

Daniel 12:1-13

Introduction

In verse one of chapter twelve we came all the way to the days of the first century and the time of “great tribulation” when the earthly temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed in AD 70. We came all the way to the days of the first century when God delivered His people through their Messiah. Then in verse two we came to the physical and bodily resurrection of the dead on the last day – some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. So how did we move from the first century in verse one to the still future resurrection of the dead in verse two?

I want to be clear: What’s prophesied in this verse is the physical, material resurrection of the body. And yet we have to take into account, here, the mystery that was as yet unrevealed to Daniel. When the Messiah’s kingdom came, the weeds would grow for a time along with the wheat until the final harvest (Mat. 13:36-43). When the Messiah’s kingdom came, it would be like a grain of mustard seed—“the smallest of all seeds”—that gradually grows into a tree, “larger than all the garden plants” (Mat. 13:31-32). It would be like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened (Mat. 13:44). This is the mystery that was not revealed to Daniel or to any of the Old Testament prophets – this period of the Messiah’s kingdom being already here, but not yet fully consummated.

So on the one hand, it’s only natural that the angel moves from the “*end*” of the Old Covenant age in the 1st century with the coming of the Messiah and the eschatological destruction of the earthly city and temple immediately to the resurrection of the dead on the last day. The intervening centuries of “already” and “not yet” were still a mystery hidden in the secret counsels of God.

On the other hand, we can’t say that this is just an empty gap that’s been entirely skipped over; and the *reason* we can’t say this is because these are the days in which the power of that future resurrection to spiritual life as well as the condemnation of that future resurrection to spiritual death is already here. When our physical, material bodies are raised from the dead, this will be a resurrection *to* spiritual life (life lived in and by the Holy Spirit of God). It’s this spiritual, resurrection life that in a very real way has already been given to us to enjoy in the present. On the other hand, when the unrepentant are physically and bodily raised from the dead, this will be a resurrection *to* spiritual death and judgment. It’s this spiritual death and judgment that is, in a very real way, the present lot of all those who have not believed in Jesus. The powerful, eschatological realities of that *future physical* and *bodily* resurrection of the dead—both for the wicked and for the righteous—are already here. We share today in the spiritual life of that future resurrection through our union with the risen Lord. In the same way, Jesus could say in His day:

- John 3:18 — Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

These are things that could never be said before Christ came into the world.* So, on the one hand, the angel moves from the “*end*” of the Old Covenant age in the 1st century immediately to the bodily resurrection of the dead on the last day because the intervening centuries of “already” and “not yet” were still a mystery hidden in the secret counsels of God. That’s only natural and to be expected. On the other hand, we can’t say that this is just an empty gap; and the *reason* we can’t say that is because these are the days of the “already” and the “not yet” – when the power of that future resurrection to spiritual life as well as the condemnation of that future resurrection to spiritual death and judgment is already operative—powerfully at work—in the present. [See chart on p. 8] So we read, now, in verses 2-3:

I. Daniel 12:2-3 — And of those sleeping in the dust of the earth multitudes shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Who are those who will be raised to everlasting life on the last day? The angel describes them as “those who are *wise* [*sa-kal*].” Does that word ring any bells for us? In verse 10, we’ll see this same word again, but combined with another very similar word:

- **Daniel 12:10** — None of the wicked shall **understand** [*byn*], but those who are **wise** [*sa-kal*] shall **understand** [*byn*].

Remember that in the Hebrew canon, Daniel is included not in the category of the “Prophets” but in the category of the “Writings” – in the same category with books like Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. All the way back in the beginning of Daniel, in the very first chapter we saw *why* this is.

- **Daniel 1:3-4** — 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, youths without blemish, of good appearance and **skillful** [*sa-kal*] in all *wisdom* [*hak-mah*], knowing [*ya-da*] knowledge [*da-at*], **understanding** [*byn*] insight/discernment [*mad-da*], and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.
- **Daniel 1:17** — As for these four youths, God gave them *insight/discernment* [*mad-da*] and **skill** [*sa-kal*] in all literature and *wisdom* [*hak-mah*], and Daniel had **understanding** [*byn*] in all visions and dreams.

We saw that five of these words are associated with the wisdom of King Solomon and four of these words are all clustered together in the prologue to the book of Proverbs (cf. Prov. 1:1-7). Daniel was certainly a prophet and it’s not wrong to think of this book in the category of the prophets (cf. Mat. 24:15), but the emphasis in Daniel is not on Daniel the prophet, but on Daniel the “wise man.” The emphasis in Daniel is not on Daniel the prophet, but on Daniel the man who shows us what it looks like to live skillfully in exile on the basis of his insight into the sovereign, saving purposes of God. This is why these same words from chapter one are used repeatedly throughout the rest of the book of Daniel. And this is why, here in the very last chapter, we’re

* If resurrection life is already here in the present through Christ then, by default, so also are the realities of “resurrection judgment and death” (cf. Jn. 3:17-18; 12:47-48).

brought back again to this theme of wisdom and understanding (cf. 8:15-17; 9:22-25; 10:1, 11-14).

Notice that this skillful living of our lives is rooted not in our ability to pry into secret mysteries, but in God's gracious revelation to us of His salvation. This is a theme that's everywhere in Daniel, but it's summed up in chapter two:

- Daniel 2:20–23 (cf. 2:30) — Daniel answered and said: “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; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.”

True wisdom and true understanding is a gracious gift from God, rooted in the insight that He has given us into His sovereign, saving purposes. It's on the basis of this wisdom bestowed upon us in our salvation that we are enabled to live our lives with true, Daniel-like “skill.”

Can you see now why the angel can say that it's only the truly “wise” who will be raised on that last day to everlasting life? In the second half of verse 3 the wise are those who “turn many to righteousness” by the influence of their own *righteous* lives (cf. 9:13). In verse 10, the wise who understand are contrasted with the *wicked* who will never understand. And so we're called to ask ourselves: “Am I one of those who are wise? Am I one of those who have understanding?” Am I one of those who have received from God insight into the mystery of His sovereign, saving purposes? If so, then I can know that one day I will “shine like the brightness of the sky above... [and] like the stars forever and ever.”

The point here isn't primarily a physical shining (though that may very well be included here), but rather the glory of reflecting perfectly the image and the likeness of God. In other words, this is the glory of being perfected in righteousness – no longer even tainted in any way by sin. This is the glory of God Himself in all the perfections of His character and His attributes shining in and through us who have been *recreated* in His image (cf. Mat. 13:40-43). Can we even begin to fathom the bliss and the joy and the everlasting happiness? On the one hand, we have to answer “no” because this will only be fulfilled on that future day of resurrection. On the other hand, we can answer in some small, but very real way, “yes” because “already” we have been and we are being recreated after the image of God by being conformed to the image of His Son (cf. Rom. 8:29).

- Colossians 3:9–10 — You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
- Ephesians 4:24 — ...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Already, Paul says that we are those who “shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Already:

- 2 Corinthians 3:18 — We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord [in the Gospel of Jesus Christ], are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

And it's this "already" that makes us long all the more for that "not yet" when Jesus transforms even "our lowly body [which is still subject to sin and all the effects of the fall] to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21). It's the joy of even *now* being transformed from one degree of glory to another through our renewal after the image of Christ that makes us long all the more for that day when we "shine like the brightness of the sky above... [and] like the stars forever and ever." And it's that future hope of the glory that will *one day* be ours that causes us to rejoice all the more in reflecting His image and likeness today. The angel concludes, now, in verse four:

II. Daniel 12:4 — 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.

Why should Daniel receive this entire vision—even this entire series of visions—only to be told that he's to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end? The point isn't that these visions were to be hidden away in a secret vault until hundreds of years later. The angel isn't telling Daniel to hide what he's just been told, but rather that the message is to be preserved and safeguarded especially for those who would live at the time of the end – especially for those who would live in the days of the fourth beast (Rome and the Roman Caesars) and in the days of the Messiah's coming and the establishment of His everlasting kingdom.

But we still have to ask: Why was the vision to be preserved *especially* for them? Isn't this vision needful and edifying even for the Jewish people in Daniel's own day? It is, but their *understanding* of the vision could never be full or complete before the days of its fulfillment in Christ. In other words, the point here is not an "understanding" that's no more than an ability to fill in all the blanks after the fact. The point here is that God-given insight into the mystery of God's sovereign, saving purposes that can only be fully received by those living in the days of fulfillment – in the days of the Messiah and His kingdom. It's in this sense that the visions of Daniel remained shut and sealed until the time of the end (cf. 12:8-9) – until the culmination of redemptive history at the "end of the ages" in Christ and His cross (cf. Heb. 9:26).

And so we see that there's a wisdom that we have today, that even Daniel himself could never have. There's an insight that we have today into the visions of Daniel and the revelation of Messiah's everlasting kingdom that even Daniel Himself could never have – because we're actually living in the days of Messiah's kingdom. This shouldn't cause us to be proud, but rather to be overwhelmed with awe. This shouldn't cause us to be proud, but rather to tremble at the stewardship that is ours – who, even if we should be least in the kingdom of heaven are still "greater" than Daniel and all the prophets of old (cf. Mat. 11:11; 13:16-17). If the book of Daniel has been fully opened to us through the insight we've been given in these days of the kingdom, then how much more accountable are we (even than Daniel!) to live our lives wisely?

It's difficult to know what the angel's next words mean: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." This could be a negative description of how people will seek a

counterfeit knowledge and wisdom apart from the revelation of God's salvation in Christ (cf. Amos 8:12). In that case, here is a warning to us not to be caught up with the world's "wisdom." Or this could be a positive description of how at the end of the ages, the wisdom and understanding of God's people will increase exponentially through the preaching of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. In that case, here is a call to meditate daily on the present realities of the Messiah and His kingdom. We go on, now, to read in verses 5-6:

III. Daniel 12:5-6 — Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. 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?"

"How long shall it be till the end of these great and astonishing and overwhelming and terrifying things?" (cf. 11:36) How long until the deliverance of God's people – of those whose names are found written in the book? How long until resurrection life and eschatological judgment and condemnation have come in the arrival of Messiah's kingdom?

IV. 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.

Why all the formality? Why the gravity and solemnity of raising both the right hand and the left hand toward heaven and swearing by him who lives forever? Because at the end of Daniel, we are to know that God is sovereign, and that this is not just a doctrinal proposition, but a reality that we are to lay hold of by faith. It is in order to create and strengthen this faith in us that we see the angel raising *both* the right hand and the left hand toward heaven and swearing by him who lives forever.

After "a time, times, and half a time" the Messiah would come and establish His everlasting kingdom. The angel doesn't *say* "a year, years, and half a year" – and that's purposeful. In chapter seven we saw that this is *intended* to be a symbolic, indefinite expression. Three and a half times is simply the perfect number—the number of completeness—cut in half. In other words, though the time may seem to God's faithful remnant to be long ("time, times..."), it will be cut short in the end ("half a time") by the God who decrees the times and the seasons (cf. Dan. 2:21) and then the rock cut from the mountain will strike the image at its base and grow into a mountain that fills all the earth – then the one like a Son of Man will slay the beast and receive the kingdom forever and ever. We're living now in the days when the "time, times, and half a time" have been fulfilled already — and not yet.

Indeed, the angel said to Daniel that "when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished." The Hebrew word for "shattering" (*na-pas*) is a strong word. It conveys the idea of smashing, crushing, breaking, and dashing to pieces (cf. Judg. 7:19; Ps. 2:9; 137:9; Isa. 27:9; Jer. 51:20-23). So when does this shattering come to an end? In the context of Daniel, it must come to an end *when* the stone cut from the mountain strikes the feet of the great image of a man and crushes it and breaks it in pieces (cf. Dan. 2:31-35). It must come to an end *when* the one like a Son of Man destroys the fourth beast and receives the

kingdom forever. And so we see that this smashing, crushing, breaking, and dashing to pieces of God's holy people has indeed already come to an end. No longer is the holy covenant people just a tiny remnant of Jews reduced almost to nothing by the powerful empires of the world. Now, the holy covenant people are spreading throughout all the world—claiming citizens from all the peoples and languages and nations of the world—under the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ, who is King of kings. Jesus said to Peter:

- Matthew 16:18–19 — You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it [against its assault]. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Jesus said to His disciples:

- Matthew 28:18–20 (cf. Lk. 10:17-19) — All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

And the Apostle Paul writes:

- Ephesians 1:20–23 — [God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The smashing, crushing, breaking, and dashing to pieces of God's holy people has come to an end already, and yet we recognize that even here there's still a "not yet." We still face persecution, and suffering, and even martyrdom and death in this world, but we experience this today *as* a people who are already victorious in Christ – *as* a people who are already laying siege to the gates of hell through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why Paul can say to the Christians living in Rome:

- Romans 16:20 — The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Already. Not yet. We see, don't we? We understand. But now listen to what Daniel says:

V. Daniel 12:8 — I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?"

Daniel isn't just concerned with "facts," here – with filling in blanks. What Daniel wants to *understand* is this fulfillment of God's sovereign, saving purposes. What Daniel longs for is a deeper, fuller insight into this final redemption of God's people. Daniel is a wise man, but what he's longing for now is a wisdom that even he himself has not yet been given. What an amazing thing it is, then, to read the angel's answer to Daniel's longing:

VI. Daniel 12:9–10 — 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.”

Daniel could not *understand*, however much he longed to (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). But we who are living now at the time of the end (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11), we do *understand*. At the end of the ages, when Jesus was born into this world and was crucified and buried and raised from the dead and then enthroned at the right hand of God, none of the wicked understood. They could not understand. But those who were wise, like Daniel – they did understand. And so they were given a *wisdom* even surpassing the wisdom of Daniel.

We have been given a wisdom even surpassing the wisdom of Daniel. We have seen with our own eyes God’s salvation in the person of Jesus Christ and the coming of His everlasting kingdom. And so we are called to live wisely, in the light of this insight that we have been given into the sovereign, saving purposes of God. We are called not only to rejoice and give thanks, but to tremble at this stewardship that is ours.

VII. Daniel 12:11–12 — And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up [in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC; cf. 11:31), there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

Here at the end of Daniel, we remember that the point is not correctly filling in all the blanks afterward, but *faith* that rests in the sovereignty of God ahead of time. Nevertheless, I’ll join all the rest of the commentators in suggesting a solution to this mystery that teaches us wisdom.

1,290 days is the equivalent of forty-three 30-day months. That indicates symbolism. 1,335 days adds forty-five days to this, which is the equivalent of an extra one and a half months (30 plus 15). This also indicates symbolism. Both of these periods begin in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC (cf. 11:31) and yet we assume that they must take us all the way to the end when God sets up His everlasting kingdom. This requires symbolism. Finally, both of these numbers are just slightly longer than three and a half years (whether lunar or solar; cf. “a time, times, and half a time”). These are, therefore, symbolic numbers that are communicating some very concrete and literal truth. First, the *length* of that period of waiting until the coming of Messiah’s kingdom was already determined by God even down to the very day. Second, the believing remnant among God’s shattered and oppressed Old Covenant people must never stop waiting. They must keep persevering until God’s salvation came.

What is the difference between the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days? I would suggest it’s the difference between the coming of the Messiah at His birth (cf. Lk. 2:25-32) and then the Messiah’s death and resurrection and enthronement at the right hand of God and His pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In other words, from Antiochus Epiphanes to the *birth* of the Messiah would be 1,290 days. But how blessed would be those who waited and who arrived at the 1,335 days when the *resurrected* Messiah was presented before the Ancient of Days and received the kingdom and poured out upon His people, in the words of Paul, “the Spirit who is from God, **that we might understand** the things freely given us by God” — things that

“no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined” (not even Daniel) and yet things that God has now “*revealed to us through the Spirit*” (1 Cor. 2:9-10, 12; cf. Mat. 13:34-35; Eph. 1:16-23). And so the angel concludes with these words to Daniel:

VIII. Daniel 12:13 — But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.

Then Daniel would understand. *Then* we will all understand—all of us who are wise by God’s grace—as we have never understood before. And then with Daniel, we will shine like the brightness of the sky above... [and] like the stars forever and ever.

