Sealed, Purified, and Promised a Lot

Daniel 12:4–13 · August 7, 2013

The Time of the End — Not the End of Time

The phrase that opens verse 4 — close the words and seal the book till the time of the end — is easily misread. It does not say until the end of time. The time of the end is a specific epoch: the resumption of God's prophetic dealings with Israel after the long parenthesis of the age of grace. More precisely, it is the restarting of the prophetic clock that commences Daniel's 70th week — the final seven years that the book of Daniel describes in such detail.

The 70 weeks were determined for Daniel's people and for the holy city. Sixty-nine of those weeks unfolded historically, concluding when the Messiah was cut off and had nothing. At that point the clock stopped. For nearly two thousand years it has not resumed. When it does, that is the time of the end. The book is sealed until then — not from us, who have the Spirit and the full light of the New Testament, but from those to whom these things directly belong: the Jewish people, who will receive understanding in the time of the end by a specific work of the Holy Spirit among the faithful remnant.

The contrast with Revelation 22:10 is deliberate and striking. Daniel is told to seal the book; John is told the exact opposite — seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. What was distant for Daniel is imminent for John and for every believer since. We do not look for signs or prophetic milestones before the Lord can come. We live in a posture of at any moment. That difference in posture is not incidental; it is the consistent and deliberate teaching of the New Testament, maintained without a single slip from the Lord's own words through to the closing verses of Revelation.

The Posture of Imminence

The Thessalonian believers understood this. They were so fully expecting the Lord's return to be immediate that when some among them died, they were troubled — afraid that those believers had missed it. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was written, in part, to address that very concern. That anxiety, however misguided in its specifics, was spiritually correct in its orientation: the Lord could come at any moment, and they were living accordingly.

This posture does not require any prophetic event to have occurred first. It does not look for a revived Roman Empire to be in place, or for the temple to be rebuilt, or for a world government to emerge. Any of those thoughts — however interesting as background to what will happen after the rapture — belong to the category of my Lord delayeth his coming if they are allowed to push the Lord's return into some future that first requires certain conditions. The Lord may come today. That has been true every day since He ascended. That is the Christian's hope, and it is different in kind from the hope of Israel, which requires prophetic milestones to be passed before it can be realised.

The Running and the Fixed Stars — Knowledge Versus Wisdom

Verse 4 closes with a description of the end times: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. The running to and fro speaks of restlessness — a ceaseless movement in search of the next thing, the next discovery, the next answer. Our own era has fulfilled this more completely than any before it. Knowledge has increased at a rate no generation could have imagined. And yet wisdom has not kept pace. The two are not the same thing.

The contrast with verse 3 is deliberate. There the wise are likened to stars — fixed, unmoving, shining from where they are. Stars do not run to and fro to gather the capacity to give light. They shine because of what they are. The nations are like a churning sea; Israel was called to be God's settled centre in the

earth; the wise of the end times will be like stars: steadfast, rooted, giving light in the darkness precisely because they are not swept up in the running that characterises those around them.

Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth — Paul's description of a certain kind of person — is the spiritual counterpart of many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. All the information in the world does not bring a soul one step closer to God. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, and that is the property of the obedient, not the learned.

Five Figures by the River — and What the River Suggests

Verses 5 through 7 present a scene worth pausing over. Daniel is by the river. He sees two figures, one on each bank. He then sees a figure above the waters — the man clothed in linen who appeared earlier in the vision. One of the bank-figures asks the figure above the river: How long to the end of these wonders? There are five persons altogether in this scene: Daniel himself, the one he had been speaking with, the two on the banks, and the one above the waters.

The figure above the waters is, in all likelihood, the Lord Himself. The authority with which He swears — raising both hands to heaven, swearing by Him that liveth forever — belongs to someone of the highest order. And the answer He gives is the final, authoritative word on the question.

As to the river itself: a thought has been offered that the river running between the two banks represents all the history that flows between God's two great epochs of dealing with Israel. On one bank stands everything that preceded the Babylonian captivity — God reigning through Israel, the Shekinah in the temple, the covenant operating in the land. On the other bank stands what is still future — the kingdom, the new covenant, Israel restored and reigning with Messiah. Between the two flows the enormous river of the times of the Gentiles, now more than two and a half millennia long. And above it all — above the river, not on

one of its banks — stands the Lord. He is not swept along by history. He is above it.

The Oath — and What It Answers

The figure above the waters raises both hands to heaven and swears by Him that liveth forever. The solemnity is unmistakable. This is not a casual estimate or a provisional answer. It is an oath, and the one who swears is appealing to the eternal God as witness. What he declares is this: it is for a time, times, and a half. And when the scattering of the power of the holy people shall be accomplished, all these things shall be finished.

The question was: how long until these wonders end? The answer is three and a half years — the duration of the great tribulation, the second half of Daniel's 70th week. But the phrasing of the end condition is important: when the scattering of the power of the holy people shall be accomplished. The scattering of Israel began long before the 70th week; it is the condition that has prevailed throughout the times of the Gentiles. What is spoken of here is the completion and reversal of that scattering — the final regathering that concludes the tribulation and ushers in the kingdom.

The scattering was judicial — a punishment for Israel's persistent rejection of God's word and ultimately of His Son. Many among the scattered people will go into eternity without receiving the Messiah. But the scattering will end. The regathering will come. God's purposes cannot be frustrated, and the oath above the river is His guarantee.

> *And he held up his right hand and his left hand unto the heavens, and swore by him that liveth forever, that it is for a time, times, and a half. And when the scattering of the power of the holy people shall be accomplished, all these things shall be finished. — Daniel 12:7*

I Heard but I Understood Not — The Limits of Even the Wisest

Daniel presses for more: I heard but I understood not. My Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And the answer is simply: go thy way, Daniel, for these words are closed and sealed till the time of the end. The time was not right. More than that: even Daniel, who was by any measure among the wise — the word sachal, from which the masculine of verse 3 is derived, is precisely the word that describes him — could not understand what was not yet time to be understood.

This is a lesson in itself. There are things in Scripture that God has not yet seen fit to open fully. To speculate about those things — to sit down and reason out from first principles what the logical implications must be — is not wisdom. It is the exercise of an intellect that has decided it can do without revelation. The right attitude is Daniel's: I heard, I did not understand, and I went my way. Confidence that we know things that God has not chosen to reveal is not a virtue.

What is sealed is sealed for a reason. When the time of the end comes, the Spirit of God will open these things to the faithful remnant for whom they are intended. That they remain largely closed to the rabbis and Bible scholars of today is not accidental; it is part of the same divine arrangement that sealed them in Daniel's day. They are not about us, and so they are not fully opened to us.

The Purified and the Wicked — Grace, Not Merit

Verse 10 describes two classes in the time of the end: many shall be purified, and be made white, and be refined — and the wicked shall do wickedly. The important thing to notice in the first clause is the passive voice. They shall be purified, be made white, be refined. There is no suggestion that they have purified themselves, or made themselves white, or achieved refinement through their own efforts. The doer is God. He purifies them.

This is the same principle of sovereign grace that is at work in every age. We did not purify ourselves. We were cleansed by the blood of Christ, applied to us by the Spirit's work. These ones, in the tribulation, will be made white and refined

by the fiery trial through which God sovereignly brings them. Their purification is His doing, not theirs. It is a comfort and a rebuke to any thought that the remnant of Israel earns its way into the kingdom.

The wicked, by contrast, shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand. Wickedness is self-perpetuating: it closes the understanding. Not because God forces anyone to be wicked, but because hardness of heart, once chosen, deepens with each choice. The wicked do not understand because they will not; and they will not because they have made a long series of choices to trust their own judgment over God's word. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

The Days — 1260, 1290, and 1335

Verse 11 introduces the first of two specific day-counts. From the time the continual sacrifice is taken away and the abomination that maketh desolate is set up — the midpoint of the 70th week, the event the Lord Himself quoted from Daniel in Matthew 24 — there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the 1,335 days.

The 1,260 days mark the duration of the great tribulation — three and a half years of 30-day months — from its beginning point to its close. The 1,290 adds 30 days beyond that; the 1,335 adds 75 days beyond the 1,260. Scripture does not state exactly what happens on each of these days, but the shape is discernible. After the tribulation ends, the Lord appears in glory, deals with the enemies of Israel, and gathers His earthly people. The full establishment of the kingdom, with Israel settled under Messiah in the land and the last enemies subdued, appears to correspond to the 1,335th day.

The three great feasts of Israel still awaiting fulfilment — the blowing of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles — find their antitype in this period. The first four feasts were literally fulfilled at the Lord's

first coming. The same literalness applies to the last three. The 1,335th day — the 15th of the month, 75 days after the abomination is removed — corresponds to the great Feast of Tabernacles: the celebration of arrival, of the journey completed, of settled rest in the presence of God.

That this sacrifice is set up in unbelief before it is taken away is worth noting. Israel will have re-established temple worship before the 70th week begins, but not in faith — not recognising Jesus as the Messiah whose sacrifice the old offerings foreshadowed. The sacrifice is thus not a righteous act; it is a continuation of the system that never led to righteousness in its own right but could only point beyond itself. That a Gentile king can come and take it away is the consequence of their own desolation, their unbelief having made them vulnerable to what then happens.

Go Thy Way — Daniel's Rest and His Lot

The final word to Daniel is personal and tender: go thy way until the end, and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. He will die. He will rest — a word used in the New Testament for a believer whose body awaits resurrection. And he will stand in his lot.

J. N. Darby paraphrases it with characteristic simplicity: thou shalt enjoy all this blessedness. Be not troubled. God will take care of this. Thou shalt have thy part in all. Daniel's participation will be in the first resurrection, the resurrection of the saints, in company with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all those who have been faithful in every age.

The thought has been offered that among all who will reign with Christ in the kingdom, there may be none who will know the contrast more keenly than Daniel. He reigned, in a subordinate sense, with Nebuchadnezzar. He served Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian. He watched those men at close quarters — their pride, their impiety, their pathetic attempts at greatness,

their occasional glimpses of something better. He knew what it looked like when men tried to govern the world. And he will stand at the beginning of the kingdom and see what government looks like when the Son of Man holds the throne. The contrast will be immeasurable. Thou shalt stand in thy lot, Daniel, at the end of the days.

> *But do thou go thy way until the end, and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. — Daniel 12:13*

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