

Daniel 12:3–13 — The Wise Shall Shine as Stars

The Wise and the Wicked Distinguished; The Sealed Book; Running To and Fro; The 1260, 1290, and 1335 Days; The Three Remaining Feasts; and Go Thy Way, Daniel

Scripture Reading: Daniel 12:3–13; Matthew 24; Revelation 11; Zechariah 12; Leviticus 23

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

(Daniel 12:3)

“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Daniel 12:4)

The Wise Shall Shine: Suffering and Honour in the Time of the End

Verse 3 opens with the honour that God will give to the wise — the maskilim, those with spiritual understanding — in the time of the end. In Daniel 11:33–34, these same wise personages appear in a much earlier setting, and some of them fall by the sword, go into captivity, and suffer affliction. In the world’s estimation, suffering and trouble are evidence of foolishness: if you were wise, you would have avoided the trouble. But in the times Daniel writes of, the reverse will be true. Those who are wise in God’s mind will suffer precisely because of their wisdom. The marks of the world’s favour and the marks of God’s favour will be opposite things.

Verse 3 distinguishes between the brightness of the expanse and the shining of the stars. Both shine, but the stars shine in the blackness of the night. They give their light precisely when there is the greatest darkness around them. It is a special privilege when God gives the power to shine in circumstances of deep darkness. Just before the Lord comes to set up his millennial kingdom, the darkness in this world will be very deep. The wise who shine then will do so against that blackness — like stars, fixed and not running about to gather light to themselves. Stars do not run. They shine because that is their nature.

The Sealed Book and the Running to and Fro

Verse 4 commands Daniel to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. This sealing is not about us; it is about Israel. A glance at rabbinic commentary on Daniel shows what a closed book it is to the Jewish people. But at the time of the end, the Spirit of God will work a quickening in the Jewish remnant, and the sealing will be reversed. They will have sufficient understanding to act on the instructions of Matthew 24, and teachers among them will have insight to lead the godly in that dark time.

Verse 4 also says, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. This appears to be a contrast to the wise who shine like fixed stars. Men who run to and fro to gather knowledge do not thereby gain wisdom. In the making of many books there is no end; knowledge does not bring a soul closer to God. Sir Isaac Newton, who wrote a commentary on Daniel, reportedly remarked on this verse that he would not be surprised if man someday attained the astonishing speed of fifty miles per hour. A French infidel mocked the remark. The irony is that God's word proved true far beyond what even Newton imagined — and the running to and fro, accelerated now beyond all historical precedent, has not added one cubit of wisdom to the race.

The Time of the End: What It Means and Does Not Mean

The phrase time of the end recurs throughout Daniel 11 and 12 (verses 40, 9, 4, and elsewhere). It does not mean the end of time. It is not the same as the Great White Throne or the dissolution of the present heavens and earth. It is the closing epoch of the present age — the end of the Mosaic age, the end of the age as the Lord Jesus himself used the phrase in the Gospels. This closing epoch overlaps with Daniel's seventieth week, though it may begin slightly before the opening of the week and certainly extends beyond the 1260th day to the 1335th.

The whole book of Daniel has a beginning and an end. It begins with Nebuchadnezzar's image: the head of gold, the start of Gentile dominion over the then-known world. The book's end is the end of that Gentile dominion and the establishment of the kingdom of God's Son. Between the beginning and the end flows the history of the Gentile empires and their relationship to the godly remnant of Israel. The three angelic persons seen at the river in verse 5 — one on this bank, one on that bank, and one above the waters — may be read as a summary of the whole book in miniature: something on this side of history before the Babylonian captivity, something on that side at the millennium, and in between, the great flow of Gentile history over which God is sovereign, standing above the waters.

The Time Periods: 1260, 1290, and 1335 Days

The answer to the question how long is given in verse 7 as a time, times, and half a time — the three and a half years, the 1260 days, which is the last half of the seventieth week. This brings us to the point at which the beast's power to persecute the Jewish people terminates: Revelation 11 shows the beast killing the two witnesses on what appears to be the 1260th day, followed by three and a half days of the world's false celebration before the witnesses are caught up and the rapid succession of the seven bowls begins.

Verse 11 adds a period of 1290 days from the stopping of the daily sacrifice and the setting up of the abomination. This is 30 days beyond the 1260. The Scripture does not declare precisely what happens on the 1290th day, but it marks an epoch. The 1335 days of verse 12 are a further 45 days beyond the 1290. Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the 1335 days: this is the end of the wonders, the full establishment of the kingdom. From the 1335th day — the 15th day of the 30-day month beginning on the 1320th day — the great Feast of Tabernacles begins, celebrating the completion of the journey and Israel's full establishment under Messiah.

The Three Remaining Feasts of Jehovah

Leviticus 23 gives seven feasts of Jehovah. The first four — Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost — have been literally fulfilled in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord and the coming of the Holy Spirit. There is no reason why the last three should not be equally and literally fulfilled. The Feast of Trumpets (the first of the seventh month) points to the regathering of Israel. The Day of Atonement (the tenth of the month) points to the national repentance of Israel and the application of the great work of atonement to them, as Zechariah 12 describes. The Feast of Tabernacles (the fifteenth of the month) is the final celebration, the settled rest in the land under the new covenant. These fit precisely into the time periods at the end of Daniel 12. Just as there was a long gap in the calendar year between the fourth feast and the fifth, so there has been a much longer epoch of time between the fulfilment of the first four and the coming fulfilment of the last three. But they will be fulfilled.

Go Thy Way, Daniel: His Rest and His Lot

Twice in this chapter Daniel is told, go thy way. The instruction is clear and personal: Daniel had a way, and he was to walk in it. The question of what would happen to the nations and to Israel at the end was not for him to carry; he was to

go his own way, do his own appointed service, and rest. The parallel is the Lord's word to Peter after his restoration: if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Each servant has his own path, and being occupied with another's path is a distraction from it.

Thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. Daniel had served under Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, and Cyrus — three of the greatest monarchs the ancient world had seen, clueless idolaters who tried to rule the earth. Above all others, Daniel will know the difference when the Lord Jesus reigns in his kingdom. He was there; he saw those men in their wickedness and confusion. And he will see the Lord come in glory and take up all that those men failed at, and make it perfectly good to God's honour. Daniel will stand in his lot at the end of the days, and no one in the kingdom will rejoice in the contrast more than he.

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament... as the stars for ever and ever.