mystery right through to the conclusion of the book. In Daniel's final vision he saw two heavenly beings on either side of the river and one of them says to the man clothed in linen, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" And the man clothed in linen solemnly announced, "It will be for a time, times and half a time" (12:7). This is the same reference to time that Daniel heard in his first vision which

he received thirteen years earlier (7:25). Nothing has changed and this much is certain, God is in control! Evil times are limited. Hold on to what you have! God has it all figured out right down to the number of days. “From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days” (12:11). This appears to be the fourth unique way of referring to the time of the end and once again we have an absolute time line shrouded in mystery. Perhaps these are the final days that finish off what is implied in seventy sevens’ (490 years). This 1,292 days is the final stretch of the final days, and even that is extended to 1,335 days. Daniel’s experience confirms what the apostle Peter said, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

The time of the end, that is the end of evil climaxed by “a time of distress”, is contrasted with a double resurrection. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2). All that has been said about time is set in contrast to the promise of everlasting life and the judgment of everlasting death. The significance of these symbolic numbers, *2300 days, seventy sevens’, a time, times, and half a time, and 1335 days*, can be seen as relatively short in the light of eternity. Now is the time to act. Jesus said, “The time has come. . .The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15). The author of Hebrews reminds us, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 4:7). We were meant to be impressed by the immediacy of the end of evil and the coming of judgment and salvation, but we were not meant to know when. Jesus said it plainly, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come” (Mk 13:32-33). Instead of speculating on dates, we should be putting on the “full armor of God, so that [we] can take our stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph 6:10).

The War to End all Wars

Daniel received a third and final vision in 536 BC in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia. This time the prophecy, which parallels the second vision of the ram and goat, is described in such intricate detail that some have concluded that the narrator is chronicling the past rather than predicting the future. Nowhere else in the Bible is predictive prophecy as detailed as it is here (Baldwin, 184). Either Daniel’s third vision is an elaborate fiction or a detailed prophecy. He was either told the truth about the rise and fall of the Persian, Greek and Egyptian armies, hundreds of years before these events took place, or somebody in the second century before Christ used Daniel’s name to rewrite history as prophecy. The larger question may be stated this way: Do we believe that history in all of its complexity and contingency is fully known by the Lord of the nations? Prophecy is the way that God has chosen to let us know that he knows. God is not surprised by the sudden rise to power of evil tyrants, nor should we. Secret alliances, betrayals, lies of deception and boastful propaganda do not catch God off guard. In the sweep of history, kings and queens come ago, empires rise and fall, but evil’s days are numbered. History assigns names and dates to events made known to Daniel centuries before. The escalation of evil fits a devastating pattern that takes its toll on the people of God. Antiochus’ atrocities are a prototype of the Antichrist. In every generation “those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time

they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered” (11:33).

If we are skeptical about predictive prophecy, how will we accept the even deeper insight that there are spiritual forces at work behind the forces of evil that history describes? As it was explained to Daniel, the source for this off-the-charts trajectory of evil goes beyond human power. The fourth beast that devours the whole earth (7:23), and the fierce king who “becomes very strong, but not by his own power” (8:24), implies spiritual forces that are supernatural. This is confirmed by the behind-the-scenes description of the cosmic battle raging between divine and demonic forces. The divine being speaking to Daniel in the third vision said that he was delayed in coming to Daniel for twenty-one days because “the prince of the Persian kingdom” resisted him. He was not able to come until Michael, “one of the chief princes,” helped him (10:13). Tremper Longman writes: “We must be careful not to speculate on the hints the Bible gives us, but that there are spiritual powers, good and bad, behind the various human institutions is a truth taught in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well” (251).

What is even more intriguing than this final all-out war is the person who breaks this news to Daniel and reveals the end of evil. This concluding prophecy (10-12) is framed by “the man clothed in linen.” He is the Alpha and the Omega of this closing vision, and given this cosmic spiritual battle, we might have expected a warrior. But the description fits a priest better, and not just any priest, but the High Priest. Daniel need not have worried about all those pre-empted sacrifices, because the once and for all sacrifice was to be given by this great High Priest. He was robed in white linen, with a golden sash. “His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude” (10:5-6). Living in the light of the apostle John’s revelation, Christians immediately think of his vision of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:12-16). Daniel was convinced of this person’s humanity, which he stressed (10:5,16,18; 12:6,7), but he responded to him as he would have to God. The vision of the man rendered Daniel “deathly pale” and “helpless” and, apart from the heavenly being’s touch, he would have remained in a deep sleep, flat on his face. Everything that the man dressed in linen says and does reminds us of Jesus. His reassuring greeting sounds like Jesus, “Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you” (10:11). His admonition, “Do not be afraid” sounds like Jesus. His touch, first on Daniel’s lips and then on his body, reminds us of Jesus’ healing touch in the gospels. His words of challenge and comfort, “Peace! Be strong now; be strong” bears striking resemblance to Jesus’ imperatives. Even Daniel’s mini commissioning at the end, “Go your way till the end,” recalls Jesus’ Great Commission.

In the light of the Incarnation and revelation of Jesus Christ, we cannot help but conclude that “the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands,” and destined to crush the kingdoms of the world (2:45), is none other than Jesus. Might it also be true that the fourth man in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, is Jesus? If he looked like “a son of the gods” to Nebuchadnezzar, may he not be the Son of God? Did Daniel see the connection between “one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven,” and “the man clothed in linen,” who has the last word in the Book of Daniel—the word of promise? It seems fitting that the one who

promised Daniel “rest” and an “inheritance” is the very same one who said “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28); the very one who said, “I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10).

Faithful to the End

Daniel is not only a model for how to live in exile but how to live in the end times. His willingness to enter into the hard work of spiritual insight and warfare, in spite of its requisite emotional trauma is an example to us. His troubled soul ached for understanding; his disturbed mind sought out greater insight. There is a form of pseudo peace happily borne by the complacent and the indifferent, but real peace is forged in those who place their trust in God. Only God can endue us with the confidence, comfort and courage that we need to live in a culture of escalating evil.

Daniel’s prayer of repentance (chapter 9) is an example of how to subsume our interests and concerns under the Body of Christ and the global church. Daniel saw himself embedded in the community of God’s people. True to his Hebrew heritage and his biblical self-identity, his personal story was part of a much larger salvation history story. The most appropriate prayer for the Book of Daniel to record was a prayer of confession. Daniel’s prayer begins, “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong” (9:4-5). Far from boasting of any ethnic privilege, Daniel confessed the sins of his people. His prayer is a reminder to us that there is no place for triumphalism in the church. Those who pray by the Holy Spirit in the spirit of Daniel will not impose their will on others, but humbly and graciously look to God for their forgiveness and salvation.

The man clothed in linen concludes the prophecy by reminding Daniel of three important points. First, he stressed the confidentiality of the report. “But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.” In other words, “This is for your eyes and ears only. Keep it secret. Put the book under lock and key until the end. In the interim there is going to be a lot of frantic running around, trying to figure out what’s going on” (The Message, 12:4). That which Daniel was told to seal up, the apostle John was told to open up. The time of the end commenced with the coming of Christ, his life, death and resurrection. But even so, revelation about the end times makes sense only to believers. Those who would use it as the leading edge of an evangelistic outreach, perhaps ought to reconsider how they speak of the end times. If Daniel was told to keep it secret, we should at least handle it with respectful reserve.

Second, the man clothed in linen emphasized the sober reality of the report. The time of the end will involve intense suffering for those who are wise. “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked” (12:10). History will show that the world is not becoming more open to the gospel, but less, much less open. Resistance will be intense, if not overwhelming. The church will not win the world for Christ. On the contrary the church will hardly survive the world. The bottom line is very sober: “When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (12:7).

Third, the man clothed in linen applies the report to Daniel personally, and in doing so, applies the report to all those who follow in Daniel's steps. "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." In other words, "Go about your business without fretting or worrying. Relax. When it's all over, you will be on your feet to receive your reward" (The Message, 12:13). The application for those who follow the Lord Jesus is as plain and simple as it is costly. Don't let the end times distract you from going and making disciples. Don't let the free reign of evil prevent you from loving your neighbor and being salt and light. Don't let a hostile world discourage you from resting in the sovereign, saving care of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.