

THE LAST WORD

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to the tag end of Daniel's great last vision, which occupies Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

In Chapter 10, Daniel was shown an awe-inspiring vision of the great Being to whom he was praying. We can identify this Being from New Testament references as the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed through an Old Testament theophany -- or appearance of God -- before he became incarnate. In answer to Daniel's request for understanding about the fate of his people he was then given a vision of the centuries. He was shown that Persia was soon to fall under an attack led by Alexander the Great. This was fulfilled in history. Alexander died in 323 B.C., some two hundred years after Daniel's vision. Daniel was then shown the rise of Egypt and Syria, the two warring powers on either side of Palestine, and the battles that would wage back and forth across the Holy Land. He also saw the coming of a "contemptible person" who would be one of the kings of the north, a king of Syria who would defile the temple in Jerusalem and would stop the Jewish offerings. As we have seen, this was fulfilled in history in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes, the mad king of Syria who did defile the temple and aroused the revolt of the people led by the Maccabees.

Then there followed a long leap of time. From the predictions fulfilled around 165 B.C., the angel leaps over the intervening centuries, including the time of the first coming of Christ (Daniel had seen this in other visions), and comes to the great double fulfillment of the vision concerning the defilement of the temple, when another willful king would arise (again from the area of Syria) who, in league with the Western powers, would repeat the blasphemies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the temple. Ultimately he would be destroyed by divine power.

We come now to the opening words of the twelfth chapter, which is still part of the same vision. The vision goes on for three more verses, and then occurs a kind of postlude to the book.

We shall observe the close of the vision verse by verse:

"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book." {Dan 12:1 RSV}

"At that time" indicates the same time as the events covered in the latter part of chapter eleven, concerning the willful king, the contemptible person who arises to defile the temple for the last time. When those events begin, Michael (the great prince who stands for Daniel's people, Israel) shall arise. Here Michael is called "the great prince." In the New Testament he is called an archangel. There are only three references to Michael in the New Testament. One is found in the book of Jude, where we are told that he disputed with the devil over the body of Moses. What that involves no one quite knows, but evidently some problem arose over the resurrection of Moses. Michael was involved because Moses was the leader of God's people, Israel.

Michael is mentioned again in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, where he fights against the devil and his angels when they are cast out of heaven and are confined to earth. This expulsion is what produces the terrible time which Jesus calls "the great tribulation." Satan comes down to earth, knowing that he has but a short time, and his wrath is terrible. Michael is also mentioned in First Thessalonians, Chapter 4, where the Apostle Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus is coming for the church:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, {1 Th 4:16a KJV}

Since the only archangel mentioned in Scripture is Michael, this helps us to know the order of the events of the

last times. When the Lord comes for his church, Michael will also stand up to act on behalf of his assigned people, Israel. Many Bible scholars thus understand that when the church is removed from the earth, then Israel will come into the forefront again as a nation under God. God begins then his renewed program of activity through his people, the Jews.

This is also what Daniel saw in his vision. When Michael "stands up" sometime before the great tribulation begins there follows "a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation." You can see how fully this agrees with what Jesus said in Matthew 24: "Then shall be great tribulation such as has never been since the beginning of the world until now, no, and never shall be," {Matt 24:21 KJV}. It will be an unprecedented time of trouble on the earth. It will be both the worst and the last of Israel's times of trouble. Anyone who visits Israel these days cannot help but be impressed with the industriousness of the Jewish nation, the amazing way they have replanted the land, and the hopes of the Jewish people for peace and an opportunity to live their own lives in their own nation. Yet anyone who knows the Bible knows that the greatest time of trouble they have ever faced is still ahead, worse even than their trials under Hitler.

Jeremiah also describes this for us in Chapter 30, Verses 4-7:

These are the words which the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah:

**"Thus says the Lord:
We have heard a cry of panic,
of terror, and no peace.
Ask now, and see,
can a man bear a child?
Why then do I see every man
with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned
pale?"
Alas! that day is so great
there is none like it;
it is a time of distress for Jacob (Israel);
yet he shall be saved out of it." {Jer 30:4-7 RSV}**

That agrees exactly with what Daniel is told. When Michael stands up there shall be a time of trouble, and yet, "your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name is found written in the book." Throughout this time of distress there will be a remnant of Israel, a persecuted minority (we are used to hearing about such these days) who will be kept safely through the time of peril.

That brings us to Verse 2 of Chapter 12:

"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." {Dan 12:2 RSV}

The Old Testament does not say much about the resurrection of the dead. Though it is a very rare occurrence, the idea is there, and this is one of the few places where it clearly speaks of resurrection. At the time when Michael stands up and the people of Israel and the whole earth go through the time of great tribulation, there will also be a resurrection of the dead.

The New Testament gives us further details. There is a resurrection that will occur when the Lord Jesus comes for his church. "The dead in Christ rise first," Paul tells us {in 1 Th 4:16b}. This is possibly the same resurrection as that in Daniel 12. Or Daniel 12 may refer to another resurrection which will occur at the end of the tribulation. But in either event, it is clearly a selective resurrection.

Not everyone is raised from the dead at this time. The angel tells Daniel, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." Evidently it is a resurrection only of those who are righteous, who know the Lord. We must read this very carefully. The Hebrew words that are translated here, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," ought to be read: "These (who are risen) shall be to everlasting life, and those (the ones who do not arise), shall be to shame and everlasting contempt."

Before the last group is raised there will come a thousand years, as the book of Revelation makes clear. We shall not spend time on these details but simply point this out before we go along. Then, Verse 3:

"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." {Dan 12:3 RSV}

These are the last words of the vision. They point out the glory and honor that God has reserved for those who are faithful during this time of trial and tribulation. There will be two kinds: those who are wise (literally, "the teachers," those who teach others), and those who witness, who turn many to righteousness. Because of their faithfulness God will honor them in this way. They shall shine out like the brightness of the firmament, and like the stars forever and ever. That is the end of the vision.

The next words are an admonition to Daniel. The angel tells 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." {Dan 12:4 RSV}

This verse has puzzled many people. They ask, "What does it mean that Daniel was told to seal up the book?" Many have taken this to mean that in some way the book of Daniel is rendered incapable of being understood; that the prophecies given Daniel are couched in such strange forms and weird language that no one can really understand them; the riddle can never be unveiled until we arrive at the actual end of days.

But that is not what it means. As a matter of fact, Daniel is not a difficult book to understand. Much of it is as simple and easy to understand as a child's reading book. It is made up of simple stories.

What this verse means is that these words to Daniel are concerning the book from which he was reading, not the one which he was writing. Now what book is that? We must get back to the start of the vision to understand that. In Chapter 10, Verse 21, the angel appeared to Daniel and said,

"But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth:" {Dan 10:21 RSV}

Then in Chapter 11, Verse 2, he says,

"And now I will show you the truth." {Dan 11:2a RSV}

It would appear that the angel had a book in front of him from which he reads the great events contained in the vision; a book which is the symbol of God's foreknowledge of all human events. All that occurs in history is known to God long before it ever takes place, and it is symbolized by the book from which the angel reads to Daniel. He has read to a certain place and now he says, "Daniel, this is all I'm going to read to you. Shut up the words, and seal the book for this is all I will show to you now." He means, "We have come to the end, your work is finished; this is all that will be revealed to you now." So this has nothing to do with the understanding of the book of Daniel. In fact, the words which Daniel had seen in the book were given in order that they might be understood. The angel simply means, "We have come now to the end of the period of revelation to you about these matters."

But the latter part of this verse has also intrigued many.

"Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." {Dan 12:4b RSV}

Unquestionably the angel is here describing that which will happen until the time of the end is reached. What will occur before then? The angel says, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." That can be taken in two ways:

Some have taken it as a prediction of the present revolution in transportation and knowledge which is so characteristic of our own day. It anticipates this sudden amazing explosion of knowledge that has come in the last century or so. As you know, for thousands of years, methods of transportation were scarcely improved.

Then man invented the steam engine and marvel followed upon marvel. The speed of transportation increased until now men are traveling eighteen thousand miles an hour and that is just the beginning. Along with this has come a fantastic increase in general knowledge that has produced our modern technological civilization. Many feel this is what the verse refers to.

Perhaps it does mean that. But I rather think it is much more likely that it refers to an increase in the knowledge of the book of Daniel. Many take it this way because it is in connection with the sealing up of the book that this is said. It would then mean "Many shall run to and fro throughout this vision." It would refer to an exhaustive investigation of the vision. Men shall investigate and carefully scrutinize the prophecies of Daniel, and the knowledge of the book shall increase as people study it through.

But perhaps something further should be said. Oftentimes what appears to be two different interpretations is not a case of either/or, but a case of both/and -- they both are true. It seems likely that that is the case here. There will be many studying the book of Daniel and prophecy in general, and the knowledge of prophecy will increase through the years as we approach the end. But because of that increase of knowledge in prophetic matters, there shall also break out an increase of knowledge in other matters, including transportation and general scientific knowledge.

That conclusion is not as foolish as it may seem. It can be demonstrated that the knowledge of men in secular matters is directly related to an understanding of the revelation of God. Any student of history knows that after the fifth century of this era, Europe drifted into a period of somnolence, ignorance, darkness, and mental torpor that even secular writers refer to as the "Dark Ages." Strangely enough, that period coincided with the removal of the Scriptures from the understanding of the common people. When the Scriptures were no longer available, men did not know much about life. But about the time of the dawn of the Reformation, even before Luther, but also including him, there came a reawakening that is called "the Renaissance," the rebirth of knowledge. It followed immediately upon the restoration of the Scriptures to the people and the restored knowledge of the Word of God.

Then about the middle of the nineteenth century -- and not until then -- there came a reawakened interest in prophecy. This can be traced very clearly in history. The Reformers did not deal much with prophetic passages; they were concerned about other issues. But about the middle of the nineteenth century, in England and other places, prophetic truth came to light again. Christians began to study predictive passages earnestly, and great conventions were held to propagate prophetic truths. It was also at that time that knowledge began to increase. The vast explosion of modern knowledge broke upon men as a result. I do not know how to prove that, but it is most interesting to note the connection of these things. There are hidden secrets of life that we have not yet begun to understand. One of them is the strange connection within the spirit of man between his knowledge of God and the rest of his life. Here is, perhaps, one very remarkable instance of how that connection has been demonstrated in a most practical way.

In Verses 5-7 we have a question-and-answer period that follows the vision. That is a common procedure in these days. We think we have discovered something new when we follow a lecture with a time for questions and answers. We call it "dialogue," but here it is in the book of Daniel.

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 I 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?" The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two 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 accomplished. {Dan 12:5-7 RSV }

Do you remember how the vision began? Daniel saw a man clothed in linen, with a bright countenance, standing by the river. Now at the end he sees two angels with him. He asks the man clothed in linen. "How long will it be until these things are over?" If you have carefully followed the character of the vision. you can understand Daniel's question. It is a time of trouble for Daniel's people such as they have never passed

through before. Daniel is troubled by this and he identifies with them, and asks, "How long will it be? How long till the end of these amazing things?" The man clothed in linen (who is the Lord Jesus), raises his right hand to indicate the solemnity of his words as a guarantee. It is much as it was in the days of his flesh when he used to add the words, "Truly, truly I say to you." Here he guarantees it with an upraised hand. "When these things begin," he says, they will run for "a time, two times, and half a time."

We have understood already from Daniel that this means three and a half years. A "time" is a year. When they are finished, the power of the holy people, the Jews, will be shattered. That is very significant. That means that Israel is going to have increased power in world affairs. They will have remarkable power, a power so impressive that the Western nations, the confederacy of the West, shall make a covenant with them. It will be power that will permit them to dominate Middle East affairs. But at the end of this three and a half year period their power will be shattered. They will be broken, defeated, crushed as they have never been before. The end of the week accomplishes the breakup of the power of Israel, and they will be cast back utterly upon the God who loves them.

At this point Daniel interrupts the man clothed in linen, in Verses 8-10:

I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?" 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 do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand." {Dan 12:8-10 RSV}

Daniel wants more information. He says, "Lord, I don't understand what you mean about 'the shattering of the power of the holy people.'" But the man clothed in linen says, "That's all right, Daniel. Remember, there is to be no more revelation to you out of the book. The book is closed; I can't tell you any more." Then he suggests that it will be necessary to study what is already given, and from that there will be a most fascinating result: "Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand."

This is all with reference to the book of Daniel, in which he had written what was revealed. Many shall read it, study it, and search it through, and it will have a very interesting three-fold effect upon them:

First, they will interact with the book. They will purify themselves by reading the cleansing word of God. God's word is always a cleansing agent. Read it and be purified within.

Second, they will act upon the word they read and thus make themselves white, i.e., their outer life will become cleansed, whitened. And the result of that will be, they will be refined. They will become better people. This is always true with the word of God, if men act upon it.

But, he says, there is also another class of persons who shall read and study the book but they will not understand, and they shall do wickedly. The wicked shall do wickedly. Read that very carefully. It does not say that such people are wicked because they do wickedly. That is what we think wicked people are: people who do nasty, wicked things. Because they do nasty things, we say they are wicked people. But that is not what the Bible says. It says the wicked are not wicked because they do wicked things; but they do wicked things because they are already wicked.

What is it, then, to be wicked? It refers to someone who will not listen to God, someone who does not pay attention to him but who thinks he knows it all himself. Someone who, in pigheaded self-sufficiency says, "I don't need you, God." That is a wicked person. The wicked person is one who says, "I can get along without you, God." They are wicked in thought first, and because of that they do wicked things. Their deeds become wicked because their thoughts are already wicked. This is the result, Daniel is told, of studying the book.

Then the last word comes. The man clothed in linen resumes what he is saying to Daniel before his interruption.

"And from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But go your way till the end; and you shall rest, and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." {Dan 12:11-13 RSV}

From the time when the last desecration of the temple takes place, in the middle of the seven year period which constitutes the seventieth week of Daniel, from that time, says the man in linen, there shall be twelve hundred and ninety days. Three and a half years is twelve hundred and sixty days, so this is an additional thirty days beyond that. We are not told what it points to. Perhaps it is something involved in the cleansing of the land after the return of the Lord. Then he says, "Blessed is he who waits and comes to the three hundred and thirty-five days," which would be an additional forty-five days, or seventy-five days altogether, beyond the twelve hundred and sixty days of the great tribulation. All we can do is surmise that this additional period introduces the day of the millennium, the golden age of earth, when God sets up his final kingdom and righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. That will be a blessed time indeed.

But Daniel is told now, "Go your way. You shall rest (that means he will die), but then you shall rise again and stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." The "end of the days" is evidently a description of the whole period we call the millennium, a thousand years, the last great period of time upon the earth. Daniel will be there. He is promised that. He will have a part in it as a resurrected being. He will not be forgotten of God, but will stand in his place at the end of the days. As we look back across the intervening centuries, Daniel is but a dim figure in the history of the past. Yet, so sure is God's word, so certain is his promise, that we can confidently look forward to meeting Daniel some day and finding out the work God gives him to do in the days to come. Just as Peter, James, and John saw Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus, so we are given a glimpse here of the work that God has for those who will appear again upon the earth.

Well, that is the close of the book.

There is but one question that comes before us at this point. We must ask ourselves, "What has been my reaction to this book? Has it bored me, or has it purified me? Have I reacted to it as it was intended I should do, or has it frightened me, and turned me away? Has it judged me, or have I been judging it? Have I been saying, "You know, you can't trust these old prophecies. They don't amount to anything. No one knows whether they are true or not." Have I been sitting in judgment on the book of Daniel, or has the book of Daniel been sitting in judgment over me, searching out the mistaken convictions of my heart and encouraging me to grasp the great things that God is preparing for those he loves? Has it opened my eyes, or has it closed my heart?"

It has done one or the other to each of us. What has it done to you? I must leave that question with you.

May the words of this book, the greatness of its contents, the revelation of its life to come, strengthen us and help us as it was intended to do, that we might understand the days in which we live. That's my prayer.

Prayer:

Our Father, open our eyes to understand what Daniel has written. Thank you for the record of history which has confirmed so much of it to us that we need have no fear or reason to doubt that the rest shall be fulfilled exactly as it is written. We ask you to drive these words home to us and make us act upon them. In Christ's name, Amen.

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