

# End of Story

Daniel 12:5-13

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

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Well good morning First Free! Today it is my privilege to be able to walk with you through the final chapter of Daniel, closing up this incredible book.

Think back with me on everything we've seen. Fourteen weeks ago we started our story off in chapter 1, in Babylon, the capital of an evil kingdom that had been allowed to crush God's nation, destroy God's temple, and capture God's people. Among those carried off was a young man named Daniel who was violently ripped from his home, never to return; instead living out his life in the courts of foreign kings. An exile.

Now in chapter 12, Daniel is an old man, well into the final years of his life, standing on the ashes of empires. Daniel has stood witness to the rise and fall of mighty regimes and through the bloody transitions of two major world powers. And through it all, he has remained steadfastly faithful to the one true God, even in the face of certain death. Daniel has walked in the presence of fearsome beasts, both literally and figuratively. Ferocious kings that in many ways act no better than animals.

The first half of the book, chapters 1-6, took us through these key moments in Daniel's life and ministry. But since chapter 7, in the second half of Daniel, we've switched genres from narrative to apocalyptic, moving from one bizarre vision to another.

So now that we're at the end of the book, what's it all been about? What has been the point of the book of Daniel? And what does it all mean for us today? What does the book of Daniel have to do with Christ's church today, in the US, in Wichita?

Today's passage answers these questions. Last week Jordan took us up through the first four verses of chapter 12 and so we have only verses 5-13 to look through today. What we're gonna find in this passage is a final angelic interaction, but nothing we cover today will be new. It's all review. Many threads from the rest of Daniel are tied together here in chapter 12 which forms a sort of epilogue, a capstone to this monumental book. In the few verses we have today we'll see two questions and two answers that will guide us as we think on what these visions of the end have to do with us now. Please read with me starting from verse 5 as we close the book of Daniel.

## **Daniel 12:5-13<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>5</sup>Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. <sup>6</sup>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?" <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" <sup>9</sup>He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And from the time that the regular burnt offering*

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<sup>1</sup>Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version<sup>®</sup> unless otherwise noted.

*is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. <sup>12</sup>Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. <sup>13</sup>But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”*

This is the Word of the Lord.

## HOW LONG?

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This is a recurring dream. Daniel has seen this vision before. Only rearranged, remixed, in a different order. Here in chapter 12, Daniel is standing on the side of a stream in the company of angels. Just as he did before in chapters 10 and 8. He sees hovering over the waters a man clothed in linen, much like the man he saw in chapter 10—the angel who fought against the demon prince of Persia. And in an echo of chapter 8, once again an angel asks another angel our first question: How long? There in verse 6: “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?”

So, how long? How long’s it gonna be? Well the other angel, the man in linen, makes it easy for us. He responds with a simple answer in verse 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 that’s the answer for ya. Simple, right?

Not at all. What in the world does he mean by “time, times, and half a time?” If I was late to a meeting and I called you and said wait up, I’ll be there in uhh, ooh, maybe, a time, times, and half a time, you would probably not appreciate that answer. And rightfully so. It’s vague. It’s ambiguous. What is a “time”? Are we talking minutes, hours, days, millennia? It’s not clear.

And this isn’t the first time we’ve been given a mysterious unit of time in which an evil enemy will oppress the people of God or, as we read here, shatter the power of the holy people. In chapter 7 the beasts will have dominion for a season and a time, and the little horn will “wear out the saints” for a time, times, and half a time. The angel in chapter 8 tells us that the end of the desolation will come after 2,300 evenings and mornings. In chapter 9, we hear that the end of transgression will come after 70 weeks. And now here, in chapter 12: “time, times, and half a time.” And just a little bit down in verses 11-12 we see that “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. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.”

What? What is going on? Why are the numbers all different: 1,290, 1,335, 2,300, 70? How many days will it be? Are these literal days? If not then what in the world are they? How does it all relate to the seventy weeks and the mysterious “time, times, and half a time”? I have my theories, but that’s all they really are—theories. Because while these numbers do point to a precise date at a specific point in time, that hour is not for us to know just yet. The end will come without warning. Like a thief in the night. One day the mystery of these numbers will be made clear to us. But until then, God has given us everything we need now in what *is* clear to us. So what is clear? What are all these times saying for certain? The answer lies in the true nature of the question: How long?

Remember that in chapter 8 the angel asks how long? And that question is specifically about the trampling of, the desecration of, the temple. Here in chapter 12, an angel asks, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?” (v. 6). When he says “wonders” he’s talking about the shocking evils

committed by the enemies of God. And so here this question is first and foremost a question of when there will be an end to persecution, an end to the shattering of the holy people.

See, in the Bible that phrase “how long” is not just a calendar question; a chronological curiosity. No, instead “how long” is most often a question of the problem of evil. Not just how long, but how long until evil comes to an end? Psalm 74:9-10 says: “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long. How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?”

Christ himself asks this question in Matthew 17: “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” (v.17).

And in the book of Revelation, when the seals are opened, the martyrs of Christ will cry out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10).

How long?

The answer throughout this passage, and Daniel itself, is simply this—not much longer. Evil *will* come to an end. How long exactly is not for us to know, but know, although sin will continue and even seem to be growing out of control, God will not let evil continue forever.

Christ tells us in Matthew 24 that in the end times great tribulation will come unlike anything before or after. And he says, “If those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days *will* be cut short” (v. 22).

This is precisely what God has been saying to us in all these mysterious units of time. That even though the enemy reigns right now, the days of evil *will* be cut short. A time, times, and then only half a time.

Brothers and sisters, right now it feels a lot like evil is winning. Like the darkness is only getting darker and there is no light at all. You may take a look around at our broken, broken world and it may seem hopeless. Like things will never get better. And indeed, things will surely get worse. Christ tells us this. But look with me again at Daniel 12:7: “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.”

All these things *will* be finished. Trials and tribulations *will* come to an end. It may feel like evil is just going to go on and on and that nothing can stop it. But the one who lives forever, the Ancient of Days, our eternal God, he looks at the enemy and he laughs—2,300, 70, 1,290, or 1,335—whatever’s going on with these, know for certain that Satan’s rule is numbered. But the one who lives forever? His rule knows no end.

## WHAT’S THE OUTCOME?

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So that’s the first question. And the angel has given Daniel his cryptic answer. But as we’ll see, Daniel’s still got something on his mind. Because sure, God’s going to win in the end, he always does. But what does that mean for his people? For Israel? After all, Daniel’s lived his whole adult life

in exile. And even though by this point some of the Jews have gone back, it feels an awful lot like the exile still continues.

See Daniel's people are lost. Their time in exile, their judgment, has not cleansed them of sin. They have not repented. They have not turned to God. It's why in chapter 9, Daniel mourns. He puts on sackcloth and ashes, confesses the sins of his people, and asks God to have mercy on them for his name's sake. Will God show mercy? Will he take back his wayward people? This is Daniel's burning question, so he bluntly asks the angel our final question today: What's the outcome? What comes after the end? "I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" (v.8).

At first glance, this question seems pretty open-ended. What "outcome"? That could refer to any number of things. But as we've seen, Daniel has deep concern for one thing—the fate of his people. And so when Daniel asks what shall be the outcome, the question is really this: What's the outcome for the people of God? What will happen to God's people, a people who have wandered so far from God? And so the angel answers Daniel according to his heart. "He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. 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'" (vv. 9-10).

What will happen to the people of God? Well it's simple. The angel says there are the wicked and then there are the wise. What does this mean?

Well, last week we saw that the wise shall shine like the brightness of the stars forever and ever. And today we're told that the wicked shall act wickedly (as the wicked tend to do). And they will not understand. So this begs the question, who are the wicked?

My gut instinct is to think of the enemy. The bad guys. Satan and the beasts and the wicked kings, the abomination of desolation. But none of those are ever described as wicked in Daniel. Instead, in chapter 9 it is *Israel* that has acted wickedly and failed to repent even after seventy years in exile.

Last week in chapter 11 we saw the people of God divided into two groups: the people who know their God, and those who violate the covenant, or more literally in the Hebrew, those who act *wickedly* against the covenant. Here, then, the wicked does not refer to those who are *outside* the covenant community, but rather to those *within*, but who fail to act like it

In other words, the question for us, the people of God today, isn't what will happen to *them*, the enemies. The question is, are you the wicked or the wise? This is not an easy question.

Look at your life. Look at your sins. The darkness you can't seem to shake. The people you've hurt. The evil that has a hold on you. And ask yourself honestly, are you wicked or wise? How would we know which one we are? Well, verse 10 of the text today gives us a couple things that characterize the wise.

Characteristic 1: The wise are purified, made white, and refined. But how do you go about getting refined? Can you purify yourself? Would you even know where to start?

Characteristic 2: The wise shall understand. But remember that in verse 8, Daniel, *the* prophet Daniel, says "I heard, but I did *not* understand." In fact, with every vision in the second half of the book, Daniel has expressed a complete lack of understanding. In chapter 7 Daniel's spirit is anxious

and the vision alarms him. In chapter 8 he is overcome and appalled by the vision which he does not understand. And though in chapters 9 and 10 angels are sent to explain, even here at the end of the book in chapter 12, Daniel still does not understand. If even Daniel does not understand then who can? Who is wise?

Folks, we've got a problem. We cannot purify ourselves. How can we, who have unclean hands, make our clothes white? What's more, we can't make ourselves understand. How can we who are ignorant give ourselves wisdom? Is there any way to become wise or are we doomed to be wicked?

Brothers and sisters, the book of Daniel has good news for you. And it lies all the way back in chapter 1 where we see that, "God gave [Daniel and his friends] learning and skill in all literature and wisdom" (v. 17). And in chapter 2:21-22, Daniel blesses God with this prayer:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,  
to whom belong wisdom and might.  
He changes times and seasons;  
he removes kings and sets up kings;  
he gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to those who have understanding."

In other words, yes, the wise are those who have wisdom, but wisdom comes from God. God alone makes us wise. God alone gives us understanding. Yes, the wise are pure, and white, and refined, but listen to these words that describe those who will suffer for Christ: "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:13).

Brothers and sisters, God has provided abundantly. In the Lamb, the one like a son of man, in *Jesus Christ*, we have all the help we need. By his blood we have washed our robes and made them white. By his sacrifice we are purified and refined. And although right now we still struggle with sin; although right now there is still wickedness among the wise; although right now trials and tribulations are all around us; and although right now neither we nor Daniel really understand the visions of this book; the promise here in chapter 12 is not that the wise will be completely refined and understand everything *right now*, but that the wise *shall* purify themselves and *shall* understand in the time of the end. This is our great hope.

So then how do we answer our question? What's the outcome for the people of God? For us? Today's passage tells us three things. Here are the first two:

**1. By the blood of the lamb, God will purify us, refine us, and clothe us in white.**

**2. Through his son, God will make us understand; we will receive wisdom in all things.**

If these things are true, if God is the one who purifies us and brings us out of the wicked and into the wise, if we have this sure hope, then what are we to do? The angel makes it plain in verses 12-13: "Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."

Wait and arrive. Go your way till the end. Our job is that simple. Do as Daniel did all through his life. Be faithful in the midst of our exile. Among fiery furnaces and lion's dens. Go down the paths we've been shown until we reach the destination. Wait and arrive. If we live like this, like Daniel did,

then we will share in his future. Here in the final verse of this book we see a heavenly commendation of a life well lived, a job well done. At the end of his life Daniel, God's good and faithful servant, receives a great reward—that he will finally rest.

This man who has lived his whole life away from his homeland will finally be at peace in his allotted place, a land that is his. And when it says “rest” it doesn't mean lying still in the ground. No instead, Daniel will *stand* in his allotted place.

As we saw last week at the beginning of this chapter, the wise will awake to everlasting life. Daniel will rise with the saints to eternal life. He will have new life in the resurrection. This is the greatest promise he could have received. And it is the last outcome that our passage highlights for God's people who are in Christ.

### **3. God will raise us up to eternal life.**

This is our greatest hope, that one day we will live and reign with our Lord.

## **MEANING FOR TODAY**

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So what does all of this mean for us today?

Well it's no coincidence that we chose to time this series around the election. I wrote this sermon on Tuesday, the day of the election, just a few hours before results started to come in. So please know that I would be saying the exact same thing today regardless of who would have won. My message is simple. First Free, remember how our story ends.

For those of you who look around at our post-election world and are tempted to despair, know that none of this is happening outside of God's control. If you look around the world and the impression you get is that wickedness is growing, that the power of the holy people is being shattered, that should not surprise you. Christ tells us that these things will increase all the way through the time of the end. Don't be shocked by what you see. Don't despair at the results of one election. Save your grief. Things will get worse. But this is not how the story ends.

In the end, God wins. The light will overwhelm the darkness. And if you are in Christ, if you have been washed by the blood of the Lamb, then you will rest and stand in your allotted place at the end of the days. Place all your hope in that.

For those of you who look around at the world after the election and feel relieved and secure, know as well that this is not the end of the story. Your candidate, your party, is not the savior. They cannot turn the tide of history and prevent the coming tribulation. Things will get worse. But although some trust in chariots and some in horses, we trust in the name of the LORD our God (Ps. 20:7). Do not place your hope in man.

I'm addressing both sides right now, but know that I have no interest in being bipartisan. Because I know where my loyalties lie, where my hope is, and it is not in any human government. My hope is in the everlasting kingdom of the Son of Man.

Now hear me right, the book of Daniel is about a politician. A senior advisor in the Nebuchadnezzar administration. So vote, yes. Be engaged, yes. Have opinions, yes. Be politically

involved, yes. But if your whole world rises or falls with the outcome of one election then you need to reassess your worldview.

People of God, remember how the story ends. Take care that you are among the wise. Seek the Lord's wisdom.

This call is even stronger today for us than it was for Daniel. Because for Daniel the time of the end was still far off. For Daniel the words were shut up and sealed until an unforeseen time. But we today know more than even Daniel. We have been shown in even greater detail how the story ends.

In the book of Revelation, in the final days, the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ, will open the seals. And an angel like the one we saw today will raise his right hand to heaven and swear by him who lives forever that there will be no more delay. On the last page, we are told not to seal up the words of this prophecy, for the time is near.

First Free, we know how the story ends—with Christ returning to set all things right. And we know that surely he is coming soon. Until then, “Blessed is he who waits and arrives” (v. 12).