

“Daniel: Nothing to See Here”

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Daniel 12:1-13

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Today we wrap up this series in the Book of Daniel, but as I shared last week, we’ll be staying in a more apocalyptic vein by spending some time in the Book of Revelation, starting next Sunday. We’ll be in a particular section of the book called the Trumpet judgments, and if Revelation has ever been something you’ve been intrigued by, intimidated by, or even scared of, let’s enter into it together, and we may find the good news embedded in and undergirding anything that we might find troubling in it. We’ll start that next week.

But like I said, some of the imagery and themes from Revelation will sound very familiar from these last two weeks in Daniel, and as we come to the very end of the book, we find the prophet struggling to hold on to hope, even when glimpses of hope are given to him. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

12 ‘At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.’² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.⁴ But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase.’

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other.⁶ One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, ‘How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?’⁷ The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished.⁸ I heard but could not understand; so I said, ‘My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?’⁹ He said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end.’¹⁰ Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall

understand, but those who are wise shall understand. ¹¹ From the time that the regular burnt-offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. ¹² Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. ¹³ But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.'

Daniel 12:1-3

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? O God, our protector and deliverer, may your faithfulness always be with us. May your Word, which at times may challenge and trouble and at others surely comforts and guides, be our light and our rest. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

In a tale of modern political intrigue, a humble police lieutenant named Frank Drebin uncovers a plot to assassinate the Queen of England during a visit to the United States. The way he found out about it was through the clues left by a partner of his, who had been injured and hospitalized during the investigation.

On the way to the hospital, he was told his partner only had a 50/50 chance of living, and that there was only a 10% chance of that.

If that last bit caught you off guard, it's because it's meant to be silly. Some may have even recognized the name Frank Drebin not as a real police officer, but as the character played by Leslie Nielsen in the Naked Gun movies. That's where this is from.

So recuperating in the hospital, his partner is attacked by a doctor who had been hypnotized, using the same method that the plotters intended to use to assassinate the queen.

Drebin heroically stops the hypnotized doctor assassin, and a thrilling car chase ensues. The doctor tries to run Drebin off the road, but instead runs into a fuel tanker truck, and it all explodes. But the doctor survives. But then he runs into a military vehicle transporting a ballistic missile, which also explodes. But the doctor survives. But now he's riding on top of the missile and speeds into a fireworks store, and everything explodes, in a manner fit for the 4th of July.

Lieutenant Drebin sees the whole thing and steps out to address the crowd gathering around. With the burning remains of the building behind him, workers running out of it trying to put the fire out on their clothes, fireworks still shooting out into the sky, Drebin calmly instructs the crowd, "Nothing to see here. Please disperse. Nothing to see here."

Obviously it's a silly slapstick movie, but that visual of Leslie Nielsen standing in front of the exploding building saying, "Nothing to see here," came to mind when Daniel is told in the

last words of the book, “But you, go your way and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.”

Daniel has been shown some astounding things, terrifying things, even. “Nothing to see here, Daniel. Go your way.”

After we left off last week, the visions just kept coming, and they mostly have to do with the rise and fall of kings.

First, there’s a ram that gets overtaken by a goat. There’s a strange weekly countdown given for the rebuilding of Jerusalem but then hardships to follow.

Then, he finds himself on the banks of the Tigris River, one of those great rivers of Babylon, and he sees a man clothed in linen, but with a face like lightning, eyes like torches, his voice like the roar of a crowd, seemingly hovering above the river. He’s terrified, tries to cower on the ground, but this figure tells him, “Do not fear,” and goes on to tell him an oddly specific account of kings rising among Persia, and then kings rising from Greece, leading up to a conflict between a king in the south and a king in the north.

And all of this bears a striking resemblance to a Greek ruler after Alexander the Great’s empire split up, a ruler known as Antiochus, who was especially reviled among the Jews for his ruthlessness in quashing a rebellion. And if the story is true, he slaughtered a swine on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem.

And all along the way you have angels showing up, “princes” as they’re referred to here. An angel named Gabriel shows up—first time he’s named in Scripture, but yes the same Gabriel who speaks with Mary, Jesus’ Mother. And an angel named Michael, often known as an archangel, is mentioned a few times, and in fact, this is the only section of the Old Testament that Michael is directly named as an angel, then only twice in the New Testament if you’re keeping score.

The striking thing is that these visions seem to indicate that the angels, the “princes,” the protectors of Israel are contending with the “princes” of other kingdoms, suggesting that mirroring the conflicts and rise and fall of kings and empires on earth is mirrored by contention between the respective “princes” of all these kingdoms.

It’s toward the end of this vision that we pick up in the last chapter of the book. “At the time,” it begins in verse 1, “Michael, the great prince”—see there’s an angel being referred to as a prince—“the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.” And Daniel’s got to be thinking, “Enough already.” He’s got to be remembering what he said a little while before: “How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For I am shaking, no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.”

But then it continues and even in the darkness of the clash of kings, a hope for deliverance: “But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel.” I don’t know if you caught that, but this is the first and only direct and clear reference to the resurrection in the Old Testament, to the hope we have in Christ. There are a few other spots that hint at it, but this is the only time it is directly referenced, and as a point of hope for the people of God.

Then Daniel is told to keep these things secret—he might not have done such a great job of that; the words are now printed in the most published book in history after all. But then it keeps on coming. Daniel looks up, still on the banks of the river it seems, and sees two others standing, one of them saying to this man clothed in linen hovering above the water, “How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?” Daniel had to have thought, “Took the words right out of my mouth.”

And the man clothed in linen gives this weird answer about “a time, two times, and half a time” and something about the “shattering of the power of the holy people.” Doesn’t matter because Daniel has no idea what that’s supposed to mean. And so, exhausted, terrified, barely able to speak, he somehow summons the courage and strength to ask one last thing, Daniel’s last words in the book that bears his name: “My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?”

A fair question, I think. Perhaps the question a lot of us might have. All this weird and terrifying stuff, but you know, where’s this heading? How do things end up? The ram and the goat, and the kings clashing, and these angels these princes fighting each other too, all with this man clothed in linen hovering above the water not giving any straight answers. It’s all hard enough, but it’d be a bit more tolerable if we at least knew how it would all end up.

And he says to Daniel, “Go your way, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end.” Like Frank Drebin in *The Naked Gun*, standing in front of the burning, exploding building, saying, “Nothing to see here. Please disperse. Nothing to see here.”

A few more words about a weird timeline about three and a half years long, until finally saying, “But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.” And with that, the book ends.

Does this feel like a satisfying end to anyone? All these cataclysmic things happening. But don’t worry about it, you’ll be delivered; there will be a rising of the dead and all that. Just go your way.

It feels like a bit of dissonance going on here, because Daniel is shown all these fantastic, troubling things, and then told to, you know, “Move along.” “Go your own way.” “Nothing to see here.”

That might be the challenge and the comfort that this troubling, puzzling book gives us. On one hand, there’s much here that has been familiar: what with lion’s dens and fiery furnaces. On the other, there’s much that may be quite strange.

And it’s easy to fixate on the strange, on what’s troubling.

Anyone familiar with the term “rubbernecking”? Refers to turning your head loosely or foolishly, but usually it’s in reference to what happens when there’s a wreck on the road, and folks slow down so they can look at it.

It’s a frustrating practice, but I’m as guilty of it as anyone. This was years ago, but I was driving late at night on the interstate, and there was a wreck on the other side of the interstate, as in, not in the median, all the way over. But one of the cars was on fire. So I slowed down, so I could take a look at it. In the meantime, a car behind me, presumably also rubbernecking but not slowing down got closer and closer very quickly in my rearview, and I didn’t notice it until I could hear it screeching and swerving to avoid me, because I had slowed down so much, and the car behind swerved around me, off the side of the road, turning and overcompensating back across the two lanes of our side of the interstate, until finally regaining control and getting back onto the pavement. And then sped off. Fortunately neither they nor I was hurt, but it was all because I and, perhaps they as well, were fixated on this burning car on the other side of the interstate.

Was the burning car important? Yes, of course. That’s a dangerous thing. Someone might have been hurt or worse in that wreck. Of course it’s important. But I made it too important.

It’s easy to become fixated.

Just in the past week, even in the spheres of kings and empires, so to speak, some of us might have been fascinated or maybe consumed by any scraps of news of a failed coup within Russia, or related to it the movements of a Ukrainian counteroffensive. Is it important? Of course it’s important. There’s a war going on. But do we make it too important?

Or within our nation, after the release of various rulings by the Supreme Court, each one perhaps bringing intense interest and resulting in high euphoria or deep lament. Is it important? Of course it’s important. They’re the rulings of the highest court in the land. But do we make it too important?

Or for a group of exiled Jews many years ago, there's a call to bow down to an idol, or law compelling you to pray to a king rather than your God. Is it important? Of course it's important. It's the law of the land in which you have been placed. But did they make it too important?

For their part, no they didn't. They showed that it's important to serve and engage constructively, to seek the well-being of the land in which they were exiled, but they didn't make it too important. Some things were more important. Going their way, following the Lord, no matter the setting and whether it was convenient or not.

As we near a holiday celebrating freedom, independence, and the start of a revolution, for which we should rightly give thanks, in that freedom may we remember a little of what Daniel shows us, that as one scholar put it, "the most revolutionary act...according to [him] was for one to *be* a Jew and to teach others to be a Jew. The most revolutionary act in the modern world is first of all to be a woman or man of faith—to reject violence, to reject the abuse of the weak, and to embrace the gospel of life and teach it to others." And in that revolutionary act, may we as we follow Christ remember a glimpse of what Daniel sees, a call to "Go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.