

“Seal the Book”

The Twenty-First and Final in a Series of Sermons on the Book of Daniel

Texts: Daniel 12:1-13; John 5:19-29

The prophet Daniel was given a vision of Judah’s future by a mysterious visitor—the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus. In Daniel 11:2-35, Daniel’s visitor foretells in amazing detail how the people and the land of Judah will fare from the time the Jews began to return home after their captivity in Babylon ends in 538 BC, until the rise of a persecuting tyrant—Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the man who will desecrate the temple in Jerusalem in 167 BC. After predicting the precise events associated with Antiochus IV’s rise to power, Daniel’s divine visitor begins to speak about the time of the end—moving from events in 167 BC to those which will occur in the distant future at the end of time. Daniel learns that a figure much like Antiochus IV will arise and *“do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done”* (Daniel 11:36). But Daniel’s vision is not yet over. The divine visitor tells Daniel that human history will come to a final end on that day when all the dead are raised, and God will judge all the earth’s inhabitants according to what they have done—whether good or evil. Some of those raised from the dead will live in everlasting righteousness, while others in everlasting shame and contempt. But instead of giving him precise details—as he had done in verses 2-35—Daniel’s visitor tells now him, *“the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.”*

With this sermon we wrap-up our series on the Book of Daniel. We are in the concluding section of Daniel’s prophecy—chapters 10-12, which includes the third and final vision given to Daniel, a portion of which we considered in chapter 11:2-45. We will consider the closing scene in this vision (verses 1-4 of chapter 12), before looking at epilogue to the book (vv. 5-13), where Daniel recounts his divine visitor conversing with two other beings (presumably angels), speaking about the time of the end, discussing how those things just revealed to Daniel must remain “sealed,” or closed off to Daniel and all of God’s people until the dawn of the messianic age.

Those of us with New Testament hindsight know that the last book in the New Testament canon (the Book of Revelation) centers around the opening of a scroll—the same one which is ordered to be sealed in the concluding verses of Daniel. The scroll’s contents are “revealed” (hence the name the Book of “Revelation” i.e., the “apocalypse”) by the Lamb (the Lord Jesus), who alone is worthy of doing so, and who, before his incarnation, revealed all of these things to Daniel in this third and final vision. This is why the mysteries of which we will read must be sealed until the coming of Jesus, because many of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel (especially those dealing with the time of the end) make little sense until the coming of Jesus and the messianic age.

We will do two things. First, we will consider the concluding portion of the vision of the end, which begins in verse 36 of chapter 11, and which continues into Daniel 12 (vv. 1-4). Second, we will then look verses 5-13 which function as the epilogue to both the vision as well as the entire prophecy (i.e., the Book of Daniel).

In the first section of chapter 11 (vv. 2-35), the vision dealt with the future of Judah after the exiles began return home from Babylon. This is the historical period known as “second temple Judaism.” The Jews

will be back in the land, not as an independent nation, but as a vassal state of first the Persians, and then the Greeks. Judah will then be caught between two empires which will arise from the remains of the Greek empire of Alexander the Great which was divided into four smaller kingdoms—the two most prominent in Judah’s future are the Seleucids to the north and the Ptolemies to the south. Daniel has been told how various kings from these empires will wage almost continual war upon each other, with Judah caught in the middle. This portion of vision concludes with Daniel’s visitor foretelling of the most evil figure in the series of rulers, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who will seek to Hellenize the Jews, and turn the temple of YHWH into a temple dedicated to Zeus—thereby desecrating it and stopping all sacrifice for sin. It will be a terrible time for Judah, and for the people of Jerusalem, but they will prevail.

The revelation of the events surrounding this particular tyrant allows Daniel’s divine visitor to jump ahead from events associated with the Maccabean Wars and the desecration of the temple (167 BC) to the time of the end—a time well after the messianic age dawns—when a figure much like Antiochus IV appears upon the scene (a man Daniel identifies the “king”) bent upon waging war and persecuting the people of God. In fact, when discussing the so-called “Man of Sin,” that individual we commonly speak of as the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8), Paul’s warning resounds with loud echoes from the latter part of Daniel 11 to describe this man who will be revealed in God’s appointed time in conjunction with a great apostasy, and who will be personally destroyed by Jesus at his second advent.

As the visitor speaks about this event to Daniel in verses 36-45, he introduces the evil “king” in direct connection with the event which marks the end of human history—the general resurrection (the resurrection of all dead) and the final judgment. The connection between the rise of this evil figure and the resurrection is apparent from the opening words of chapter 12. *“At that time”* i.e., at the time of the end, the following will occur. We know from Daniel 2:28 and 10:14, that a time identified as “the latter days,” begins with the coming of the Messiah, a point also made explicit in the famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24-27. In Daniel 12:1-4, it now becomes clear that the latter days will end with the resurrection of all the dead—an event which marks the end of human history as we know it.

Daniel was told by the divine visitor in chapter 10:13, 21, that Michael—the great archangel—will wage war and defeat unseen demonic forces which lay behind the great empires which will arise to persecute the people of God. So too, at the time of the end, YHWH will again send Michael to defend his persecuted people from the wrath of the evil king. The visitor tells Daniel, in the balance of verse 1, when the “king” appears (i.e., the Antichrist), then *“Michael [shall arise], the great prince who has charge of your people.”*

We read of this same event from an entirely different perspective in Revelation 12:7-9, when after the messianic mission of Jesus is underway, *“now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”* The war recounted by John in his vision in Revelation 12 occurs as a consequence of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Daniel sees it as occurring *“at that time,”* i.e., in “the last days,” which is the final period in human history which spans the entire time between our Lord’s first advent until his second coming. Christians have a linear view of history—those events decreed by God progressively unfold, coming to a final moment in time, commonly called the final judgment. This is when time (this age), gives way to eternity (the age to come).

From Daniel’s perspective (in 536 BC), the “time of the end” appears to be but one event off in the

distant future. In light of what is known as “prophetic perspective,” when a prophet looks ahead to a series of future events he sees what looks to be one event. But upon the passage of time, and the fulfillment of the various events prophesied, what appeared to be one event, turns out to be multiple events. An illustration of this principle might be helpful. As we sit here in OC and look to the mountains that surround the LA basin, we see what looks like one continuous mountain ridge surrounding us. But should we drive toward those mountains, as we get closer, we soon discover that what looked like a single ridge from a distance, actually is a series of hills and valleys which rise and fall before you get to the highest point, that point which we see from a distance.

The same holds true for prophecies such as this one. Daniel is told of a series of future events—Christ’s first advent, his death, resurrection, and ascension, the rise of an Antichrist, and the general resurrection and judgment at the end of time, but he is given this vision so far in advance, that the specific events associated with our Lord’s first and second coming look to Daniel to be one event occurring at a single point in time. Yet, looking back from the perspective of New Testament fulfillment, we know this not to be the case. Daniel was told of multiple events which occur at both the beginning and the end of the time between Jesus’s birth and his second coming. This is that period in human history Christians identify as “the last days.”

At the time of the end then (when the messianic age dawns), the Messiah will come and finish the transgression, put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal both vision and prophet, and anoint a most holy place, before the time decreed by YHWH is completed (9:24). But three and a half weeks of Daniel’s prophecy remain to be fulfilled, and as we will see shortly, Daniel’s visitor (both here, and again in the Book of Revelation) informs us that the three and one half years which remain of the seventy weeks prophecy is actually the entire inter-advental age (that period of time between our Lord’s first and second advents).¹

This period (“the time of the end”), which begins with Michael casting the dragon and his legions from heaven, is identified for us by the Apostle Paul in redemptive-historical terms in Colossians 2:13–15. *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”* There is no doubt then, that at the time when Jesus is put to death, he wins a great victory over Satan (putting him and his minions to shame) by breaking the power of sin. When Jesus rises again from the dead, his resurrection ensures a final resurrection at the end of time. Daniel is given this information by his visitor in language of spiritual warfare—a theme echoed by Paul apart from any reference to Michael and the angels.

These last days shall, at times, reflect the difficult days of Antiochus IV’s persecution of the Jews, as Daniel’s visitor explains, *“and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”* The phrase “time of trouble” appears throughout the Old Testament as a period of great difficulty for God’s people, which requires YHWH’s immediate act of deliverance—which, of course, comes to pass.² Jesus uses this same phrase in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) when teaching his disciples about the events soon to come to pass, as well when speaking of events

¹ Kline, “Daniel’s Covenant of the Seventy Weeks,” _____

² Steinmann, Daniel, 559.

off in the distant future associated with his return—such as that found in Matthew 24:29–31:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Jesus warns of great tribulation paving the way for his return. So too the apostle John speaks of the entire inter-advental period as the time of “great tribulation” in Revelation 7:14.

Based upon Daniel’s vision and subsequent biblical teaching, the entire messianic age will be one of tribulation for the people of God (the age of the church “militant”), but such sporadic tribulation (which Jesus describes as “birthpains”) will grow especially horrific at the time of the end—mirroring what the Jews experienced during the days of Antiochus IV. But hope is not lost, because it is also revealed to Daniel, *“but at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”* Those found “written in the book” are those elect believers in Jesus whose names were written in eternity past in the Lamb’s Book of Life (those given by the Father to the Son in the covenant of redemption—the covenant before the covenants).

In Revelation 13:8, we read that those who do not worship the beast are those whose names are found written in the Lamb’s book, and who will be spared from the judgment to come (because of the merits of Jesus), and those whom the devil cannot harm because they are protected from deception.³ In 2 Thessalonians, Paul describes those who perish at this time as follows: *“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* Paul clearly has Daniel 11 in mind.

That this occurs at the end of history becomes clear in verses 2-3 of Daniel 12, when the visitor introduces what is the clearest Old Testament passage predicting a general (universal) resurrection and final judgment at the end of the age. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth 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.”* Sleep is a common metaphor for death because such language implies a temporary state from which people awaken— i.e., when all the dead are raised on the last day (the resurrection).⁴

The moment of death begins the process of our return to the same elements from which Adam was first formed (the dust of the ground) when created in Genesis 3:19. We do not “pass away,” as our contemporaries put it. We die and we return to dust. Biblically speaking, death is not in any sense natural, but is a consequence of the Fall, as when YHWH tells Adam, *“by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* Likewise in Job 20:11 we read, *“his bones are full of his youthful vigor, but it will lie down with him in the dust.”* In Isaiah 26:19, the prophet comforts God’s people with the following promise. *“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for*

³ Young, *Daniel*, 255.

⁴ Steinmann, *Daniel*, 559.

joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” When we die, our bodies return to dust, even as our souls are with the Lord awaiting the resurrection of the body at the end.

Growing out of this Old Testament expectation is the resurrection of all those who have ever lived, and the day of final judgment. Daniel describes it as a resurrection of some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting punishment. This becomes the clear teaching of the New Testament as well, for example, as seen in the teaching of Jesus in John 5:28-29 (part of our New Testament lesson). *“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”* On that day, we will be raised from our graves, bodily, and reunited with our souls. Humpty-Dumpty will be put back together and we will be raised imperishable to live with the Lord forever.

If the language of judgment is clear—shame and everlasting contempt in the full fury of God’s wrath (Hell), the language of righteousness might require a bit of explanation. This is a prophetic reference to the merits of Jesus imputed to all those who believe, those whose names are found written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul writes, *“because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,”* while in 2 Corinthians 5:21, he adds *“for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* We rise to righteousness because of our union with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, a point powerfully made by Paul in Ephesians 1:13-14. *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* This will be the case on that day of which Daniel is speaking, the resurrection at the end of the age. The blessed Holy Spirit who indwells us ensuring that we are raised and transformed in righteousness, so as to live with the Lord forever.

The vision comes to an end, and Daniel’s visitor instructs now him, *“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.”* These words do not refer to advances in transportation, or increased human technology over time, but rather indicate that as the vision is sealed, and as redemptive history continues to unfold, true knowledge can be found only in the revelation of God (his word). Sadly, the pagans will look for knowledge where it cannot be found.⁵ The vision is to be sealed—i.e., written down. Although many will seek to understand it, this will only come to pass with the dawn of the messianic age (the messianic mission of Jesus), the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the opening of the scroll by the Lamb (Jesus) according to Revelation 5-6.

With vision concluded, Daniel sees two additional figures. We read in verses 5-7, *“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?” 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.”* The two figures Daniel sees are likely angels who appear on either side of the Tigris (where Daniel was standing). Perhaps they are present as

⁵ Young, Daniel, 258.

witnesses to the solemn oath the divine visitor swears, marking the importance of these words (v. 7).⁶ Their appearance mirrors the account in Genesis 18 when YHWH appeared to Abraham along with two other mysterious figures (i.e., presumably the two same angels).⁷

One of the figures asks about the time of wonders of the end, and is told by the divine visitor, that there will be a time, times, and half a time, a period of time which corresponds with the last three and a half years from the prophecy of the seventy weeks. This is the same period mentioned in Revelation 11:1-3 and 12:14 when the church enters into its wilderness phrase in that time between the first and second coming of Christ⁸—a good reason for the Apostle Peter to describe Christians as “exiles” as he does in his two epistles. The Messiah will come, accomplish all the things required for the seventy-weeks to be complete, but after he is cut-off in the middle of the final week (i.e., Christ’s crucifixion), he will be raised and then will ascend into heaven, where he remains until the last day. This is the period in which we live—a time characterized by intervals of persecution and suffering along with times of revival and seasons of refreshing, continuing until Jesus returns and ushers in the final jubilee and eternal Sabbath.

The visitor explains that immediately before the end, there will be a terrible time for the people of God but it will come to an end “*when the shattering of the power of the holy people [the church under persecution from “the king”] comes to an end all these things would be finished [i.e., the return of Jesus].* The power of Antichrist will be broken, presumably with Michael’s help, and then will come the day of resurrection and judgment—confirmed by verses 11-15 of Revelation 20.

In verse 8, Daniel recounts that “*I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, ‘O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?’*” Like many of us, Daniel too is very interested in Bible prophecy. But he is told that the time has not yet come for an explanation to the mysterious things he has just heard. Daniel’s curiosity must not get the better of him. The divine visitor tells Daniel in verse 9, “*Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.*” The vision is to be sealed—presumably this vision, along with the other material Daniel has written down—until the time of the end. Only when the Lamb (Messiah) opens the scroll will the meaning of these things become clear.

Despite the challenges God’s people will face, Daniel is given words of encouragement. “*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.*” This is but another way of affirming the messianic promise of Daniel 9:24, of the coming of a Messiah who will finish the transgression, put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal both vision and prophet, and anoint a most holy place. As the New Testament will explain, those who purify themselves are those, who, through faith, trust in the finished work of the Messiah to save them from the guilt and power of sin. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating our minds and hearts to believe, we remain like the wicked, and we will never understand the things just revealed to Daniel.

The visitor concludes by giving Daniel the time frame for these things to come to pass in verses 11-12. “*And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes*

⁶ Young, Daniel, 259.

⁷ Steinmann, Daniel, 568.

⁸ Kline, “Daniel’s Covenant of the Seventy Weeks,” _____

desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.” The interpretation of this time frame is very much disputed (and certainly difficult). As we have seen earlier, the numbers in Daniel’s visions are highly symbolic, and we are firm ground if we relate this vision to the earlier one in chapter 8 when a more precise time (2300 days and nights) was given to predict the time of distress associated with the desecration of the temple. Many commentators think the 1,290 days are symbolic of completeness, and that this refers to Judah’s trial associated with the coming of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the desecration of the temple, and the cessation of the sacrifices for sin.

But the time limit also tells Daniel’s reader that whatever tribulation is to come will be limited and come to an end. Those who wait the entire period of time for deliverance (the 1335 days) will also participate in the final consummation (i.e., the resurrection).⁹ There may be an echo from Daniel 12:11-12, found in Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:21-22. *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”* The Lord did indeed cut short Jerusalem’s anguish and suffering in A.D. 70.

The stranger’s final word to Daniel closes out the entirety of this prophecy (i.e., the Book of Daniel) and informs the prophet of his fate. *“But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”* Everything of which the visitor foretold will be Daniel’s inheritance when he stands with the people of God (the righteous) on the last day. It was God’s will that this young man be taken in exile from Judah while still a youth. It was God’s will to give him great gifts, just as YHWH did with Joseph. It was God’s will that Daniel be a counselor to Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, as well as God’s will that it be Daniel who confronted Belshazzar with the words of imminent judgment. It is God’s will that Daniel shall rest (i.e., “die”) and then wait in the presence of the Lord for that day when he shall stand bodily (the resurrection) looking back at all the glorious things revealed to him. And it is God’s will that Daniel “seal the book.” Amen.

⁹ Young, Daniel, 259.