

Daniel 11 and 12 The Finale (Matthew 24 2 Thessalonians 2)

We begin with a most solemn thought, that the world, human government and society as we've known them will end! Things as we've known them will not continue indefinitely. The human race is not evolving or progressing to achieve by our own efforts some kind of harmonious paradise, quite the opposite! Evil will come to a depraved and violent peak, the Lord will come in judgement and only then can there be a newly restored heavens and earth, the home of righteousness.

Writing over 500 years BC the prophet Daniel is inspired to record a number of visions in which he predicts with astounding accuracy certain events before they take place. Here in ch11 he speaks of a cruel, deceitful persecutor of God's people who would desecrate the Temple in Jerusalem. Historians agree the description here perfectly fits a Seleucid ruler called Antiochus IV who rededicated the Temple to the Greek god Zeus and had pigs sacrificed on the altar. Any showing resistance were put to death in the most horrific ways. For Jews living in Jerusalem in 165 BC it would have seemed like the end of the world!

But there's more suggested in Daniel's words. The world wouldn't end immediately but there would be other savage dictators like Antiochus culminating in a world government and ruler that would only be overcome by the advent of God's kingdom and 'one like a Son of Man' coming with God's angels on the clouds of heaven!

The time of Antiochus would be dreadful but not the end. Dictators and persecutions like this point us forward to one ultimate world leader, a truly demonic character the New Testament calls the Anti-Christ, the Man of Lawlessness, the Beast of Revelation.

The Lord Jesus gives us vital perspective in Matthew ch24. Speaking around 30AD, He actually quotes from Daniel ch11 and says it's like the time of Antiochus is being repeated. The apostles would see Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed again in their generation, this time by the Romans, but it still wouldn't be the end of the world. He tells us not to misunderstand the wars and earthquakes. These are terrible but not the end, they remind us that the end is coming! Before the actual end, the Good News of God's grace in Christ must be preached throughout the world and, to our shame, 2000 years on this remains the Christian Church's unfinished commission!

And here's an irony, two things are happening at the same time. Even as the Church is equipped by the Holy Spirit and Christians testify to Jesus and we see the Gospel spreading and the Church growing worldwide, we also see evil appearing more unrestrained than ever, manifesting in widespread deception and hostile opposition. We should not be surprised. Our Master told us to expect as much. It's what we see happening with the Apostles in Acts and again in figurative language in Revelation - the Lord building His Church through the witness of His holy people, all the while bitterly opposed by the devil and those who feed on his lies.

This Antichrist world leader will excel in every form of wicked behaviour, blasphemy and ruthless manipulation. Even now in the relative freedom of Western democracies we see how it is becoming increasingly difficult to be a practising Christian. The laws are being changed and used against us, just like in Biblical times, just like the Lord and His prophets predicted in Scripture.

But let's not dwell too long on the dark side for the 'end' of the end is not evil but good. The climax of the ages does not belong to the devil and his puppets but to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His people!

The real finale to things as we've known them will be when Christ returns in glory. See how He again quotes Daniel (ch7) in Matthew 24. The world will see the 'Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory'. Revelation 19 pictures Him as a rider on a white horse, commanding the armies of heaven, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'!

Many will mourn in horror as they realise too late they have scorned and rejected the Giver of Life. Now all remains is to face Him as Judge! He will overthrow Satan and his woefully insufficient antichrist and consign all who have followed them to everlasting punishment.

But see here the comfort and reassurance given to Christians, to those who have trusted and followed their Lord faithfully through times of trial, enduring harsh opposition. The Good Shepherd will send His angels to carefully gather us safely to Him and we will 'dwell in the house of the Lord forever'!

Daniel is given to reveal yet another wonder centuries before the birth of Christ. He is told here in ch12 that there will be *resurrection*. Not just temporary rescue from a lions' den or fiery furnace no, but nothing less than complete restoration of body and soul to enjoy 'new heavens and a new earth' and eternal life with our Lord!

We should be understandably disturbed at the thought of evil increasing, even temporarily and the suffering that will inevitably bring. There is no doubt that the teaching of God's Word should alert us to be clear-minded and focussed. We need to know and hold to this truth God has revealed and be prepared to stand firm in our faith. Heeding the words of our Master we must be careful not to let our 'love grow cold'!

But far from being overwhelmed by the futile death throes of wickedness, we should be greatly assured that evil will be ended by the triumphant coming of our Lord and the happiest and most glorious of endings will be when we are raised incorruptible like Him to live and reign eternally!

Did you notice one other detail in this OT book of Daniel ch12 that turns up again in the NT? Daniel is told, 'everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered.'

Daniel was permitted a glimpse of a court in heaven where records are kept, records of your life and mine. Every word and action, every choice. The Apostle John is also given to see this court in the closing chapters of Revelation. One particular book is mentioned, 'the Lamb's book of life'. It contains the names of those who have trusted in Him, those He has redeemed, those now destined to be welcomed into the 'new Jerusalem'.

All of our studies in Daniel, this amazing ancient book of divinely-inspired wisdom, now come to a close with this crucial question:

Will our names be found written in Jesus' book of life?