

Main Idea: In the final chapter of Daniel, we discover "two inevitables" related to the end times. God doesn't tell us when the race will end, but He spells out these two "inevitables."

I. There are inevitable events (1-4).

Theme of Daniel: The kingdoms of this world will be replaced by the Kingdom of God.

A. The worst is yet to come (1).

1. There will be a time of distress.
2. There will be a time of deliverance.

B. The best is yet to come (2-4).

1. Some will rise to everlasting life.
 - The wise will rise.
 - Those who lead many to righteousness will rise.
 - They will enjoy an eternity too wonderful for words.
2. Some will rise to everlasting contempt.

II. There is an inevitable tension (5-13).

A. God wants us to know *what* not *when* (5-7).

1. It will be for three and one-half times.
2. It will include the breaking of the power of the holy people.

B. God says we won't know *when* until *then* (8-13).

Why?

1. He wants His people to be pure (8-10).
2. He wants His people to persevere (11-12).
3. He wants His people to live in light of the inevitable (13).
 - Death is coming.
 - Death is not the end.

What's going on in the world, and where is it all heading? Those are the questions that we're discussing together this summer. And to help us answer them from God's perspective, we're turning our attention to His Word, and specifically to the book of Daniel.

Last month we spent one message in Daniel 9, then a second in Daniel 11. This evening we'll be pondering together Daniel 12.

I've run in two kinds of races before. The first, which is the most common, is where runners line up on a starting line and head for the finished line. Every runner knows ahead of time where the finish line is, a fact he uses to his advantage as he paces himself in the race.

There's a second kind of race, one which I have participated in one time in my life. In that race, the participants did not know where the finish line would be. That fact was in the hands of the coach alone. Let me explain.

When I was in High School, in a fund raising effort, eleven members of our track team ran a 24 hour relay race. We started on a Friday at 1:00 with the ambition to run until Saturday at 1:00, each runner taking the baton for one mile increments. We set up a campsite by the quarter mile track, so that ten runners would watch and cheer while the eleventh runner ventured his four laps, and passed the stick to the next fellow. Each runner ran approximately 1 mile per hour for 24 hours.

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¹ This message has been adapted from sermons delivered at WBC on 9/15/96 and 9/3/06.

The interesting thing about this type of race is that only one person knew for sure when the race would end. The coach. The coach held the official watch, and only the coach had the authority to fire the gun to start the race. Likewise, only the coach had the authority to fire the gun the second time to signal that time was up and the race was over.

Oh, we runners had watches, too. We knew roughly when the race would end, but only one person knew exactly when it would end--the one with the official clock.

Do you know how the race ended that day? I'll tell you at the end of this message. But first, I want you to consider another race that we're all in, the race of world history. This race isn't like a hundred yard dash, or even a marathon. It's like the race I was in in High School, for there's only one person who has the authority to say, "The race is over." There's only one person who holds the watch. We run. We know the race will end, but we don't know when.

Yes, ready or not, it's coming.

That's what we discover as we investigate the message of Daniel 12. Thankfully, the One who holds the clock has given us valuable guidance on how to run this race. He's told us everything we need so we can persevere to the end of the race.

In the final chapter of Daniel, we discover some important prophetic information regarding the end times. God doesn't tell us when the race will end, but He does spell out two "inevitables."

I. There are inevitable events (1-4).

To sum up the book of Daniel in one sentence, here's what the twelve chapters reveal: *The kingdoms of this world will be replaced by the Kingdom of God.* In chapters 1-6 we find Daniel outliving a series of powerful, earthly rulers. Rulers come and rulers go. In the final six chapters of the book Daniel receives a series of visions regarding future events. They make it clear that *the kingdoms of this world will be replaced by the Kingdom of God.*

When will that happen? We don't know. But what God has told us in verses 1-4 is that there will be two inevitable events associated with the end times. The first is not pleasant to consider. In reality...

A. The worst is yet to come (1). Verse 1 begins, "At that time." At what time? As we read verse 1, we must remember the context. We are in the final segment of a vision that God gave to the prophet, the record of which began back in chapter 10. Daniel was standing by the Tigris river when an angel came to him with a message from God concerning future events.

What has Daniel learned so far in the vision? We're told in chapter 10 that he learned that there is an angelic battle that is raging, unseen to us, which influences what's happening on the world scene. In chapter 11, he learned that in the future there would be four Persian kings, followed by a mighty Greek king, and then a divided Greek kingdom (11:1-4). A series of battles would take place between the northern and southern divisions (11:5-20), until a wicked blasphemer would hit the scene (11:21-35; history verifies this man was Antiochus IV Epiphanes). The last thing the angel told Daniel in chapter eleven was that there was coming an ultimate, dictator, a man with an anti-Semitic agenda, a figure who would aspire to be God, a character the Bible elsewhere identifies as the Antichrist.

With all this information running through Daniel's mind, he must have wondered, "What does all this mean for God's people? With the rise of all of these future, pagan rulers, and namely, this coming God-hater, what's going to happen to my people?"

The answer that Daniel received was two-part, and the first part was not pleasant. He learned that for his people, the worst was yet to come. Here's what Daniel heard, verse 1—"At that time [that is, the time just described at the end of chapter eleven, the time of the coming Antichrist] 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..."

Throughout history, the Jewish people have suffered incredibly. But the worst is yet to come. We learn two realities from the angel's words in verse 1, as it relates to the Jews.

1. *There will be a time of distress.* Apparently, God has given Michael the archangel the responsibility for protecting the nation of Israel. In Jude 9 we're told that Michael contended with the devil over the body of Moses. The day is coming when Michael will arise, and allow the Jewish people to undergo a time of adversity unlike any previous period in history. The Bible calls it the Great Tribulation.

As early as Deuteronomy 4:30, God predicted that in the "latter days" the children of Israel would be "in tribulation." Later, Jeremiah the prophet wept over that coming day (30:7), "How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it."

Jesus described this coming adversity, and said it would begin with "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Matt 24:15)." The Lord graphically described the period in these words (Matt 24:21-22): "For then there will be great distress [KJV 'great tribulation'], unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."

Ponder this, my friend. In this eat, drink, and be merry age, we need to realize there is coming a time of distress. A large scale slaughter is coming in which the ultimate God-hater will unleash his fury against God's chosen.

Thankfully, we learn of a second reality in verse 1.

2. *There will be a time of deliverance.* Verse 1 concludes, "But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."

After the time of distress there will be a time of deliverance. For whom? The angel told Daniel, "At that time, *your people* will be delivered." Who were Daniel's people? The Jews. But not all of them, only those names are "found written in the book."

God knows His people. He keeps track of them. He has written the name of His people in a Book. He perseveres in behalf of those who are in the Book, and the same persevere after Him. What an encouragement this was to Daniel! To hear the angel say, "Daniel, God is not through with Israel. He will fulfill the promises He made to Abraham."

By the way, though I believe the text is speaking here particularly concerning the Jewish people, there's a relevant question we must ponder. Is *my* name written in the Book? Our eternity is at stake (see Rev 20:11-15).

There are two inevitable events. The first, the worst is yet to come. The second?

B. The best is yet to come (2-4). What's that? In a word—it's the *resurrection*! Verse 1 reveals that there will be a time of unparalleled tribulation but God will deliver His people. Does that mean He will deliver them *from* the suffering and death of that period, or that He will deliver them *through* the suffering and death? It's difficult to say from this text. We know from the book of Revelation that there will be many tribulation saints who will become martyrs at the hands of the Beast in the Tribulation. They will die, but God will deliver them.

How? Verse 2 tells us how He will do it, through resurrection. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Did you realize that every person will one day experience resurrection? Because of Adam, all die, but death is not the end. Death is merely a change of location. Death will be followed by resurrection.

Please don't misunderstand me. This is not universalism, the teaching that says that everyone, after dying, goes to be with God. No, there are clearly two distinct types of resurrection, according to verses 2-4.

1. *Some will rise to everlasting life.* Let's take a closer look at verse 2—"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth [that is, they've died] will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." There are two groups clearly distinguished here, the first being those who will be raised to experience eternal life. Note with me three observations about this first group.

- The wise will rise. Verse 3 begins, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens..." The Bible does not teach annihilation, that when a person dies, he ceases to exist. Rather, death merely moves us into the next phase of our existence. The wise are those people who prepared in this life for the life to come. They lived in light of the coming resurrection.

Like Job did, who stated (Job 19:25-26), "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Job knew that the resurrection was coming.

God made a similar prediction through Hosea (13:14), "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" The wise will rise.

- Those who lead many to righteousness will rise. The end of verse 3 reveals this, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, *and those who lead many to righteousness*, like the stars for ever and ever."

Do you know what will happen if we're truly gripped by the fact that the resurrection is coming? Not only will we get ready for it, we'll want to help others get ready! As verse 3 puts it, we'll want to lead others to righteousness.

Are you investing your life in leading others to the source of righteousness, Jesus Christ? Did you talk with anyone this week about the Lord? Did you invite anyone to come to church with you so they could learn about Him? Evangelism isn't optional. Here we learn that it's an indicator of whether or not we are living in light of the resurrection. Here's what will happen to those who are.

- They will enjoy an eternity too wonderful for words. The Bible doesn't give us much detail about the resurrected, eternal state. Perhaps the obvious reason is because it's beyond the capacity of human language! Rather than describe it, the angel gave

Daniel a picture. The resurrected will shine like the brightness of the heavens, like the stars forever and ever.

My friends, the day of resurrection is coming for us. You who have lost a loved one recently, be encouraged. Death is not the end. The resurrection is coming. When you wake up in the morning, and look in the mirror, and see a body that aging and wearing out, remember this. The resurrection is coming. What a hope we have!

But wait. The resurrection is not a message of hope for all. There's a second group.

2. *Some will rise to everlasting contempt.* Notice verse 2 again, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Those who do not know Jesus Christ will be raised, too. They will receive a resurrected body, too, but oh, how different! The body they will receive will be suited for an eternity of shame and contempt.

Imagine an eternity of shame. Some of you remember, as though it happened yesterday, some foolish deed you committed 30 years ago, and you are full of shame every time you remember. My friend, 30 billion years will not diminish the shame in eternity for those who rejected Christ in this life.

Remember the account of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus? (see Luke 16:19ff) After he died, the rich man longed for relief from his suffering. He called to Abraham for help. But it was too late. Abraham told him (26), "A great chasm has been fixed so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

My friends, I want you to stop and ponder this message the angel revealed to Daniel. For God's people, the worst is yet to come. But on the other hand, because of the resurrection, the best is yet to come! On the other hand, for those who don't know Christ the present life, with all its turmoil is as *good* as it will ever be. Indeed, the worst is yet to come—and it will never be any better, not if you are outside of Christ. It's a non-negotiable inevitable.

Perhaps you're wondering, "When? When will this happen?" We find insight in the following verses where we see a second inevitable...

II. There is an inevitable tension (5-13).

Frankly, we don't know when the "race" of human history will be over. Jesus said that only the Father knows that. But from the following dialogue between Daniel and the angel in verses 5-13, we learn two lessons about how to live with the inevitable tension.

A. God wants us to know *what not when* (5-7). In verse 4 the angel gave Daniel an important instruction, "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." *Close up the scroll*, that is, seal up the words of the scroll containing this prophetic vision. For how long? "Until the time of the end." Michael told Daniel that the revelation he had given him pertained to a future time, indeed, the time of the end.

At that point, Daniel witnessed a breathtaking spectacle (5-6): "Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank [remember, Daniel is by the Tigris river; 10:4]. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river [apparently, to the angel that has been with Daniel], 'How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?'"

Here's the scene. The angel has finished giving Daniel the vision. Two other angelic beings come, and one asks, "How long until these wonders are fulfilled?" Why did the angel ask that question to begin with? Perhaps he was curious—remember, angels are created beings and not omniscient. 1 Peter 1:12 indicates that angels desire to look into the things that pertain to our salvation. Perhaps the angel asked the question for Daniel's benefit, so Daniel could hear the answer to the question he no doubt pondered. "When?! When will these amazing things take place?"

Based on the reply, Daniel learned that God wants us to know *what* not *when*. The answer the angel gave doesn't tell us when, but instead elaborates on what will happen.

Notice verse 7, "The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven [the typical procedure in taking an oath is to raise one hand; the raising of both hands indicates the certainty of what he's about to say], 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.'"

Notice the emphasis here is on *what*, not *when*. Daniel is told two details about the coming day of trial that will precede the resurrection.

1. *It will be for three and one-half times.* What does that mean? It's the same phrase Daniel heard in an earlier vision, in chapter seven. That's when God revealed the following about what would happen in the day of tribulation (7:25), "He [the Antichrist] will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints...The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time." The NIV footnote offers this alternative reading, "a year, two years and half a year."

Notice a second detail about this tribulation period from verse 7.

2. *It will include the breaking of the power of the holy people.* Who are these "holy people"? The term means "set apart." Apparently, it's another reference to Daniel's people, the people God set apart for His redemptive plan, the Jews. The angel told Daniel that when the power of the Jews has been finally broken, all the things of this final vision will be completed.

John Walvoord believes this refers to what's going to happen to the Jewish people in the last half of the seven-year tribulation period. God wants the Jews to know ahead of time that the intense persecution will not go on indefinitely, but has an end in sight—three and one-half years.

There's no question that what God has predicted and revealed in Daniel 12 will happen. We just don't know when. He didn't tell us that. He didn't want us to know that. That's a tension with which He wants us to live. God wants us to know *what* not *when*. A second lesson about this tension...

B. God says we won't know when until then (8-13). If you feel confused by this vision in Daniel, you're in good company. Daniel himself was perplexed! Notice his admission in verse 8, "I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, 'My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?'"

That's a good thing to do. If you're lost, ask for directions. If you're confused, ask a question like Daniel did. He received an interesting reply.

Verse 9—"He replied, 'Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.'" What kind of answer is that?! "Go your way, Daniel."

What was the angel saying? Get on with life, Daniel. Part of living for God in this world is living with *unanswered questions*, and trusting Him in spite of the tension.

To put it simply, the angel here is offering a needed reminder for those who are enamored by their prophetic charts. God says we won't know when until *then*.

We would do better to focus on this question. Why does God want us to live with this tension? We learn three reasons in verses 8-13.

1. *He wants His people to be pure (8-10)*. The tension is part of the purification process. Verse 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."

Why does God allow His people to suffer? For many reasons but here's a primary one... *to refine them*. Job testified to that in Job 23:10, "For He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

E.g.—

2. *He wants His people to persevere (11-12)*. Consider verses 11-12, "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."

What does the angel mean by 1,290 days? Apparently, he has in mind the same three and one-half year period of persecution mentioned in verse 7. From the time the abomination that causes desolation by the Antichrist begins, there will be 1,290 days.

Apparently, God has recorded this to encourage His people who will be living through that harsh time. He's saying, "Take heart! The end is coming! Persevere!"

That's what He's saying to you as well if you are seeking to a God-honoring life but are taking it on the chin for it. "Take heart! Persevere! The end is coming!"

3. *He wants His people to live in light of the inevitable (13)*. Isn't it interesting that the book of Daniel ends with an *unanswered* question. Daniel wanted to know, "When?", but God did not tell him when. He told him to **go** (in verse 9), and then repeated that command in verse 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."

Go, Daniel. Before this vision is fulfilled, you will rest (that is, you will die). And then at the end of the days you've just learned about in this vision (the days of the coming tribulation period), you will rise to receive your inheritance.

Back to the Opening Story: Remember the 24-hour marathon relay race I told you about earlier? We started at 1:00 in the afternoon, ran through the night and the following morning. We runners knew the end of the race was getting close when we saw the coach keep looking at his watch and reaching for his gun. I happened to be "on deck" as the clock ticked closer and closer to the long-anticipated 1:00 hour. As the runner before me rounded the final curve, the coach told me, "Just take the baton and run as hard as you can. The race is almost over."

Which I did. I took the stick and ran! But what I didn't realize was this. "Almost over" to me meant a few seconds, so I sprinted like you would in a 100 yard dash. "Almost over" to the coach meant a couple of minutes! I ran as hard as my weary legs would take me, thinking the race would surely end any moment. I ran 100 yards, but no gun sounded. 200 yards, still no gun. I continued down the backstretch and around the

curve, still no gun. As I finished the lap which marked the quarter mile mark, I grimaced with pain and looked at the coach. His response, "Keep going. The race is almost over."

He was right. The race did end, finally (or I wouldn't be here today!). What a thrill it was while on the back side of the track on lap number two to hear the gun sound. The race was over! The race ended right on schedule, right when the coach looked at his watch and said, "Time's up."

So it is in the race of life. God has the clock, not us. He hasn't told us when the race will end, but He has told us exactly what we need to know to prepare for the end. Indeed, He did more than tell us. He did something to prepare us for the future. He sent His Son into the world, who died as a substitute for sinners and who rose victoriously from the grave. His Son returned to heaven and is now awaiting the go-ahead from His Father to return and rescue His people, and to judge the world.

Are you waiting for Him, my friend? We need to take to heart the message Daniel learned that day 25 centuries ago. We must face these two inevitable truths:

- Death is coming. "Daniel, go, for you will rest, but remember this..."
- Death is not the end. "You will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

Response: Are you prepared for the inevitable? Are you sure? It's inevitable that the worst is yet to come. It's inevitable that the best is yet to come. It's inevitable that Jesus is coming again. The question is this. Are you ready for the inevitable? May God help us to use this time of response to be prepared.

Let's sing a song in which we express to the Lord our desire for His coming.

Hymn of Response: #242 "While We Are Waiting, Come"

Let's spend some time reflecting on the truth of God's Word. With our heads bowed before the Lord, let's ask questions that have eternal significance:

- Are you prepared for the inevitable?
- Do you know for sure which resurrection you will participate in?
- Will you rise to everlasting life, or to shame and everlasting contempt? If Jesus Christ is your personal Savior and Lord, you will rise to everlasting life. If He is not, you will rise to everlasting contempt. My friend, call upon the Lord Jesus Christ today and you will be saved!
- Have you been living in light of the inevitable?
- If Jesus did return today, are there things in your life which would be an embarrassment? If so, I urge you to confess and forsake them now.

Time for Response in Prayer

We have a great hope! Death is not the end. Because Jesus died and rose again, we too can look forward to the resurrection. Yes, we serve a Risen Savior! That fact can make all the difference in the world in our lives today. Let's conclude by singing a song that affirms the difference it makes knowing that Jesus lives.

Song of Commitment: #213 "Because He Lives"