

Thriving in Babylon: A Godward Life in a Foreign Land - A Daniel Recap

Daniel 12:4-13

“But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”

Introduction: It's bittersweet to come to an end of something truly enjoyable: the end of Christmas Day, the end of summer vacation, or the finale of a miniseries. I remember reading through the *Chronicles of Narnia* and being exhilarated by the ending but simultaneously disappointed that the adventure had come to an end. That's where we come to in the **book of Daniel**, as we finish the last few verses of a final vision. The beauty of this study is just like reading any other book series: we can go back and read it and study it again (but probably not for a little while).

A few realities stand out as we conclude. **1) Daniel is given an immense amount of information about the end of the world, but he still did not understand everything completely** (12:8 - "I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, 'O y lord, what shall be the outcome of these things.' "). I hope that we have all gained insight and hope regarding future things, but I do not believe any of us has everything truly worked or figured out....at least I do not. We'll learn this morning *why* that is, at least in part, but the reality stands that God gives us **what we need, not always what we want**. He calls us to walk by faith, trusting Him above what our minds can comprehend, and He has intentionally NOT filled in every blank for us. We must embrace a level of mystery while simultaneously exhibiting full reliance. For some of us, that is near impossible, since something has to jive with our mind before we believe it, but that is exactly the point: *we were NOT intended to know the times or hours, even though we are given MUCH information*. Faith is hard, but we fight for faith in Jesus Christ, since without faith it is **impossible to please God**. (Heb. 11:6)

2) We learn an immense lesson from Daniel living in Babylon, since there are more parallels for us in Babylon than in Christ's future Kingdom! - Daniel lived an uncompromising and uncommon life because he served an uncommon and uncompromising God! His life, and that of his friends, gives us principles to think through as we face similar challenges that he faced: a pagan government, pressure to capitulate, pure opposition, growing evil influences, and standing alone in the vocational arena. Living in Babylon did NOT negate his ability to thrive, but forced him to see ALL things through a **Godward lens, to put down mere pragmatism, and to ACTIVELY serve His God everyday** since there was no status quo upside to do so. If ever we were going to follow his lead in that, to stand up when others refuse, to practice what is true when others are taking the path of least resistance, and to do so boldly when the majority is silent, now is the time.

3) Daniel's defining character quality was faithfulness, which is available to every believer - Daniel was set apart NOT because of his dream catching ability or lion taming, it was **his faithfulness**. Jesus lauded the *faithful servant* in the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:21, 23). **"Many a man PROCLAIMS his own steadfast love, but a FAITHFUL man who can find?"** (Prov. 20:6). Faithfulness is a rare commodity, as even David said "Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone; for the **faithful have vanished from among the children of men.**" (Psalm 12:1). What we need now is faithful men and women, faithful families and students, faithful servants who will do what is hard because it is right, will stand firm in raging current of cultural change and love audaciously, even our enemies.

Contented with Hope Based on a Sure Future (7-12; 12:4-13)

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and **seal the book, until the time of the end**. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

⁵Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, **two others stood**, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. ⁶And 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?**" ⁷And 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. ⁸**I heard, but I did not understand.** Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" ⁹He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are **shut up and sealed until the time of the end.**" ¹⁰Many 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. ¹¹And 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.** ¹²Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the **1,335 days.** ¹³But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."

After receiving the most intense of visions ever given to man, Daniel needed some final **instruction and encouragement**. Just by way of reminder, last week we looked at the life of **Antichrist, a King who will do as he wills**, and who would wreck havoc on the world and the Jewish people in particular. He would establish world rule, a world religion, and engage in world war. For 3 1/2 years he would seem to be the bringer of peace and would be seen as a help to Israel, but he would break the covenant with an *abomination of desolation* (Matt. 24:15; Dan. 9:27, 11:31; 12:11), setting off a time of trouble the likes of which the world has never seen, where 2/3 of the Jewish population will perish (Zech. 13:8). The promise would be that at the end of this time, there would be a **resurrection of the faithful and wicked, the first to great reward and the other to shame**. On hearing this (much like us), I'm sure Daniel had many questions, of which he was able to get out ONE (12:8). But before angels or he could ask any questions, he was given **final instructions**:

Final Instructions: What to do with the message (12:4)

What would we expect the command to Daniel in terms of the message he received? Copy it, distribute it, proclaim it, send it, drop it from the sky? This was such an intensive, seemingly important piece of prophetic utterance that distribution would seem most important. But instead, he was instructed **to shut it up and seal it**. This was NOT about keeping it secret or put in a vault, but sealing it would mean it would not be **tampered with or changed**, like a deed of purchase which contained all the terms and conditions of a sale (See Jer. 32:9-12 where Jeremiah purchased land). Because it is preserved, we get to glean from the prophesy as well as the book as a whole. But it actually has a different reach than even getting to us.

"**Until the time of the end**" signals the time of the final tribulation, this last part of the 7 year Tribulation on earth (see Dan. 11:35; 40; 45). Somehow, Daniel will have special significance to the Jewish population alive at this last time, and they will be given insight to these mysteries because they will be living through them as they happen! It's one thing to understand history in theory or on paper, its quite another to live during the unfolding of it (like trying to teach my kids about 9/11). During that time, "**knowledge will increase**", meaning they will understand the depths of this prophecy better than we do now, and better than Daniel knew then. In fact, I'd even say there are parts of this prophesy that WE know better than even Daniel, since we have the advantage of looking back on some and have more revelation given (like the actual book of Revelation).

Angelic Question: How long till the end (12:5-7)

After this instruction, Daniel looked up and saw **2 angels** on either side of the Tigris river, with "**the man clothed in linen**" above the waters. This is the same dressed figure as **10:5-6** and the same description

as Revelation 1:12-16. In other words, this was most likely a *Theophany*, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ who helped answer the questions that the angels and Daniel had. Note that the angels asked the first one, since the angels like the OT prophets often did not fully understand the prophecies they made concerning Christ (1 Pet. 1:12). They were all intrigued by Christ's **first coming** as we are in His **2nd coming**.

They asked a question that had already been answered earlier, but perhaps it was for emphasis or encouragement: "**How long till the end of these wonders?**" In other words, how long will these terrible, earth shattering events last? This is the question anyone asks in the midst of trial and suffering.

There was a two part answer. The man in linen raised up both hands (raising the right hand would have been for an oath, but both hands signaled even more certainty) and He swore by the One who lives forever, since there was no greater being to swear by. He said for a *time, times, and half a time*, which we've already seen take up **3 1/2 years**. He then added the caveat, "*that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end.*" This not only gives **timing but purpose**. Yes, God will judge the earth, nations, and wickedness during the Tribulation, but He will also bring His covenant people back to Himself when they finally are broken and look to the One they pierced (Zech. 12:10). It will last only as long as God will a remnant back to Himself and deliver them.

Daniel's Question: What will the outcome be (12:8-13)

I must admit I take a little comfort in the fact that Daniel himself did not fully understand what was just presented to him. But he still mustered up a response: **what will be the outcome of these things? I need a little more information and have so many questions.** *Do you ever feel that way when it comes to Biblical teaching, especially when it comes to prophecy?*

The man in linen's response, twice, was **"go your way, Daniel"** (9, 13). Daniel, this prophecy is for the end and will be much more understood at the end, so it's up to you to go and live. In other words, don't waste too much time speculating, filling in blanks, or conjecturing. This is the best counsel for anyone studying prophecy: seek to understand what the Bible gives us, understand God's purposes and what He's seeking to accomplish, and then live as Peter told the exiles: *"conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."* (1 Pet. 1:17-19)

But, he also gave Daniel 2 quick pieces of information. 1) Many would be saved in the end, but there would still be many wicked who would NOT understand, even as the world itself was being torn apart. We say today that people are more open to the gospel when life is fragile and falling apart, but except for the Spirit opening eyes and hearts, many will stubbornly stay in their sin. 2) He added some **time to the days of the last 3 1/2 years**. Jesus added 30 days from the time of the abomination, and **45 days after that** that will be a time of blessing. If we read Matthew 24 and 25, this would seem to correspond to the **"sheep and goat"** judgment (30 days), and then "come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:31-34).

With this information, Daniel is called to go his way, knowing he'll find rest and will have a place in the resurrection. It's good here to review how Daniel lived, until this point in his life and most likely in his last days on earth.

Resolved to Operate with Clear Conviction (Dan. 1)

But Daniel **resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food**, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself

Conviction comes when you know what you believe and why you believe it. When the status quo goes away one finds out what they truly believe. Has life in the body of the church been out of **convenience or conviction, consumerism or a yielded life to Christ**? Do you see your life through the lens of a **Mission given by Christ**, or out of a desire for safety and security (1 Thess. 5:3). Daniel had steely resolve as an early teenager, living by Biblical principle rather than cultural comfort.

We need families, men and women, young and old, to live lives with **steel spines and soft hearts, to be unbending in belief yet compassionate to others still in process**. As God continues to move us out of comfort, it is an incredibly gracious time to **evaluate** our values as individuals and families. How and why would we spend our time, money, and resources in the ways we have been? Do we have Biblical reasons for why we are making certain decisions? Do we need help thinking through these things? Now is the time do make sure we are clear in our convictions.

Ruled by Faith not Fear (Dan. 3)

¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, **that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.**"

Fear is powerful weapon. Our default setting is self-preservation, of ourselves and our families. When fear is the driver in life, conviction goes out the window, as well as rational, logical, or calm thought. We've watched fear drive people to **isolation, depression, and separation**. A godless fear, then, moves us away from a Godward life, fearing death over God, fearing the unknown rather than trusting God who knows and is working all things out for His purpose and will. Daniel's friends understood the mystery and secret of not allowing fear to rule: *they had a greater fear of God than anything a pagan king could do to them*. (Matt. 10:28 - "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear **Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**"). Faith in God IS THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR, and living in fear signals an area of evaluation and growth. Do we really trust God? Do we believe Him? Fear and joy cannot exist together. Fear and contentment cannot exist together. So we take our fear to the LORD, asking that He would give us the belief to trust that His grace is sufficient for us.

Prepared by Practicing Prayer (and other means of grace) (Dan. 2, 6, 9)

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, **as he had done previously**.

Most major, catastrophic, and life changing events in life do not give a heads up before they happen. No note is given to us saying, "*In 3 months time, you will be diagnosed with _____*", or *you will lose _____*, or *you will experience _____*". These things come to us when we are NOT expecting them, and most of us think these things will happen to someone else. Daniel experienced exile, pressure to interpret a dream, and persecution, all simply because he lived out what he believed. In Daniel 6, we was ultimately thrown in with lions because of a conspiracy against him, and it was his preparation in practice that not only got him ready but also put him in the pit.

Daniel was a man of prayer: he prayed regularly, with teenage friends, in crisis, when he was overwhelmed, and when he realized he needed to confess his own and the sin of the nation (Dan. 9). Practicing regular prayer not only helped him see everything through a Godward lens, it also **prepared him for what was to come, and he was able to respond to the unexpected, and do it with grace and consistency.**

Thursday night the elders had the privilege to meet with Daniel and Lisa Smith, which left us all encouraged and humbled. Lisa has had multiple bouts with cancer, and a little over 6 years ago Daniel was diagnosed with the nastiest form of prostate cancer, which has continued to fight against his body even today. Daniel recalled his response to the doctor when he was given the diagnosis prompted him to follow Daniel and Lisa out to the parking lot to see if they were ok, since Daniel was so calm and content to learn he had cancer. Was it shock? Nope. The last 6 years have shown that the Smith's were prepared, not with classes or books they've read, but because they are known by their Savior, they have an ongoing relationship with Christ, and have a real relationship with the church. Does this make it easy? By no means. But it means they continue to thrive in ministry and grow in the midst of most difficult pain and sadness.

Settled to Consistently Shine in the Midst of Crookedness (Dan. 4)

²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: **break off your sins by practicing righteousness**, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

Finally, Daniel showed us that in the midst of living in a pagan culture, there are opportunities to shine brightly. Daniel had a real relationship with Nebuchadnezzar, who God drew to Himself over many decades. He had opportunity to call him to repentance before God judged him by turning him into a crazy man who acted like an animal for 7 years. We remember that this is less about **performance for us** than continual trust in God's work of grace and forgiveness in our lives. We don't try to position ourselves as **better** than everyone, but we continue to point others to Christ, who's life and work is the only basis for salvation and hope. We are not saved by works nor are we sanctified by works, but we live humbly, obediently, and expectantly that God will work on the minds and hearts of others. This is why Daniel did not take pleasure in the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar, and most likely upheld his kingdom as he went through his downfall.

So, we settle into Babylon, but we never get too comfortable. We learn from Daniel who lived an exemplary life, yet never got to see his beloved homeland again, but instead sojourned faithfully where God had placed him. He did not waste time complaining, fighting against Nebuchadnezzar, or sorrowing over what was lost. He lived! He functioned faithfully, practiced the means of grace available, and was not driven by fear. All of this in light of the coming of Christ, who will bring about a kingdom, will rule with justice, and will be with us.