

I read an article written by Jason Whitlock, a black social commentator:

The consequence of pervasive secular values is the prioritization of death over life. As a nation, we've seemingly decided the avoidance of death is more important than the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

For people who do not believe in the afterlife, fear of death wields total control over decision-making. America's founders, flawed as they were, believed they answered to a Higher Power and in the concept of heaven and hell. They prioritized life over death because their religious faith softened the consequence of death on this earth.

Collectively we no longer believe that. We have a death obsession. There is no freedom we will not sacrifice in pursuit of avoiding death. A nation that fought a revolutionary war over taxation without representation and an even bloodier civil war over the abolishment of slavery has spent four months afraid to breathe and cowering at home fearful of a virus with a 99 percent recovery rate. That is not written to suggest we take a cavalier approach to COVID-19. It's written to make us question our obsession with death.

For nearly two months, we have put more time, energy and focus on the expired lives of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks than we have the future of our youth. I don't mean to diminish the life of George Floyd or the handful of other victims of criminal police misconduct, but what kind of sick, narcissistic country hyper-focuses on justice for a dead man when the lives of millions of kids are being destroyed?

The expansion of American freedom, from the Civil War to Civil Rights, had traditionally been won by the men and women concerned with being on the right side of God. We now wet our fingers, hold them in the air and move at the whim of social media trends. We serve death, not life.

The Bible has an obsession not with death but with life, notably life now and after death.

Living according to God's Word transforms how you approach everything because you know about life everlasting.

We have seen in Daniel these four apocalyptic visions of conflict that rages in the world; conflict in the visible realm and conflict in the spiritual realm, and it all seems a little scary.

The kingdoms of this world battle one another and they battle against God's kingdom as the end draws near.

In some ways, all of this can be greatly discouraging.

Because it is hard for people to understand. No one really does.

Even those who spend years studying these visions, history, language do not agree or completely comprehend.

Moreover, in apocalyptic prophesy it often seems like things are messy and violent and full of suffering.

Even more so because the events we read of seem so huge and overwhelming.

We wonder what will happen to little me. What about my friends and my kids and just regular people trusting God?

What will happen to God's people at the end of the days? Daniel 10:14

What we are going to see in answer to this question is all about life, life everlasting.

Part of the purpose of apocalyptic prophesy like this is for God to give His precious people reassurances.

God is going to come in vengeance and vindication because He loves His people and if faithful to His promises.

We need the reassurance because most of the time things do not look like they are going well.

Which is what makes all of this such a fantastic story to the glory of God.

The darker the depths of despair and difficulty the brighter is the light of glorious victory!

Today we will be looking at the last part of the final vision that God gave to Daniel...

as he prayed in Babylon for the restoration of Jerusalem.

He is there in his window reading the Bible and praying three times a day.

He is in exile, kidnapped as a youth, now an old man, counting down the days told to the prophet Jeremiah.

An angel appears to him. **Daniel 10:4-6** He cannot stay conscious or on his feet.

The angel stands him up and strengthens him and tells him twice that he is "greatly loved."

The angel also explains that he is three weeks late in coming because of the great spiritual battle that rages unseen.

This angel has been opposed by the "Prince of the Kingdom of Persia" whom Michael has defeated.

After speaking to Daniel, this fearsome angel will be going back into battle.

The great spiritual battle that rages is a reflection of the physical visible battles that rage... or the other way around.

The military battles, political battles, cultural battles, even church battles...

reflect the spiritual battle that rages unseen: angels, demons, faithful prayers praying.

And, there is something that the Lord has decided that Daniel needs to know, because he is "greatly loved."

So, this angel has been sent to tell him.

That the kingdoms of this world will be battling away...

but God's plan for His kingdom moves forward unhindered, and God is mindful of His children.

I. The rise and fall of the Antichrist.

Daniel 11:40-45

In Daniel 11 the angel that visited Daniel told him that in some 250 years this "despicable person" would arise...

out of the conflict of the nations of the earth, in this case the remnants of Greece after Persia are destroyed.

He is called in chapter 7 the "little horn" uttering great boasts and blaspheming God.

He will hate the covenant, persecute God's people, and set up his abomination of desolation in the holy place.

Daniel is told this because this violent, deceptive, fake king is a type of Antichrist.

Thus, toward the end of the chapter, we move from a focus on this "despicable person," this "little horn."

The focus shifts to the ultimate Antichrist sometime in the future, at the end of the days.

The Antichrist will arise, likewise, out of the conflict of nations seeking power and riches.

He will conquer and destroy, attacking Jerusalem and "the beautiful land."

He will desire to destroy the plans and works of God and will serve Satan.

We learn from Daniel and from 2 Thessalonians that the Messiah will not come in victory until the Antichrist appears.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 The man of lawlessness will come and destroy, exalting himself, demanding worship.

We see in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and elsewhere that the presence of the Antichrist will initiate a great tribulation.

In Daniel 1-4 we have a short explanation of the end of days.

In verse 4, God tells Daniel to "hide these words in a book until the end of time. Which he has done for us.

Then, beginning in verse 5 we have a conversation between Daniel and the angel that serves as a commentary.

Daniel is clearly struggling with what God has told him. **Daniel 12:8**

For what and why are there all these wars and suffering for God's people?

The angel gives the answer. **Daniel 12:9-10**

Even now God is purging and purifying us. Can you feel it?

There will be this period of time (a mystery) and then the end. **Daniel 12:11-13**

II. A time of great tribulation.

Daniel 12:1, 7

We have already been reading about the Antichrist, the one who will oppose the purposes and plan of God.

In Revelation 13 we learn that he will require all people to worship himself or they will not be able to buy or sell.

We are told that he will make war against God and against the holy people of God and seek to overcome them.

It is because they resist him that there will be a great tribulation, more than the people of God have ever had.

In the Bible, the word "tribulation" is always used for the suffering of God's special holy people, His children.

Tribulation means the suffering of the saints. **John 16:33 Colossians 1:24**

In Daniel 12:1 we read about what will happen when the Antichrist rises and falls. **Daniel 12:1**

Michael the archangel will personally stand guard over the people of God, everyone who's name is in the book.

"There will be a time of distress such as has never occurred."

Personal angelic protection and horrendous suffering are concurrent!

You might think, "How can that be? I thought angels protect me from suffering."

In the book of Revelation God's people suffer, but the Lord protects them from apostasy and despair.

In Daniel 12:7 we learn that it will be at the end of "a time, times, and half a time" (a mysterious number)

that the tribulation will come to an end.

But it will include the "shattering of the power of the holy people." (more suffering)

Why suffering? Why does it always seem like the faithful followers of God must suffer?

David asks this question over and over in the Psalms. This question is the theme of the book of Job.

It is thematic in parts of Paul's letters. **Philippians 3:8-11**

This is the pattern, we see it in Daniel as well... suffering and then resurrection, the resurrection of the dead.

III. The resurrection of the dead.

Daniel 12:2-3

These two verses might be two of the most encouraging in the entire Bible.

Most religions and philosophies of the world teach something about existence after death.

But the Bible, by far, gives more details than any.

Why? It is because God actually knows about life after death and what the future holds. God is not speculating.

So, the angel tells Daniel at the end of verse 1 that there is coming a rescue for all those who is in the book.

This would include everyone, Jew and Gentile, who is trusting in the Lord and living in obedience to Him.

What will the rescue look like? Verse 2.

Those who sleep, those who have died, will awake. This really is a mind-boggling thought.

If you are a Bible-believing Christian maybe you are used to it. But nothing like it has ever happened.

When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew tells us...

tombs were opened and bodies of the dead were seen walking around. That was wild.

The death of Jesus was a life and death shaking event. But nothing compared to what is yet to come.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 We learn that this resurrection will be initiated by the return of Jesus Christ.

In Daniel 12 we learn that both the righteous and the others will be raised.

The righteous to everlasting life. We will meet the Lord in the air and join Him in victory.

Those who are not followers and lovers of Jesus will be raised to everlasting contempt, kept for judgment.

But the focus here is on those who love God, those who will be raised to life everlasting.

We learn 3 things about them, presented in an interesting parallelism:

1. They have insight. We see this again in verse 10. These are people who have understanding.
Why do they have insight? They “know their God” and “display strength and take action.” (Daniel 12:32)
They have insight because, like Daniel, they are in the Word, reading, studying, thinking about what God says.
Are you in the Word? Do you know that this is your only protection against deception?
People think, “Oh no. I’m smart. I will never fall for the lies of the enemy.” They’re wrong. I’ve seen it.
2. They “lead the many to righteousness.” These people share with others the gospel of God, Jesus Christ.
After all, what will the faithful followers of Jesus be doing in their lives and in the tribulation?
Revelation 12:10-12 The Devil is doing all he can, but he cannot overcome them.
They overcome him “because of the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.”
They do not stop trusting in Jesus’ blood and speaking the truth. They are proud of Jesus.
3. They shine brightly like heaven, like the stars forever and ever.
They are not raised to “disgrace and everlasting contempt.” (verse 2)
They are not cast into hell at the judgment, which is really a sentencing. (Revelation 20)
They honor Christ in their lives and so the Lord Jesus Christ will honor them with life everlasting.
We who know and follow Christ will share in His glory just as we share in His suffering. **Romans 8:16-17**
Do you know that you will be changed? **1 John 3:1-3**

C.S. Lewis writes in his Weight of Glory:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you say it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – These are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

And, so, we will be raised to live forever, ultimately in a new heaven and new earth in the presence of God.

This is our “allotted portion at the end of the age.” Daniel 12:13

Revelation 21-22 tells us that there will be no sin there, no tears, no more suffering.

Brother, sister, this is what God has made you for. It is marvelously encouraging.

This is why you need not fear persecution, suffering, loss of health or home or money.

This is why you need not fear the collapse of the United States.

This is why you need not fear coronavirus.

God has a plan for history and for you, all this is part of the plan. The end of the plan is that you live forever.