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UNRAVELING THE FUTURE STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

End or Beginning? Daniel 11-12

Daniel 11

1 And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him. 2 "Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. 3 Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. 4 After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others. 5 "The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. 6 After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be handed over, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her.

7 "One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress; he will fight against them and be victorious. 8 He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North alone. 9 Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own country. 10 His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress. 11 "Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated. 12 When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant. 13 For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped. 14 "In those times many will rise against the king of the South. The violent men among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.

15 Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. 16 The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it. 17 He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him. 18 Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back upon him. 19 After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more. 20 "His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be

destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle 21 "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. 22 Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. 23 After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. 24 When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses-but only for a time.

25 "With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. 26 Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. 27 The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. 28 The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country. 29 "At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. 30 Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. 31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. 32 With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. 33 "Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. 34 When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. 35 Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.

Before entering into the details of these last two chapters, we must ask the question concerning the purpose of this revelation to Daniel and to his people. We can hardly assume that the archangel only gave a futuristic history lesson to Daniel. There are three schools of interpretation on this section of the Book of Daniel. The first interprets these chapters as basically foretelling the future. The liberal school, that postdates the book to the time of the Maccabees in the 2nd Century BC, sees in it an apocalyptic treatment of the past and a retelling of what has already happened in a prophetic way. The third school understands this prophecy to be a picture of the moral development of the humanity without any direct reference to any political events, i.e., the state of human conflicts and of society as history develops.

We should approach this chapter that has a specific historical context with the thought that the Holy Spirit, besides revealing future events to Daniel, uses historical happenings to prepare God's people for what will happen at the end of time at the appearance of the Antichrist, when Satan plays his final act on earth. God always warns His people who live in fellowship with Him, of the trials and sufferings that lie ahead. He does not want any of us to be taken by surprise and off guard.

“The first year of Darius, the Mede” is generally understood as the year in which the edict was issued that permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The three kings in Persia appear to have been: first, Cambyses, Cyrus’ son (accession 529 BC); second, Pseudo-Smerdis, an impostor ... and third, Darius I, or Hystaspes, also called, the Great, (522-486 BC) The fourth, far greater than they all was, then, Xerxes, known in Esther as Ahasuerus (486-464 BC). The wars of Darius and of Xerxes, by which the Persians infuriated all of Greece, are well known to students of ancient history. The wealth of the fourth king, Xerxes or Ahasuerus, may have been derived from the accumulation of the riches of the three previous ones. There appears to be a gap between the three kings of Persia and the one who is called “a mighty king,” who is generally taken to be Alexander the Great, who was the ruler of the Macedonian Empire. Alexander in turn invaded Persia in revenge of the Persian invasion of his homeland in the century preceding him.

The archangel predicts the breaking up of the Macedonian Empire by stating: “After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.” In the next forty verses, the archangel gives Daniel and the Jewish people a preview of history to come. Only those details are provided that are important to them, particularly as they lead up to the appearance of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the type of the Antichrist. The Kingdom of the South and the Kingdom of the North are respectively Egypt and Syria. The statement about the daughter of the king of the South who goes to the king of the North to make an alliance refers to the marriage of Cleopatra, daughter of Antiochus, to Ptolemy, the king of Egypt. There were frequent and almost constant wars between these two kingdoms. Yet the reference here is to Ptolemy Philopator, who succeeded Ptolemy Euergetes in Egypt, and who was exasperated at the conduct of Antiochus in invading Syria and Palestine. He assembled an army, and marched with it to Raphia, where he met Antiochus, and a battle was fought. This put the land of the Jews, called here “the Beautiful Land,” in the middle of the conflicts. It seems that the Jew’s sympathy went to the side of Syria in all of this.

The daughter in verse 17 is Antiochus’ daughter Cleopatra. It appears that, at one point, Antiochus felt the need to come to an agreement with Egypt so he could concentrate his energy toward Rome with which he had entered into a conflict. The section in verses 21-32 predicts the appearance of Antiochus IV Epiphanes as a type of the Antichrist who will appear at the end of world history. Everything that preceded in this chapter leads up to this point. These are the events for which God wanted His people to be prepared and for which He wants them to watch and pray. The archangel describes Antiochus’s character as “contemptible.”

Daniel 11:36--12:3

36 "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. 37 He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. 38 Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. 39 He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over

many people and will distribute the land at a price. 40 "At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood.

41 He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. 42 He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. 43 He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. 44 But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. 45 He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

12:1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

The remainder of chapter eleven, actually verses 21-45, probably describes some of the details of the war between Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Egypt. His primary aim-to unify his empire by spreading Greek civilization and culture-brought him into direct conflict with the Jews. This conflict broke into open rebellion in 167 B.C. Accounts of these conflicts are found in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees. The revolt began with Antiochus' edict that sought to unite all the peoples of his kingdom in religion, law, and custom. The Jews were the only people who would not adhere to this edict. Antiochus issued regulations against observing the Sabbath, practicing circumcision, and keeping all food laws. These regulations were followed by the "abomination of desolation" (Dan 11:31)-the erection of the altar of the Greek god Zeus over the altar of the burnt offering in the Temple. Jews were forced to participate in heathen festivities and were put to death if they were caught with the Book of the Law in their possession. As the revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus, gained momentum, the people of Israel united to overthrow Seleucid domination of their land. The Syrians were routed and the Temple was cleansed on the 25th of Chislev, 165 B.C. This cleansing is now observed by the Jews as the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah), around December 25. According to ancient writers, Antiochus IV withdrew into the East following his defeat. He died in Persia a madman.

The persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes was the cruelest and severest that God's chosen people had ever experienced in their history as a nation. Only Hitler's "Final Solution" in which the Holocaust claimed six million victims superseded it. Inasmuch as this prophecy has not seen its final fulfillment yet, we can safely and mournfully say that the worst is still to come. Some scholars want to limit the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in the first two verses of chapter twelve to the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Undoubtedly, some of the fulfillments had occurred during the terror regime of that period, but the re-occurrence of the same type of language in the New Testament suggests that the ultimate fulfillment is still to come. Jesus spoke about the future Great Tribulation when He said: "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again."

One would expect that the standing up of Michael in behalf of the nation of Israel would mean their deliverance from oppression. The opposite turns out to be true; the distress of that period is said to be unequalled in previous history. It is, however, not necessary to read that persecution is what follows the appearance of Michael. We rather interpret these words as meaning that Michael appears upon the scene because of the extreme pressure to which the people are exposed. Although deliverance does not seem to come immediately, it does come, and in such a way that God is justified. The immediate application, as we have seen, pertains, undoubtedly, to the persecution of Israel under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Michael's intervention and support during that period ensured the survival of Israel as God's chosen people to whom God's revelation on earth had been entrusted. Their endurance assured the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The archangel does not elaborate on the meaning of "the book" in Daniel 12:1. The word is often used generically in Scripture as an image that assures us of God's special attention to specific problems. The question is whether "the Book" referred to here pertains to spiritual salvation. Those who hold to the view that eternal salvation is referred to here may see in these words a prophecy about the rapture of the Church before the appearance of the Antichrist.

However, in verse 2 & 3 - *"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."* - the archangel definitely refers to eternal salvation and condemnation. There is also a strong suggestion that the primary fulfillment of this prophecy relates, not to the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but to the end of times. It is true that the approximately three centuries that separated the people in Daniel's time from the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes can be considered a long time span, but the reference to the resurrection of the dead, definitely points to "the last day." The phrase "sleep in the dust of the earth will awake," apparently, is unique in Scripture. "Sleep" speaks of being dead and "the dust of the earth" suggests burial in the ground, which was not always the usual mode of burial among Jews; often the dead were placed in caves. The words indicate that there was among the Jewish people a concept of resurrection.

The words "wise" and "righteousness" in verse 3 are the translation of the Hebrew words *sakal* and *tsadaq*. *Sakal* is used to describe the qualities of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We read that, in the eyes of Eve, the tree was "a tree to be desired to make one wise." It conveys the idea of guidance. *Tsadaq* means basically "to be right," or "to make right." The wisdom referred to here is "the fear of the LORD which is the beginning of knowledge." It implies not merely understanding but also the result as expressed in acts of righteousness. In the context of the archangel's words, the brilliance of shining stars refers to the future glory of the righteous. It is true that stars become visible at night. To emphasize the importance of darkness in the image, however, may be pushing the principle of interpretation too far. The words of the archangel stress the brilliance of moral perfection not the night sky that is visible from the planet on which we live. It is true, though, that the starry sky at night, more than rising or setting of the sun, reveals to us of the greatness of the universe in which we live.

Daniel 12:4-13

4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." 5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. 6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" 7 The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." 8 I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" 9 He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. 11 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. 12 Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. 13 "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

If the purpose of this vision of Daniel were to arm the Jews beforehand for the hardship to come, the sealing of the book would not make much sense. The sealing may have metaphorical meaning — a book sealed, though it was visible to the eye, and was not hidden away — could not be read. If the key by which to interpret it is not granted, a book cannot be read. Prophecy was delivered frequently in enigmatic language, and the meaning of it could only be grasped when circumstances supplied the key. Daniel himself did not grasp the meaning of the words he had to write. This brings us to the last scene of this vision and the conclusion of the book. It is generally understood that the river mentioned is the Tigris. The “two others” are also angels or archangels. Since no names or further details are given, we cannot be specific. There appears to be a third person who is above the water of the river. Some interpreters see in him Christ before His incarnation. He is definitely the most authoritative person on the scene. He is probably the same person John sees in Revelation, and the oath He swears there is quite similar to the one spoken here. One of the angelic figures asks Him when the events will take place. The question reads literally in the Hebrew text: “How long the end of these wonders?” The Hebrew word used is *pele’* which means “a miracle.” The question does not seem to ask when the predicted catastrophes will take place but rather when God will intervene and give deliverance. We can hardly call “the abomination that causes desolation” a miracle.

The answer expected would not be meant to satisfy man’s curiosity regarding the future but it would stimulate hope during the time of tribulation. The answer is both encouraging and discouraging. The 3½ years stand for a rather limited time. But the second part of the reply is far from encouraging: “When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed. The Hebrew word rendered “broken” is *naphats* which also means “to scatter.” Some commentators see in it a reference to the end of the Diaspora of the Jewish people.

We do not learn whether the angel who asked the question was satisfied. Evidently, the words did not reassure Daniel’s anxiety. All he could see from his human perspective was darkness.

The subsequent conversation with the other archangel did nothing to assuage this. What do we do with 1290 and 1335 days the archangel mentions to Daniel?

The suggestion that “the abomination that causes desolation” would refer to the Cross comes as a surprising ray of new light upon the subject. It is obvious that the erection of the Cross can in no way be compared to the placing of the statue of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies of the temple. But it cannot be denied that the Cross is also an abomination in the fullest sense of the word. The fact that it was also the altar on which the atonement of the sins of the world was made does not change the horror of it. On the Cross, God’s holiness was at once desecrated and vindicated. The paradox of sin is solved in the paradox of the cross.

One gets the impression that the 1335 days mark a happy event toward which the believer may look forward with joyful anticipation. Nothing indicates what the extra 45 days, the ones that separate the 1290 from the 1335 stands for. We may have to wait for heaven before these divine mathematics will become clear to us. To Daniel’s question: “What will the outcome of all this be?” the archangel answers that the tribulation will serve the purpose to clearly draw the line between the saints and the sinners and that the characteristics of both categories will become more clearly marked. We find the same thought expressed in Revelation, where the angel tells John: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.”

Twice in these last verses, the archangel says to Daniel: “Go your way.” The Hebrew words *yalak qets* may be rendered: “walk to the end.” Daniel had been one of God’s beloved watchmen, one that had stood in the gap. He had understood the times and had opened the door for the Holy Spirit to work through his prayers of intercession. The archangel’s words could be understood to mean that Daniel’s task was finished and that he could rest. We can also read in them to mean that he was to continue to walk on this path to the end of his life on earth.

APPLICATION

1. The _____ is Yet to _____.

2. The _____ is Yet to _____.

3. The _____ are Yet to _____.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you define hope? Share an experience in your life that God's Word has given you hope?

2. When your problem remains, what does it mean for you to walk wisely?

3. What is the most important lesson you have learned from the Book of Daniel?