

Living in Light of the End
Book of Daniel
Sunday, July 23rd, 2023

Scripture:

Daniel 12:13

[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."

Pray

Introduction

As we come into the book of Daniel, we are jumping into a world where God's people are defeated because of their sin, are living in exile in Babylon, and are without any hope that God will fulfill his promises to his people that he gave to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David.

They would inevitably be asking questions like:

- How long do we have to suffer through the hardships of exile and persecution?
- Is our God really sovereign over all things?
- If God is sovereign, then when will he come and deliver us?
- When will he finally bring his forever kingdom that he has promised?
- How are we supposed to live faithfully, as God's people, when everything around us is falling apart?

And God in his goodness chose a man by the name of Daniel. A man whom he gave him visions and dreams to help answer these very questions so that his people would be encouraged to remain faithful within their current circumstances.

So who was Daniel?

Daniel was a young Jewish exile from a noble family and was chosen by King Nebuchadnezzar to be educated in the ways of the Babylonians so he could work for the king. As it says in Daniel 1:3-5

[3] Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, [4] youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. [5] The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. [6] Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

But more than merely being a noble and educated man from Judah, he was a man who remained faithful to God, and was blessed by him with skills in literature, wisdom, visions, and dreams. As it says in Daniel 1:8:

[8] 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.

And then in Daniel 1:17:

[17] As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

In blessing Daniel this way, God would use him to change the hearts of kings, to protect his people in captivity, and to help them remain faithful by giving them visions of the future that remind them that God is sovereign and in control of all human history.

Now, the book of Daniel itself was written at some point in the 6th century. And the biographical parts contained within it roughly span the years of 605-522 B.C. It is 12 chapters long and can be divided up in a couple of ways:

One, it can be divided up by languages.

Chapters 1 and 8-12 are written in Hebrew

Chapters 2-7 are mostly in Aramaic.

And in having chapters 2-7 written in Aramaic it is suggested this section of Daniel was meant to be a witness both Jews and non-Jews while chapters 8-12 are for God's people as he explains his grand future purposes for them.

Second and more commonly, it can be divided up into two halves.

Chapters 1-6 which are mostly biographical.

Chapters 7-12 which are mostly future visions.

And if you have spent any time reading these future visions in the book of Daniel, you will notice two things about them.

One, they are describing future events using non-human symbols (statues, beasts, animals, etc.). **Like the book of Revelation this is what scholars would call Apocalyptic literature.**

Two, it can be hard at times to understand what these future visions are about. So, with that in mind I want to give you a simple chart to help you understand the historical periods and empires that, **according to most scholars**, these visions are describing.

Explain the "Future Visions" slide.

Now, I realize that this chart won't help you to understand all the nuances of every vision and exactly what they mean, but that isn't necessarily the point anyways.

The point of this book and its visions, as I mentioned earlier, was and is to show God's people his purposes for them, and that he is sovereign and in control of all events and all of human history.

And in so doing, it is meant to help both the Jews in exile and us today, remain faithful to God in the face of trials, tribulations, persecutions, and conflicts, so that we are able to endure, in faith, to the end.

So with that in mind, I have 3 points from the book of Daniel this morning that will hopefully give us clarity about our world, will help us to rest and trust in God's sovereignty over all things, and will give us the necessary encouragement to live in light of the reality that the end is coming.

1. Don't be surprised by trials, persecution, and global conflict.

Daniel 7:23-25

[23] "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

[24] As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

[25] He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

These verses are part of the interpretation that Daniel received from his 2nd main vision of the 4 beasts in Daniel 7. And to help put these verses in context, Daniel received a vision where he saw a lion like creature with wings (v. 4), a bear with three ribs in its mouth (v. 5), a leopard with 4 wings and heads (v. 6), and then an unidentified beast that was terrifying, dreadful, exceedingly strong, and had iron teeth and ten horns (v. 7).

And when Daniel saw this, it says in verse 15 that his spirit within him was anxious and the visions of his head alarmed him. So he approached someone who was there in his vision (probably an angel) and asked them "what does this all mean?" and the person responded in Daniel 7:17:

[17] 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

Now, if you remember the chart I showed you at the beginning, most commentators believe that the 4 kings or empires represented here are the Babylonians (the lion), the Medo-Persians (the bear), the Greeks (the Leopard), and the unidentified beast with iron teeth and ten horns is more than likely the Roman Empire.

And the fact that they are depicted as beasts who devour shows us that these nations, rulers, and empires are strong, ruthless, and are all about amassing their own power and glory at any cost. Meaning, that the world from the 6th century all the way through 5th century A.D. (if the 4th beast is Rome) was going to be a messy place full of war and conflict.

But the vision doesn't stop there. Because Daniel in 7:19 asks to know the truth about the 4th beast with its ten horns. And though many believe that the 4th beast and its 10 horns points to the Roman Empire and its kings, we also have this other horn or ruler that comes up after and is different. And Daniel learns in verse 25 that:

*[25] He shall speak words against the Most High,
and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,
and shall think to change the times and the law;
and they shall be given into his hand
for a time, times, and half a time.*

Now, even though many think that this last horn is pointing to the antichrist in the future, the truth is that we can't say with any definite certainty who it is.

But what's important here is that we have within this vision a world that is full of chaos, war, destruction, and the rise and fall of nations. And while all that is going on we have God's name being blasphemed and his people being worn out, killed, and persecuted.

Because God wants these exiles and all who would read Daniel's vision to be ready. To understand that hard times, trials, persecutions, and global conflicts are coming, and are going to continue for a long time.

Now let's take a moment and think about where we are at right now. We are living in a time where conflict and war are raging. Russia and Ukraine are at war. Terrorist attacks are rampant in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Civil war is consuming Myanmar. And we are in the midst of one of the largest genocides in history where, according to the WHO, 74 million babies are aborted worldwide every year.

Also, when we look into the persecution of Christians across the globe, we find that according to the advocacy group Open Doors about 360 million Christians were persecuted worldwide in the last year alone.

When we hear these things, it can cause us to be full of fear, anxiety, and worry, and it can cause us to doubt God as if this was unexpected. But this is exactly what he was trying to prepare us for in Daniel 7, and it is also what Christ told us would happen in Matthew 24:6-9 when he said:

[6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

[9] “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.

Realizing this, what actually should surprise us in America is the reality that most of us haven’t had to endure the trials, hardships, and persecutions that many others have experienced and do experience throughout history and the world.

But it also shouldn’t surprise us if they come. None of us here should be under the illusion that our country is experiencing a spiritual revival. In fact, it seems like the exact opposite is true.

Truth is becoming increasingly subjective and optional. Talk of God or even a basic knowledge of God is becoming rarer among younger generations. The basic premises of morality, gender, marriage, and sexuality that have existed in our society from its foundation are being challenged and continually redefined. And rapidly what we believed was our right to the free exercise of religion is quickly becoming labeled as bigoted hate speech.

This is what Paul writes about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

[3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Add to this the fact that America has enemies across the globe, a debt issue that is out of control, and a ton of political infighting and we could quickly find ourselves living in a country that is either on the brink of collapse or is increasingly persecuting us for our faith in Christ.

But God, in his goodness, through Daniel, Christ, Paul and others has shown us that this is exactly what was supposed to happen. So instead of running in fear, instead of being surprised that the world is acting like the world and doing evil things, we should instead take heart.

Take heart that God knew this would happen, it did not catch him by surprise, and that it is all apart of his plan to bring about his grand purposes for the flourishing of his kingdom and the good of his people.

Which brings us to our 2nd point.

2. Rest secure because God is sovereign and in the end Christ wins.

Daniel 2:19-22:

[19] Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. [20] Daniel answered and said:

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
[21] 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;
[22] he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.*

In Daniel chapter 2 king Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a giant statue that he doesn't understand. So he calls all of his magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers, to not only tell him the dream, but also to give him its interpretation.

When they can't do it, the king gets mad and is about to kill all of them, including Daniel and his friends. But by God's grace Daniel finds out what is happening, prays to God for help, and in his goodness, God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

It is revealed to him that this dream shows a giant statue with a gold head, arms and a chest of silver, bronze thighs, and legs of iron and feet partially of iron and clay. And like Daniel 7, most scholars believe that this is a vision about the same 4 nations that the beasts represent.

Babylon is the head of Gold, Medo-Persia are the arms and the chest of silver, Greece is the bronze thighs, and Rome is the iron legs and the iron feet mixed with clay.

But what's more important than the statute itself or exactly what nations it represent, is what comes next in the vision. Here is what it says in Daniel 2:34-35:

[34] As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. [35] Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Do you see it? This is the kingdom of God manifesting itself in the course of human history. This stone, that was not made by any human, will break the statue to pieces and so that all of the pieces of these kingdoms and rulers will be like chaff and will be blown away.

And we know from the New Testament that the stone of this prophecy which is also talked about in Psalm 118:22 is in fact Jesus Christ.

As Peter says in Acts 4:11-12:

[11] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. [12] And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And Jesus likewise talks about this in Luke 20:16-18 when he says at the end of the Parable of the bad tenants:

[16] He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” [17] But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”?

[18] Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

All of the fierce nations and rulers who will come, and all the of the world conflict and persecution they will bring with them, will be crushed and destroyed by God, through Christ.

And not only will he destroy all of these rulers, but he will also bring with him a new a new and everlasting kingdom.

Listen to Daniel’s words in Daniel 2:44-45:

[44] And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, [45] just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

So all the kingdoms and rulers of the world will be destroyed by God. Yet, what will remain will be another kingdom. A heavenly kingdom, that was inaugurated on earth, by the death of Christ (the cornerstone) on the cross.

And when his kingdom comes fully and completely, it will become a great mountain and will fill the whole earth according to Daniel 2:35, and it will stand and exist forever and ever.

And to be sure that the king understood the seriousness and magnitude of what was happening Daniel ends this vision by saying in verse 45 ***“A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”***

This is Daniel telling King Nebuchadnezzar that the one true God, Yahweh, the great God, is sovereign and in control of all of things, which means that this dream and its interpretation are sure and fixed, and will happen according to his mighty will and plan.

This is the resounding message of the book of Daniel. That God is sovereign and in the end Christ wins.

He is sovereign over all world powers, wars, and tragedies. And he is in control of every persecution and conflict that will come. Because he has told us that they would happen according to his definite plan so that he can build his kingdom until that day that Christ returns.

And if you are here and you are feeling afraid, anxious, worn out, and are struggling to believe that God is going accomplish his kingdom purposes for us, his people, I want you to let the following verses just wash over your soul.

Daniel 7:13–14

[13] “I saw in the night visions,

*and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.*

*[14] And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel 7:27:

*[27] And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’*

Daniel 12:1:

[1] “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

Revelation 7:9-10:

[9] After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 22:12-13:

[12] “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Children, loved by God, Rest secure today. Your God and my God is sovereign and in control of all things. He will accomplish his grand purposes for us as his people. And in the end, our God, Savior, Friend, and Lord Jesus Christ is coming back, and he will win.

So then in light of these realities how are we to live and remain faithful to our God, right now, in this dark and depraved world. That’s our last point for this morning.

3. Live in light of the end

Daniel 11:32-33, 35

[32] He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. [33] And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder.

[35] and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.

Daniel chapter 11 is an amazing chapter of apocalyptic prophecy. And it is so detailed that it easily finds its fulfillment in the Medo-Persians being overthrown by the Greeks and the rise and fall of the Greek empire. But one particular person that shows up in this prophecy is a man by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes who reigned from 175 B.C. to 164 B.C.

Now, I'm not going to give you all the details of this man's life, but if you read Daniel 11:21-39 you very quickly realize that he wasn't a great guy. And when we look to history, we learn that he killed roughly 80,000 Jews, he stopped them from sacrificing and offering burnt offerings, and he even set up an altar devoted to Zeus in the temple and offered sacrifices to this false God on the altar.

And in verse 32 it says that he tried to seduce some of the Jews with flattery and would entice some of them to turn against God's covenant. **But it also says that "the people who know their God will stand firm and take action."**

And if we are God's children who believe in his sovereign rule and that Christ is returning than we to are called to the same thing.

But how do we do that today? I have 4 quick things that I want to leave you with this morning to help each one of us be a people who not only stand firm in our faith, but also take action and live for Christ in the midst of a crooked and evil world. And we can find all 4 of them in the book of Daniel.

First, we must **believe**.

Again it says in Daniel 11:32:

*[32] He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, **but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.***

We must be a people who continually set our minds and hearts to the hard work of knowing God's word and believing it. Now, in one sense this may seem easy, but everyday we are tempted to doubt God's promises and turn away from him. But we must resist that temptation and instead we must daily make choices read God's word, know God's word, and walk by faith in the promises of his word.

As Paul writes in Romans 12:2:

[2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Second, we must **pray**.

Daniel 6:10

[10] 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.

Daniel knew that he would be thrown in the lion's den because of a document that the king signed. But instead of cowering in fear, he all the more went to his upper chamber and cried out to God. And we know the outcome of that situation. **Daniel was saved by God.**

Now, I realize that every situation won't always work out like that, but we can see in the rest of scripture that we have a God who calls us to pray, and he says that when we pray according to his will, he hears us and will answer.

As it says in 1 John 5:14-15

[14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

So if we are to live and endure to the end we must be a people of prayer.

Third, we must **teach.**

As it says in the first part of Daniel 11:33a:

[33] And the wise among the people shall make many understand...

The implications of this tiny verse are too many to expound on right now, but I will say that we are surrounded all the time by people whose thoughts are shaped entirely by present realities vs. ultimate realities. Friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors who know nothing of Christ.

And we all have been given the command by God to go and make disciple, and to teach them the ultimate realities of God. Because the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20 isn't just for a select few, but it is for each and every person who calls themselves a believer in Jesus Christ.

And if that feels scary to you remember that you are not alone. For Christ says to his disciples at the end of the great commission in Matthew 28:20b

[20b] ...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

And finally, we must **Resist.**

Once again in Daniel 11:33 it says:

[33] And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder.

The point is that we must be a people who stand on truth. If it cost us our jobs, if it costs us family relationships, if it costs us our homes, our church building, our tax-exempt status, if they throw us in jail, and even if they take our life, we must stand firm on the word of God.

We must not back down, and we must not compromise, because remember, our God is sovereign, and our Savior Jesus Christ is coming back soon.

And if we take action, stand firm, and remain faithful until the end of our days we too will receive the fulfillment of the promise given to Daniel in 12:13 which says:

[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.

Let's Pray.