

The Last Page (Daniel 12)

We are finishing the book of Daniel's content, six stories about Daniel in a foreign court, and four apocalyptic visions. Each narrative and vision, in their own way, spoke to the book's overarching theme: despite current hardships, God is in charge, and he will triumph in the end. Jesus will vindicate our name and end this cosmic conflict, and he guides us individually and His Church in each step of the way. The intended recipients are the "masliilim," or wise or discerning ones, people who remained faithful to God in the face of cultural pressures and even persecution. How reassuring these accounts (chaps. 1-6) and visions (chaps. 7-12) would be to these God-fearing followers of Daniel's survival, even prospering, in such a setting. How uplifting it would have been for them to learn of Daniel's visions (Chapters 7-12), which revealed God's final victory over the most heinous and strong demonic powers.

The stories have been told, and the visions have ended. Now we get to the book's epilogue, which is a brief but crucial exchange between Daniel and his heavenly interlocutors.

THE FINAL SCENE (DANIEL 12:5-13)

This final scenario takes place immediately after the end of the vision and its interpretation in Daniel 11:1-12:4, when Daniel is still at the Tigris River. On either side of the river, there are two figurines. "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" one of them, probably Gabriel, asked the other. (Dan 12:6). The second person answers, but before we go into it, we first establish who he is. He is characterized as "clothed in linen" (Dan 12:7), which connects him to the celestial figure in Daniel 10:5, whom we found to be none other than God, in the form of the preincarnated Jesus himself (see Revelation 12:12-16). This identification is supported by the fact that he was standing "above the waters," since God is frequently described in the Bible as the one who rules and dominates the waters (Ps 29:3, 10; 77:16; 93:4).

As a result, we must interpret that Gabriel is asking God "how long" they must bear the persecution before God's final victory. Before responding, the figure portraying God lifts his right and left hands. When someone makes a commitment to speak the truth, they often raise their right hand, but God lifts both hands to double down on the gesture. He also swears by himself since that is how the words "him who lives forever" (Dan 12:7) should be understood.

God then responds, "It will be for a time, times [literally, 'two times'], and half a lime" (Dan 12:7). This sentence has been used previously (Dan 7:25). Like there, this response does not provide (in itself) the reader with the sort of information required to draw an end date on a calendar. Rather, the response reveals that the outcome is predetermined. While evil appears to have complete control, its dominance shifts from a single time to a double time, but suddenly time slows to half a time and ultimately stops. That said, while communicating that there is a predetermined end—which we need more information from elsewhere in the book and even the Bible to finally piece together—this passage provides important insight to Daniel (and to us) that our troubles will end, God is still in control, but it may get worse before it gets better for good.

Daniel is not happy with the response and continues, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" (Dan 12:8), yet he is rebuffed even as additional information is provided. "Go about your business, Daniel," is the substance of what the supernatural figure says to him. The scroll (which depicts the unfolding of history) has been set (rolled and sealed). During the interim, the wicked will continue to be evil, while many will be

"purified, made spotless, and refined" (Dan 12:10). The wicked will fail to recognize that God is in control and will ultimately triumph, but the wise (the loyal) will.

Then God adds a last note concerning the amount of time that the daily sacrifice, the tamid, when the priests make sacrifices on behalf of the people in the morning and evening, and the abomination of desolation (anything that profanes the holy place) are put up. There will be a total of 1,290 days. But then, cryptically, Jesus bestows blessings on those who make it—not just the 1,290 days but the 1,335 days as well. This is difficult for us to grasp, but as we have already stated about the use of numbers in the book of Daniel, they are purposely misleading if you do not pay attention to structural and grammatical clues—especially if you are not a Jew of Daniel's era. They offer the impression of an endpoint, but they communicate much more.

But what is clear is that God again urges Daniel to, in effect, go about his regular life in spite of the fact that he has been made aware of great events that will happen in the future. This knowledge should not get him to change his life but rather to continue his daily work in the knowledge that God will have the victory over evil and that Daniel himself will "rise to receive" his "allotted inheritance" (Dan 12:13), surely a reference to the fact that he, like the other wise, will awake to everlasting life and "shine like the brightness of the heavens" (Dan 12:3).

CONCLUSION

After six stories and four visions that constantly remind the reader that God is in charge and will triumph in the end, the book concludes with the heavenly interpreter urging Daniel to "go your way till the end" (Dan 12:13). The angel addresses us, the readers, in addition to Daniel. Rest certain that God has written your life's history, and "you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance" (Dan 12:13). Don't be concerned if life comes to you in an unfavorable and even oppressive way—it is likely to happen sooner or later—but live your life in light of what will most certainly happen: Michael, Jesus Himself, will "stand up,... for the children of thy people," for you and me, at our most difficult and trying time. The final victory is assured, even if, like with Daniel, we must rest until He appears in the clouds.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Read chapters 10 to 12 again (or at least 10 and 12) and answer the following:

1. What roles do facts and emotions play in our understanding of our salvation and our daily walk with Christ? Why does Satan use both to frustrate our spiritual progress?
2. God is all-powerful, yet He uses the approach of persuasion and cooperation, not coercion, in reaching people. How do you explain such approach?
3. In what ways Michael/Jesus stands up for you and me during the great time of trouble? How does His firm stand in our behalf help us to courageously face the great trouble ahead of us?
4. Looking at your spiritual condition right now, would you rather rest in Christ before the great time of trouble, or would you rather go to the trying time? Why or why not?
5. If you knew for sure that Christ was coming in the next few days, what immediate actions would you take to prepare yourself to meet Him in peace? When would you do this, and why?