

Daniel 12

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[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 12. I don't know about you, but sometimes I think it's easy to grow weary in the Christian life.

Sometimes maybe it's just the monotony of the day in and the day out of everyday life. Sometimes maybe it's the discouragement of our own failures, feeling like nothing will change.

But it's also easy to grow weary on top of all that when we face hardship and opposition in the world. When we run up against the world's worst, it's incredibly easy to lose heart.

And as we come to the end of our study of the book of Daniel today, we're going to dive into this topic of how to combat weariness.

You know, in the first half of this book, as we sort of now stand at the end and look over the last 12 chapters, in the first half of this book, Daniel showed us what it was like to live in exile, didn't he?

[1 : 1 3] He showed us how to carry on living faithfully for God's kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. And then what we've been finding over the last few weeks is that in the second half of this book, Daniel was given a glimpse of what it would be like for God's people, not merely just to live in exile, but to live in suffering.

Daniel, we've been noticing, foresees a time when God's people are going to undergo intense distress, affliction, and even persecution.

And in the final verses of this book, we are forced to face two questions. And these two questions are the ones that our own hearts often ask, actually, when we face trial and when we face distress, whether that be corporately as the church or just personally, individually as Christians.

And the first question is, how long? How long is it going to last? And the second question is, what in the world is going to become of me or become of us in and through it?

And I think Daniel ends with these questions because inside of them, inside of these questions, if we explore the biblical answer to these questions, we actually start to find the encouragement that we need when we're weary and ready to give in.

[2 : 5 3] In other words, what Daniel is doing here is he's holding out the key to steadfast perseverance. How not to lose heart even when the world is giving us its worst and even when we're ready to give up.

That's where we end in our journey here in the book of Daniel. So let's pray. Let's ask God's grace as we look into these verses together. Father, we do come before you with humility and also, God, with a sense of confidence and awe, knowing that you are a speaking God and that you've given us in your word everything necessary for living life unto you, for living life to the full, for knowing you and praising you.

So, God, we thank you for your word and we pray that as we draw the threads of this book to a close that you would continue to speak to us, you would continue to encourage us by your spirit, and we would continue to see in Christ the great and resounding yes to all your promises.

In his name we pray. Amen. Okay, so let's dive in and look at the first question Daniel presents to us in verses 5 through 8. Daniel 12, page 750 in the Pew Bible, verses 5 through 8.

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?

[4 : 36] 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. So here then we have this first question that we need to consider.

How long? Now let's put this section in context. Remember that the last three chapters of the book of Daniel form one long section, one long final climactic vision of this book.

If you go back to the beginning of chapter 10, you'll remember that Daniel was there standing on the banks of the Tigris River when suddenly a heavenly messenger with a radiant appearance appeared and began speaking with him.

And in chapter 10, that figure strengthens Daniel. And then in chapter 11, all the way through chapter 12, verse 4, he gives Daniel this long last vision that we considered last week.

[5 : 45] And if you want a really good overview of the entire book of Daniel, actually, go back to Greg's sermon last week and listen to it. But then here we are in verse 5.

We're back with Daniel on the banks of the Tigris. The vision has ended. And more heavenly messengers appear. And they begin to speak to this radiant figure who appeared at first, the man clothed in linen.

So here we have in verses 5 through 13, this long conclusion. Well, it's a short conclusion to this long fourth and final vision of the book. And remember that that last vision of chapter 11 was what?

It was a vision of the coming distress and persecution that God's people would face after they returned home from exile.

As they waited for God's coming redemption in Christ, Daniel shows them again and again, and particularly in this last vision, that it's going to be a troubled time.

[6 : 48] And as we noted last week in the second century BC, this persecution, this troubled time would reach a level of intensity unlike any before.

A ruler by the name of Antiochus IV, who dubbed himself Epiphanes, the great manifestation of God. Pretty humble guy, right? Antiochus Epiphanes IV would attack Jerusalem, desecrate the temple, and put many faithful Jews to death.

But again, as we saw last week, Daniel wasn't just writing to prepare God's people for the second century BC. Especially at the end of chapter 11, we see that the atrocities of Antiochus are described in such a way that they become paradigmatic.

They become almost this pattern of the ongoing and increasing persecution that God's people will face throughout their coming history. Until the final day, when Christ returns in glory and makes all thing new in the resurrection.

So then this is a message for God's suffering church, not just in the second century BC, but for all ages. It's a message for God's people, not just as they awaited Christ's first coming, but as we await his second coming as well.

[8 : 11] And the questions that the angels ask again is how long? How long until the end of these wonders? Now that word wonders can kind of throw us off, but it's helpful to note that in chapter 11, verse 36, that the same word basically is used to describe Antiochus and his atrocities.

So what the angels are asking here isn't necessarily how long until the resurrection, how long until everything sort of wraps up and God comes in glory. More specifically, they're asking how long is the suffering going to last?

How long is this distress going to go on? How long will God's people have to endure such trial? How long will God's people have to endure such trial? I wonder if you've ever asked that question.

We find it over and over again in the book of Psalms, don't we? As that book instructs us how to pray, we find ourselves praying again and again with the psalmist.

How long, O Lord? Perhaps as you learn of persecution facing the global church, you pray and ask, how long?

[9 : 20] Perhaps as you learn of injustice here in our own country, you wonder and you pray, how long? And perhaps even this morning, you're facing distress and trial personally in your own life right now.

And the spirit-prompted cry of your heart is, how long? And it's worth noting that it's the angelic messengers who ask this question, not Daniel, right?

I think that's very instructive. You know, sometimes we need others to pray this prayer for us in our presence, on our behalf. Often the best way we can minister to one another is to sit down and pray with a hurting brother or sister and pray on their behalf, how long, O Lord?

So that is the question. And in verse 7 comes the answer. And it comes as a particularly solemn oath.

Not just with one hand raised, which was the way you made a solemn vow, right? But with both hands raised. This is a doubly sworn, doubly true message that's coming.

[10 : 38] But I don't know about you, but admittedly, the answer that comes doesn't immediately feel helpful, does it?

Time, times, and half a time. And suddenly you're having flashbacks of watching Hal Lindsey on the TV and seeing people in sandwich boards marching around.

What is that supposed to mean? Time, times, and half a time. We ask a very practical question and are giving an incredibly cryptic answer. What good is that? Well, you know, we're in pretty good company if we find this answer initially to be difficult to understand.

Peek ahead at verse 8. Is it 8 or 9? In the next verse, Daniel himself confesses that he has a bit trouble understanding it. But I think we can meditate together on this phrase and plumb to its depths.

Because I think that this phrase does have a word of wise, even pastoral counsel for us. Remember first that these chapters of Daniel are written in a genre, in a literary style, called apocalyptic literature, that's heavy with symbolism.

[11 : 52] And the reason why this literature is heavy with symbolism is because it's meant to help us not just get information with our heads, but to get it with our hearts. It's trying to help us feel something.

Now, we know historically something that Daniel would not have known. We know that the persecution of the Jews in the second century under Antiochus lasted roughly three and a half years.

So, on the surface, this phrase, time, times, and half a time, is a way of talking about that period of suffering.

You see, you've got time, right? That's one. Times, that's two. And half a time, that's a half. Three and a half. Lo and behold, three and a half years.

And we've actually seen that number expressed in different ways throughout these last chapters of Daniel. In chapter seven, there we saw the same phrase, time, times, and half a time. In chapter eight, we learned of 2,300 evening and mornings.

[12 : 58] In chapter nine, we learned of one half of one week. And a little later in this chapter, we're going to hear about 1,290 and 1,335 days.

And all these numbers, not exactly, but roughly, come to about three, three and a half years. But here's what we also need to remember.

We need to remember that Daniel was being shown a vision that was working on multiple horizons at once. And we've seen this again and again and again in this last part of the book.

He has been given a glimpse, not just of the distress of God's people before Christ, but in and through that, he's been given a glimpse of the distress and the persecution of God's people after Christ as well.

All sort of coming together in one for him from his prophetic distant vantage point. So yes, on the surface, a time, times, and half a time is a way of speaking of the distress in that second century period.

[14 : 00] As the Old Testament church lived in that in-between time after the return from exile, before the first coming of Christ. But it's very interesting that in the New Testament, in a place like Revelation 12, for instance, they'll pick up this same phrase, time, times, and half a time.

And it becomes a way of speaking about the distress of God's people throughout the whole church age. As we today live in another in-between time, between Christ's first coming and his second coming.

So what then is this phrase, time, times, and half a time, meant to help us feel? What is it saying to our hearts as we ask the question, how long?

Well, I think as I've thought about it, and as I've read commentators, and as I've considered it, I think it's meant to be a realistic but ultimately hopeful call to patient endurance.

Here's what I mean. It's as if God is telling Daniel and us, yes, you will have to endure affliction for a time. And then it will seem to last even longer.

[15 : 20] You will have to endure not just for a time, but even for times. But when your strength is gone, and when it perhaps feels like no one is on the way to help, it will be half a time.

God will cut it short, and he will rescue his people. Perhaps you've been through seasons of suffering or affliction yourself, and you can actually look back and see that that is what it felt like.

Time, times, and half a time. You patiently endured, and then it wore on until it didn't seem like there was any end in sight.

And when you felt almost out of breath, suddenly, half a time, God's rescue came. The rest of verse 7 says the same thing in a different way.

There we learn that the power of God's people will be shattered. But when it almost seems like there's no help and no hope, the end comes, and God rescues his people.

[16 : 35] And this has been the pattern throughout redemptive history, you see. God brings the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, only to have them become seemingly trapped between Pharaoh and the Red Sea.

There are the armies pushing them into the waters. And when it seems like their power has been shattered with no help and no way out, God parts the waters, and they're rescued.

Years later, Jerusalem will be surrounded by the armies of Assyria. In every direction, the land is laid waste. The power of God's people shattered by the war machine of Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor.

But just when all seems lost, in the middle of the night, the angel of the Lord strikes their armies down, and they flee, and God's people are saved.

And years later still, when God's people are under the oppression of yet another empire, God will at last send the long-awaited king.

[17 : 53] And he will teach, and he will heal, and a movement will begin to form. And many will think this could be the one, the one we've been waiting for. And just when he seems to be at the height of his powers, riding into Jerusalem triumphantly, with the people shouting, Hosanna, here comes the king of David.

He will be betrayed, arrested, condemned, and then mocked, and beaten, and executed. And the true Israelite, God's own son, will be shattered.

But after three days in the tomb, when there seemed to be no hope, and no help, and all was lost, and the disciples were wandering back home, God raised him from the dead.

And in that moment, you see, the fulfillment of this pattern finally meant that the real underlying, long affliction of God's people had come to an end.

No longer would the enemies of sin condemn us, because Jesus had paid for our sin. And no longer would death hold out its threats against us, or hold us in fear, because Jesus the king had conquered death.

[19 : 31] And so you see, no matter what trial or affliction comes, even if it lasts for a time, and even if it stretches on into times, it will come to an end.

In Christ, it will always be time, times, and half a time. Even when we are shattered, we know it's not the last word, because Christ has come.

He's taken on flesh. He has died. He has risen. So that even in our dying, we too will rise. So to this question of how long, the symbolic answer is that God's people will often have to endure, friends, for a time.

And then we might need to endure even a little longer, for times. But we can know that God will not delay, and his rescue will come quickly, decisively, in half a time.

It's not too hard to see how this applies to us today, is it? On the one hand, this describes the entire church age. We wait with steadfast endurance, and even through the most troubled times, we know that Christ will return, and make all things new.

[20 : 47] But what about on the personal level? Do you see the balance that this truth gives us? Time, times, and half a time.

On the one hand, we don't need to rush to easy answers, or quick fixes in the face of suffering. There will be time, and there will be times, that we need to endure.

This is what we should expect, friends. So we can, and we should learn, to lament. That things are not the way they're supposed to be.

And we can, and we should learn, how to weep, with those who weep. And if our lives seem difficult, if afflictions come, we need not need, we need not think that something has suddenly gone horribly wrong, and that God's plan, and God's care for us have ended.

No, God tells us very clearly, there will be time, even times, when we need to endure. In other words, I think this gives us a very realistic picture, of what life, in between Christ's first and second coming, will be like.

[22 : 03] But on the other hand, as much as it is a realistic picture, it's also a hopeful picture, is it not? Even if the time becomes times, it will end with half a time.

God will cut it short. We don't know when, but he will. And so, we don't need to give in to despair, or self-pity. We don't need to grow weary, or afraid.

Because God knows how long, and his timing is always right. And just like the children of Israel, on the banks of the Red Sea, and just like the remnant, in Jerusalem, surrounded by armies.

Friends, if you are in Christ, then even the darkest tomb, will soon be flooded with light. God's rescue will come.

So that's the first question. How long? But all this leads to another question. Let's pick up in verse 8. Verse 8, Daniel says, I heard, but I did not understand.

[23 : 06] And I said, oh my Lord, what shall be the outcome 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 act wickedly.

And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there should be 1,290 days.

But blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 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.

So Daniel steps forward and asks a question of his own. What will become of God's people as a result of all this? As they suffer, as their power is shattered, what will happen to them?

Now God has just shown Daniel in chapter 12, verses 1 through 4, the beginning of this chapter, what will ultimately happen to them, the resurrection, they'll be vindicated. God's people will ultimately be rescued, and saved, and given new life in the new heavens and the new earth.

[24 : 22] And Daniel, at least to some extent, must have understood that. Which means that Daniel's question in here is probably a bit more specific. He's not asking what's going to ultimately happen.

Well, God just told him that. The resurrection is what's ultimately going to happen. He must be asking something to the effect of what particularly is going to be the result of all this suffering? What's going to come of it?

If we know that God's people will undergo all this trial and distress until the end, what's it going to do to them as a result? And again, we ask similar questions, don't we?

We hear of the persecution of the global church, and we wonder if the church is actually going to survive in those places. And we see Christians undergoing suffering or injustice, and we wonder, what will become of their faith and their hope and their love under such conditions?

And perhaps even in our own hearts, as we experience suffering ourselves, we ask, what's really going to come of all this? And again, an answer comes.

[25 : 30] And God's answer here has three parts. The first part is this. Realize that the outcome of all of this is ultimately in God's hands. That's verse 9. The words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end, God tells Daniel.

Well, what does that mean? Well, it means they're secure. They're certain. Nothing is going to change them. In other words, God has it under control.

And that means we shouldn't try to pry or to speculate into all of the details. God has them figured out. We don't need to. But it also means we need not fear. We need not approach our future with anxiety.

Because God will see to it that his good plans unfold for his people and his good timing. And he will keep them safe. Second, God tells Daniel that the outcome of all of this is that the people of God will be refined.

This is verse 10. On the one hand, times of persecution will expose who is and who isn't in a genuinely saving relationship with Christ.

[26 : 44] Jesus himself taught this in the parable of the sower. Like seeds sown on rocky soil, Jesus said, there will be some who hear the word, initially receive it with joy and identify with God's people, but when the heat of testing and persecution comes, it will fall away.

And I think that's what Daniel means when he says the wicked shall act wickedly. Because in chapter 11, when the persecution comes, it causes this division in the people of God.

Some persist in faithfulness, others fall away. But the flip side is that those who are in a saving relationship with Christ will be refined.

Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, Daniel says. And the idea here isn't that we, through our own efforts, make ourselves better, I think the sense is that the seasons of trial and distress have the effect of bringing out what's truly in us by God's grace.

You see, when God saves us, when we enter into a relationship with Christ, it's as if God pulls us out of the ground, pulls us out of the mine, like a big hunk of ore, like a big chunk of metal.

[27 : 58] And God, by his grace, has seen to it that there is infinite beauty in us when he pulls us out. He has forged in us an eternal beauty.

But, we are still very much in an ore state. There are countless impurities. We are filled with dross. Our old self still lingers.

And just like precious metal, that's what makes us weak. That's what steals our strength and our joy. And one of the uses of affliction and trial, the book of Daniel tells us here, is that it burns away the dross.

Our pride, our self-reliance, our self-righteousness starts to get melted away as we walk through the furnace of affliction.

And of course, it never feels good at the time. But the outcome in our lives is greater beauty and greater strength as we display more and more of Christ's character and God's glory.

[29 : 19] Third, God tells Daniel that the outcome of all of this is that the people of God will not just be refined, but they will be blessed. We see this in verses 11 through 12, which are probably the most cryptic of this last little conclusion to the book.

We're told here in no uncertain terms that there is blessing for those who endure, who hold on steadfast through to the end. And again, what's going on here is that we see Daniel using numbers to convey a sense, to convey a feeling.

There's going to be 1,290 days of darkness. Again, that number of roughly three and a half years, that number symbolic of the time of affliction for God's people.

But then, in verse 11, we see that there's going to be a time after the darkness. And there will be a people who indeed persevere to it.

Now, is there any particular significance to the number 1,335? It's hard to say.

[30 : 25] Maybe so, maybe not. If you've got a good answer, come up to me afterwards and we can talk about it. I actually think there isn't. I think the point is, and I think the big point seems to be, no matter what you make of it, is that the time of persecution isn't the end.

that we need to hang on just a little while longer and that there is unbelievable blessing on the far side of suffering. Those who hang on will be blessed and God guarantees that there will be a people who last, you see.

So what verses 11 through 12 seem to be showing us is that in a way that we don't fully really understand what these verses seem to be showing us is that our experience of suffering is able in God's hand to bring about an even greater future joy, a blessing for us as we hold on.

Which, of course, the Bible all over the place affirms, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account, Jesus said. Rejoice and be glad.

Why? For your reward is great in heaven. And the Apostle Paul puts it in this way, this light and momentary affliction.

[31 : 48] One has to wonder whether Paul had his tongue in his cheek when he said that. When you read of all of his afflictions, you think, light and momentary, Paul? I'm not so sure. And yet here's why he says it's light and momentary.

This light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. whatever he was experiencing, whatever you and I are experiencing, God is able to use even our afflictions to bring about our greater joy.

What a God we serve, friends. Is there any other God who can do such a thing? So stepping back, this is what the outcome will be.

The suffering to come, though obviously not good in and of itself, will be used by God for good to refine his people and to bring about their greater joy.

And so how should we respond to all this? Well, in verse 13, God tells Daniel, and in a sense, he kind of tells us to go your way.

[33 : 05] Not get lost. Stop asking pesky questions, Daniel. I'm done now. No. In other words, go, Daniel. Go in the way that I've appointed for you.

Get about the work that I've called you to do. Start walking in the way that I've prepared for you.

With renewed endurance, with steadfast patience, go. Keep on living for God's kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of this world, even if and even when the trials come. Go your way, Daniel.

Keep going. But notice what Daniel's able to do. He's able to return to his work with renewed confidence and hope.

God tells him, go your way till the end and you shall rest and you shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days. God tells Daniel, you will rest, Daniel, and you will rise.

[34 : 09] Friends, the Christian life following in the way of Christ is not some begrudging duty, not something we have to do merely because it's right.

No, friends, it's a marathon with a goal, with an end. And we often grow weary because we lose sight of the goal and we think that things will never change and that they'll always be just like this.

but that's not the case. No matter what trials lay ahead of us, we can push forward because there's a joy set before us.

And no matter how long the race and even if time drags on into times, we know that in half a time the end will be in sight and our rest will come.

And God is telling us here that even if this race is full of opposition, and hardship, the outcome will be not just our beauty but it will be our blessing. Because ultimately we know the one who ran this race before us.

[35 : 21] And because he has blazed the trail ahead of us through the cross and on to glory, we know that we too as we take up our cross and follow him will join him in glory.

So brothers and sisters, go your way. God has called us to live for his kingdom here and now and there is work for us to do.

And our hope is secure. The road may be rough, persecution and loss might lie before us, but in the end we will rest and we will rise.

And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God has willed his truth to triumph through us. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, his kingdom is forever.

Amen. Let's pray. God, we pray that you would grant us your persevering grace so that we might run the race with endurance all of our days no matter what lies ahead.

[36 : 44] And Lord, keep our eyes fixed firmly on the hope and the joy set before us in Jesus' name. Amen.