

Optimist or Pessimist?

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[0 : 00] He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the ones desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all.

Instead of them, he will honour a god of fortresses, a god unknown to his ancestors. He will honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts.

He will attack the mightiest fortress with the help of a foreign god, and will greatly honour those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people, and will distribute the land at a price.

At the time of the end, the king of the south will engage him in battle, and the king of the north will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry, and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood.

He will also invade the beautiful land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab, and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries.

[1 : 15] Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver, and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Kushites in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many.

He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain, yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him. At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.

There will be a time of distress such as not happened from the beginning of the nations until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one in this bank of the river and one in the opposite bank.

[2 : 37] One of them said to the man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the river, How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled? The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand towards heaven.

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.

I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, My Lord, what will the outcome of all this be? He replied, Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. 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.

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 1,335 days.

[3 : 52] As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of days, you will receive your allotted inheritance. David, thanks a lot for reading that for us.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful to see where we're going as we look at this together. We've been in a sermon series in the book Daniel, and so this is the, we're taking the last two chapters together, together, and it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at page 899 as we look at this portion of God's Word together.

It's our habit as a church to work through books of the Bible. We're going to start a series next week in Mark's Gospel, and we do that so that we don't just cherry-pick. We let God set the agenda. But when we come to a portion of God's Word like this, it's a great reminder to pray and ask for God's help. Let's ask for His help as we turn to His Word. Heavenly Father, we pray that You would give us ears to hear Your Word, heads that can understand, and hearts that are willing to respond rightly and follow You.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder if you'd describe yourself as an optimist or a pessimist. The story is told of two boys, brothers, and one was an unwavering optimist and the other a terrible pessimist.

[5 : 27] And the parents thought, we've got to do something to correct this balance in our own kids. So one Christmas, they decided that while the boys were out, they would fill the bedroom of the pessimistic boy with presents.

Just fill it up. And they'd fill the bedroom of the optimistic boy with manure. So that's what they did. And a short time later, they went up to see how the boys were getting on. So they opened the bedroom door of the pessimistic boy and they find him sitting, weeping inconsolably, surrounded by gift boxes and wrapping paper.

And he says, I'm just never going to have the time to play with all of these presents. And then they went and opened the door of his brother's bedroom and they found him with a beaming smile on his face, standing waist deep in manure with a shovel in his hand.

And he said, there's got to be a horse in here somewhere. Well, do you think of yourself as an optimist or a pessimist? In Megan Markle's speech two years ago to teenagers graduating from the high school where she was at school, she said this, I'm already excited for what you are going to do in the world.

I'm cheering you on all along the way at the start of all the impact you're going to make in the world as the leaders we all so deeply crave. You can feel a sense of expectation there, can't you, being laid on these graduates.

[6 : 52] The world needs you and you're going to meet the world's needs. But it was actually a speech that was more about frustration with the world at the time than it was about hope for those people because it was a speech made just in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and Megan was actually expressing visceral fury that the world was in the state it's in.

And as much saying, my generation has failed, as she was saying, could your generation do any better? Well, what about for us? Do you see the world becoming a better place?

Or do you see it becoming a worse place in your lifetime? And what do you expect you might be able to achieve? What difference could you make? Well, this is our last Sunday in the book of Daniel.

He was alive in the 6th century BC. He was an Israelite, so he was one of God's people at that time. And the visions that God gave to Daniel were to give his people reassurance as they live far from home and as life is tough.

They need to know what's coming so that they can live wisely. And for us today, we live in what the Bible calls the last days because it's the days where Jesus has already come and died for sins and risen to rule.

[8 : 04] But we're waiting for his coming again. And as we live in these last days, we need reassurance for what's coming so that we can live wisely. So our first point is, in terms of our expectations, expect distress.

Let's pick things up at the start of verse 12, sorry, chapter 12. Chapter 12, verse 1. He says, At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.

There will be a time of distress. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. Now, those words, as we'll come to see as we look at the chapters as a whole, are about a time that's not yet come.

A time of distress. But the times of distress that are coming are really what Daniel's vision in chapter 11 are all about. We didn't have all of it read, but you can see from the headings, just back over the page, the headings in our Bibles there, in the church Bibles, that chapter 11 starts with the kings of the south and the north.

Do you see that just above verse 2? Now, Daniel was a government minister serving under the Persian Empire in Babylon, but he hears these incredible details about what will happen in the next couple of centuries.

[9 : 24] There'll be Alexander the Great will rise up, and then he will be replaced. As he died, age 32, there was this power struggle between a dynasty in the north and a dynasty in the south, and it's described for us in verses 5 to 20.

You can map verses 5 to 20 onto what historians say happened. Now, what we see from that is that human power is ferocious. Verse 10 is just one example there.

If you have a look down, it says, His sons, this is the king of the north's sons, will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.

This is what human history is like. Just as we hear of thousands of troops being moved around the Ukrainian borders as we speak, and we see here as well that human power is frustrated.

So another theme in that chapter, chapter 11, is again and again a king rises, but their plans get thwarted. In verse 11 it says, The king of the south will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the north, who will raise a large army and then the but, but it will be defeated.

[10 : 42] And that happens again and again, that human power is ferocious, but it's frustrated. And it's also frightening, human power. So in verses 21 to 35, the sweep of history slows right down, and Daniel is given a vision that focuses on one particular man.

He's not even a king. If you look at verse 21, he's the climactic man of the north. It says, verse 21, he will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty.

And the man being described here, we thought more about when we looked at chapter 8. He's called Antiochus Epiphanes. Epiphanes wasn't his last name. Epiphanes just means God manifest. And you can learn a lot about someone from the nickname they choose for themselves.

It's quite a nickname, isn't it? Imagine meeting someone who said to you, I'm James, but you can call me God made manifest. What would we think of that? And Antiochus was a maniac.

He caused horror for God's people. It was a terrible time to follow the Lord. At the end of verse 31, it's predicted that he will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

[11 : 54] Now desolation there is the sense of desolation of the people of God. As what Antiochus did was he went into the temple in Jerusalem where they'd offered sacrifices to the living God and he declared it for Zeus, the pagan God, and he sacrificed pigs on the altar.

A terrible thing for the Jewish people. He had monthly inspections in the towns of Israel and if you were found to have the scriptures in your home, it was the death penalty. If you observed the Sabbath, death penalty.

And the reason this man is still relevant for us is because Daniel then sees another coming later who is like a chip off the old block.

He kind of fits the blueprint of Antiochus and that's the man we meet from verse 36 onwards. So we see he's a different man because this one is a king, verse 36.

The king will do as he pleases and we hear about him until the end of the chapter. Verse 36, it says, he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard of things against the god of gods.

[13 : 04] He's worse than any who've come before. So in verse 37, it says, he will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the wonders are by women, nor will he regard any god but will exalt himself above them all.

So the prophecies here are a bit like when you're climbing a hill and you know that sense. We took our kids up a hill in the Lake District near Keswick last summer called Catbells and when you go up Catbells, it's one of these hills with a false summit, you know, so the kids can see the top and they're thinking lunch at the top and their morale's high and then you get to the top and then you can see the top and it's much further away and much higher.

And Bible prophecy can be just like that. For these verses in Daniel, there's this initial fulfillment, ah, Antiochus comes, he's the one that we were forewarned would come, but then there are further fulfillments after him.

And extraordinarily, when Jesus is talking to his disciples, he forewarns them that the one predicted in Daniel 11 is still to come.

So in Matthew chapter 24, Jesus is with his disciples, they're marveling at the temple and he says to them that the temple will be destroyed and they say to him, when will these things happen?

[14 : 25] And they also ask him, when will the day of the Lord come? And he answers them in Matthew chapter 24 and he starts by telling them about the temple being destroyed and he says

this, so when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation spoken of through the prophet Daniel, let the reader understand, then that those who were in Judea flee to the mountains.

So Jesus there tells us of the next fulfillment of this prophecy and it happened in AD 70, a generation later as the Romans came and they destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

But then we get to that fulfillment and we see there's another fulfillment because the apostle Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica a letter, 2 Thessalonians in our Bibles because they thought, they'd heard a rumor that the day of the Lord had already come, that Jesus had already returned and he writes to reassure them but he says before that day comes of Jesus' return, the man of lawlessness has to come.

And he says of him, it's very Daniel chapter 11, he says in 2 Thessalonians, the man of lawlessness will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped so that he sets himself up in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God.

You see what's going on there? Paul is saying the man promised in Daniel 11 is still to come, is still future for us today. He's called the Antichrist by the Apostle John in 1 John chapter 2 where he says many Antichrists have come into the world who stand against Jesus but the Antichrist is yet to come.

[16:10] And the question to ask ourselves therefore as we look at this is, is there room in my Christian worldview for my life to be distressing?

If my life is distressing, does that destabilize me? Or is there room in my Christian worldview for God to be for me and my life to be like that?

I was reading this week about this year's wellness trend of manifesting. I don't know whether you're into wellness but manifesting, which is getting very trendy this year, is where you speak out your aspirations and apparently by vocalizing them there's the belief you can make them happen.

It's a sort of pseudoscience where what you say actually starts to shape reality. And in the church maybe sometimes we wouldn't fall for that but we end up with this kind of gospel that says, well because God is for me my life will be more comfortable if I follow him and really give my all to him. But chapters like Daniel 11 say life can be distressing. That you could live a life filled with the spirit, led by the spirit, a life of prayer, a life of love of God and other people and it could be marked by distress.

[17:37] That could be the normal Christian life. Is there room in my Christian worldview for distress? Expect distress. Our second point more briefly is expect delay.

So that's in chapter 12 but in chapter 10 last week we saw the man who tells Daniel all these things. We saw him last week. He's this glorious angel who kind of carries the imprint of the glory of God on him.

He's just phenomenal and Daniel spends most of the rest of the chapter either passed out or on his knees having encountered this glory. And at the end of the vision in chapter 12 verse 5 Daniel actually sees two others standing either side of this man and one of them asks a question in verse 6.

One of them said to the man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the river how long? How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled? And the answer comes in verse 7. The man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the river lifted his right hand and his left hand towards heaven 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.

[18:57] And numbers in Daniel are symbolic and if we take the phrase times there as two times time times and half a time is three and a half and Daniel has been full of sevens because seven is the symbolic number in the Bible for completeness.

So when it's saying three and a half it's half of seven and it's a way of saying that the period of distress will be lasting but it will be limited by God. It's not going to go on forever.

In verse 11 we hear more time references. It says from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up there will be 1290 days.

We don't know what that is. It could be that it's roughly three and a half years. So it's just another way of describing that God has ordained how long this will last. And then it says verse 12 blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of 1335 days.

And I don't know why it's 1335 but one thing I worked at about 1335 days this week is that it is 45 days longer than 1290 days.

[20 : 10] So the angel may simply be saying to Daniel everyone who endures everyone who keeps trusting God through this time of distress will be blessed by God.

Good for you if you can keep going in distress. So again is there room in your world view to see the Christian life as a waiting game? It can be very exciting to be a Christian and Jesus could come any day.

He implores you and me be ready for his return. Be ready today for his return. At the same time Daniel chapter 12 says to us brace yourselves for delay.

Don't let it catch you by surprise if the world is getting worse. Don't be surprised if the world doesn't get fixed in your lifetime. Don't be surprised if the political scene gets more depressing.

If the first minister or the prime minister or the president is someone you think is outrageous is ridiculous how has it come to this? just keep on keeping on as a Christian and remember that despite appearances the Lord reigns and he's building an everlasting kingdom.

[21 : 24] We're to wait for him. Wait patiently and one day everyone will see it. That's our third point. After expect distress expect delay thirdly expect deliverance.

So let's look again at verse 1 of chapter 12 and the key with this being Michael being referenced we met him previously in Daniel is he is a spiritual being an angel who fights for God's people.

So it's a way of describing God's spiritual beings on the side of God's people protecting them. Verse 1 At that time 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. But at that time your people everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered.

So picture the Lord we pictured him earlier in Daniel in his courtroom and now we learn he has he has a book and the names of every believer are written in the book.

[22 : 30] Whatever anyone does to them down there no one can scratch their names out of his book here. And Daniel points us beyond death with a promise about a future day coming a judgment day verse 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake some to everlasting life others to shame and everlasting contempt.

so the message is that if you keep going the day of vindication will come resurrection day. In Daniel chapter 2 God revealed that all the great kingdoms of the world mighty though they look will one day be taken down and God's kingdom will rule forever.

as we saw that stone destroy the statue of the human kingdoms. In chapter 7 Daniel saw the king a man called the son of man who went into the throne room of God the ancient of days on the clouds and God gave the son of man authority to rule forever.

His kingdom will last forever. In chapter 9 the angel Gabriel told Daniel that when this Messiah king comes he will bring in everlasting righteousness.

There will be no more sin in his kingdom. And now we hear of the day he appears as judge. The fury stops. The books are opened and everyone who has waited for him everyone who has endured who has kept on trusting will rise to eternal life.

[24 : 14] I don't know if you saw on the news yesterday there was a sad story of the relay runners from Team GB in Tokyo who'd won the silver medal in the men's 4x100 meter relay but one of them had taken illegal substances and he failed his drugs tests and so they've had their medal stripped off them devastating as the truth was revealed.

It was sad to read of that could we imagine the complete reverse of that emotion picture the exact reverse that on the day of Jesus return there will be this great reversal as people whom the world pitied people whom the world forgot and never noticed people whom the world rejected even hated imprisoned killed are raised and vindicated and honored as Jesus places a crown of righteousness on their heads and for Daniel himself there's a wonderful moment here to close the book that he says in verse 8 if you have a look at verse 8 I heard but I did not understand and having read Daniel some of us know exactly how he feels so he asks my lord what will the outcome of all this be and the word for Daniel is that he's going to die before resurrection day in verse 13 it might be obvious to us it maybe wasn't obvious to him but in verse 13 he's told as for you go your way till the end you will rest and at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance and it's a message to all of us who die in Christ or people we've known and loved who have died in Christ that though death is a horrible thing when you trust

God's promises you go through death and you rest and at the end of the days you rise and you stand before Jesus whom you've served but you see from the nail marks in his hands that he served you first and he says well done good and faithful servant and he hands you an inheritance and says come and let me serve you at my heavenly banquet forever so folks we've thought about Daniel's last vision and three things were to expect how do we respond well I've just put three things there on the sheet the first is look to the throne we saw last week that before the prophecy there is a whole chapter of build up where Daniel meets the angel why because Daniel needed to see a glimpse of the glory of God before he hears about the distress and the delay he has to have in his mind's eye the Lord who reigns and Daniel chapter 11 says to us do you know Daniel's God if you know him you'll keep going if you don't know him how will you keep going so just have a look at that it's in verse 32 it's describing the man of lawlessness first fulfilled by Antiochus but chapter 11 verse 32 it says with flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant you see what's going on there so the devil's tactic isn't always to frighten you into not being a Christian sometimes it's to flatter you into not being a Christian it's to say come and live your life away from Jesus and it will be better and some people will fall away don't be destabilized when you see people fall away with flattery he will corrupt those who violated the covenant so how do we avoid that we'll look at the second half but the people who know their God will firmly resist him that's how we resist the distinguishing mark of the people who keep going who persevere is they know their God that the Jesus who wears a royal robe today in heaven with the title on it King of Kings and Lord of Lords is our good shepherd our guide and our saviour and our friend and in him and through the spirit we can call on God as our father today and enjoy knowing him in a relationship so look to the throne and remember the one on the throne is the one we can know secondly look to the future remember that as certain as the distress is the deliverance that will come a day of resurrection those who sleep in the dust will awake a day of vindication some to everlasting life and a day of glory so in verse 3 of chapter 3 he says those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens so I asked at the beginning for you to think am I an optimist or a pessimist we could say the Christian answer to that is I'm a hop-timist it's not my phrase Craig Hamilton's phrase we're called to be hop-timists we're full of healthy biblical realism about how in this world we'll have trouble we'll face distress but full of confidence in God's promises for a secure future so look to the throne look to the future finally lead others to the sun let's read verse 3 again just have a look again at verse 3 of chapter 12 those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever folks how incredible to have our eternal future compared with the shining of a star most of the stars we see in the night sky are much brighter than the sun the star that keeps us alive they're so far away that what we're seeing at night is how they looked millions of years ago it takes so long for the light to reach us and yet we can still see them with the naked eye literally quadrillions of miles away further away than we can ever grasp because they are so intensely bright and that's the picture [30 : 46] Daniel gives us here of the brilliant brightness of people who live wisely who live fearing God waiting for Jesus return and the difference between our shining and the stars shining is that though they will just shine for millions of years the people who are trusting Jesus will shine forever and the specific he gives us is those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever we can do that by persevering with a faithful life a life that doesn't compromise like we saw Daniel engaged with the world but having no other gods but the Lord we can lead others to righteousness by sharing our faith as we invite friends to come and hear more through a passion for life as we talk to friends about Jesus we have the opportunity to shine forever we can lead others to righteousness when we use our words to encourage people to keep going in our church family maybe as over coffee we say to someone how are you going how are you growing as a Christian how are you growing think of the group of dads in the church dads of little ones who have been getting together on Zoom to read a book about fatherhood about being a Christian dad or the woman who was sharing lifts to work with a colleague and so she asked her small group to pray that she'd have a chance to invite her friend to read Mark's gospel with her over coffee or a retired man who now devotes himself to disciplined systematic prayer for ministries and churches and for his not yet believing family members just going on praying for them because he has the time now or Martin and Jennifer Patterson who go to church in Cumbernauld known to some of us here but preparing to move their family with small kids to Vietnam because so few in Vietnam know the Lord Jesus and their heart's desire is to lead people to righteousness in lots of ways very very ordinary things to do but the book of Daniel leaves us with that picture of Daniel himself perhaps not very

noticeable in later life just an old man dying far from home but finding rest and then being raised and glorified so that he will shine like the stars forever let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word and what he's been saying to us well we have toorn as always as only one thing as always uh and everything makes like work however it was like there's a little it's like whatever it comes and it's like it's the but and

I when it's like show So, Father, we praise you that we can know you, the living God, and that though you forewarn us of distress and delay, through Daniel we see that Jesus is the Son of Man and he is on his throne and will establish a kingdom that lasts forever, a kingdom of righteousness, by your Spirit help us to endure patiently, to persevere hopefully, and to lead others to righteousness, for our good and for Jesus' name's sake.
Amen.