

DANIEL 12 CBC 7.2.2021

If you like stories where good triumphs over evil and the bad guys get their comeuppance while everyone else lives happily ever after, that's what we've got today in Da 12. Here's the archetype of all such stories, and best of all, *this* story is true! And we're in it somewhere – hopefully on the right side.

We've reached the end of Daniel's book. Daniel is no longer the teenager we met in ch.1. He's spent 70 years in exile in Babylon and is now in his eighties. And at the end of his life he's given a series of visions to prepare God's people for what's to come. There are still evil days ahead before the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God.

The final vision spans chs.10-12, and it foretells times of great opposition to God. Sometimes God's faithful people will be martyred (11:33) – that's very telling in a book where the heroes are often wonderfully delivered (chs 3 & 6). We serve a God of miracles *and* martyrs.

And we saw last week that this opposition to God will culminate at the end of history in a terrible figure identified in the New Testament as the antichrist. But if that sounds horribly gloomy, praise God that it's not the end of the story! At the moment when it seems antichrist is about to be victorious, God intervenes. 12:1-4 gives us the last bit of the vision:

12:1 *“At that time (i.e., the time of battle) Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. Michael is the archangel we met in Da 10. He appears in the NT too, in Jude 9 and Rev 12:7, and always he seems to have a special responsibility to protect God's people. Only on the Last Day will we see how hard he's been working! So he intervenes when the battle is fiercest: v.1 ... There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.*

What will they be delivered from? From persecution? Yes! From disease? Yes! From sorrow? Yes! They'll be delivered from everything! Because God reveals something extraordinary: **v.2** *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

How often we want to scream because there seems to be no justice in this life – but now at last there's going to be justice. All those faithful people who've been brutally martyred in times of persecution – surely God's deliverance has come too late for them? NO! Because this world isn't the end of the story. We're going to rise from the dust!

Biblically, that's a very profound statement. Think back to Ge 3 and God's sentence on Adam and Eve for their rebellion: *“dust you are, and to dust you will return”* (Ge 3:19). That's the curse upon us all: because of sin, we die. So to raise people from the dust means reversing the curse! Who can do that? When you get to the New Testament, you find the answer is Jesus. *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”* (Gal 3:13). And in Him we will rise to life!

Indeed, all will rise – what a message for Covid Britain with its 100,000 deaths. The story isn't over for any of those people. All will rise – but they won't all enjoy the same sort of resurrection. Some rise to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Jesus says exactly the same thing as Daniel: He will tell everyone to stand up at the Last Day, and *“those who have done what is good*

will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (Jn 5:28-29 – and the “good” we are to do is to hear Jesus word and come to God through Him, v.24).

Everyone will rise to face Jesus at last, and He will make a great division. If you’ve received Him, He’ll receive you; if you’ve refused Him, He’ll refuse you. And you’ll receive your everlasting reward, either life or contempt. And everywhere in the Bible, God urges you to choose life, and He has provided a Saviour for you (Jn 3:16). I urge you to come to Him! *Far more important than knowing you’ve paid for your funeral is knowing that Jesus has paid for your sins.*

That’s wisdom, and it plays out in how you spend your life on earth: **v.3** *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.* Do you see that? Knowing there’s a resurrection leads to wise living, because once you’ve got the future clear, your priorities in *this* world become clear too. Think of 1Cor 15: Paul spends 57 verses showing us that Christ is risen and we shall rise too. And the punchline? v.58: *“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. ... Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”* Resurrection means we shape the whole of life around being followers of Jesus.

So the wise “lead many to righteousness” - we bring people to Jesus, and we encourage them to keep the Faith. Because the only people who will enter into eternal reward are those who took God’s side even when it was a difficult and unpopular side to take.

And then we’ll shine like stars, not because we’re heroes, but because we’re like Jesus and reflect His glory. And nothing will undo this final transformation. It will last *“for ever and ever”* (v.3).

And that’s the message! **4** *But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.* The message is rolled up, indicating that it’s complete (it’s not hidden – Daniel has just published it! But it’s the end of the vision). And it’s sealed to authenticate it. Here’s God’s answer to our world’s confusion.

Even so, **v.4** ... *Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.* They’ll run around looking for answers to life anywhere but in God’s word, because their hearts are stubborn. And they’ll discover all sort of things, but it won’t bring them peace or satisfaction. We see this everywhere. People have never had more access to knowledge. Yet without God’s word they remain as ignorant as ever about what their life is for and where it’s heading. And they find no peace. Just fear and anxiety. Because when truth is rejected for lies, we cannot find contentment.

But God has given us all we need to know – if we’ll only take it! The Bible is THE KEY to the plans of God. We can lose our keys – and perhaps you’ve lost the habit of getting into God’s word. Or we can misuse a key (you might bend it taking the lid off a tin of paint) – perhaps you misuse your Bible by opening it at random when you’re in trouble, to wrench a promise out of its context. BUT when you use a key properly it’s a very useful thing. And when we use our Bible properly it’s like a key that fits the lock perfectly and opens up life in a way that makes sense of what we see and enables us to live with trust and hope and joy.

Some of you could have your life utterly transformed if you would get into God’s word properly. But it will cost you effort! Two minute dips won’t be enough. Take it as seriously as you take other important things. I’m staggered at the number of professing Christians who say they believe the Bible but they haven’t a clue what’s in it. Their level of understanding is that of a child. So when they’re confronted by the world they’re wiped out because they’ve no idea how to respond.

But if we'll get into the Bible and take God's word seriously, we'll understand what we were born for, what this life is about, and where we'll end up. That's worth knowing! And we *can* know these things because God has told us.

And that's where the content of Daniel's vision ends. But there's a footnote in vv.5-13 and it contains a couple of questions asked by the curious. v.5 takes us back to the scene of Daniel's vision: *5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. 6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"*

The figure who hovers above the waters is the heavenly messenger we met in ch.10. And someone, seemingly another angel, asks him the question we'd all like the answer to: *How long before these things happen?* Even angels aren't immune to curiosity! But you don't get the date in either the Old or the New Testament.

Instead, *v.7 The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."*

We're told the end will come when God's people seem at their weakest. But as for how long? A time, times and half a time! I take this to mean we'll have to be patient (a time) ... then more patient still (times) ... but the end is determined and will come suddenly (half a time). It's a great little phrase and you should make use of it when next you're on a long car journey with your kids. "How long till we get there?" - "Time, times and half a time! Be patient, be very patient, and we'll be there before you know it!"

That's what Daniel hears. God's people will have to be patient in tribulation. In fact, they'll have to be very patient. But they can be certain that God will bring their troubles to an end.

And that should be enough! But Daniel tries another question. *8 I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"* "If you won't tell me the date, can you at least give me some more details?"

But *9 He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end.* I've told you all you need to know so that you can press on faithfully till the finish. You don't have to calculate future dates. Your task is to live today for the glory of God.

That's a very important lesson to learn. Our task is not to shake our fist in God's face and demand He answer all our questions, but to humble ourselves before Him. Are you familiar with Dt 29:29? It's worth knowing: *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law."* Truth is divided into the secret things and the revealed things. One belongs to God, one to us, and we need to respect the difference. Don't let's trespass into the secret things, and don't let's hold back from the things that are revealed.

And as we live through the troubles of this world, it's enough for us to know that, **v.10** *Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.*

We know this to be true. People go through dreadful things – “God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world” – and some surrender to God in their need, while others go on just the same and become more hardened and bitter. They prove God’s condemnation of them is just, because they show they would never repent.

So the instruction to Daniel is, “Keep on faithfully witnessing to God. But as you do that, there’ll be a continual division. Don’t be surprised that many oppose you!”

But the end of these troubled days will come! **11** *“From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. 12 Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.*

Another tantalising time reference that conceals as much as it reveals! I take it that it’s symbolic rather than literal. 1,290 days – we’re going to have to endure patiently. Will we do that? What about a further 45 days – are we willing to hold on a little longer? The end will come. Trouble stretches ahead, but it’s measured by God and it’s limited by God. And it won’t be a day too short or too long.

Because what we’ve learned over the past few weeks is that Daniel is a great book about a great God. He’s the true King, and even the worst times in history are under His sovereign control. Evil can’t win. There’ll be times of trouble, but there’ll also be a time of final triumph when evil will be brought to an end and the glory of God will be all in all.

Do you believe that? We keep looking back on things that are already fulfilled and saying “*Isn’t that wonderful*” - but we need to have the same confidence in what God says about the future. This is our God.

SO **v.13** *“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.”* “Go your way, Daniel”: Not “*Run along now*” like a little child; rather, go on as you are going – keep on following God and serving Him. And in due course you’ll be enjoying rest and resurrection and reward.

And that final word in the book of Daniel is the closing message of the book to all God’s people. Why do I say that? Because it’s essentially the promise of the gospel. Jesus says, “Come to me, and I will give you rest. Be yoked to me and wherever you go I’ll be there. I’ll journey with you through life, and carry you through death, and raise you to everlasting glory at the Last Day” (Mt 11:28; 28:20; Jn 6:39).

If at this moment you’re in trouble, panic, despair, asking “What should I do?” the answer is: Do the next task God has given you, and trust God with the future because your heavenly Father is holding it securely.

And when the last battle is over, it will be for us as in C.S. Lewis’ book of that title. Are you familiar with how he closes the Chronicles of Narnia?

“For us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

PRAYER: Thank you for this glimpse of the future that you’ve prepared for those who love you. Thank you that Jesus died our death and defeated every evil power so that we might rise to life with Him. And we pray that by the help of your Holy Spirit, your church may be faithful through every trial until our Lord returns in glory; and that we might be among the faithful. For your glory’s sake. Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- How can what God reveals about the future make a difference to how you think and feel and act in the present?