

## The Understanding of the Wise

Daniel 12:8-10

Wouldn't you like to find out more about the future? Most of us would. Historically, there have been three schools of thought about how to do so. Christians would say this understanding comes through God's revelation; others (including Descartes) would say that this understanding comes through reasoning alone; still others (including Nietzsche) say that's it is impossible to know (so each person has to make it up as he goes along). How are you and I supposed to exercise faith for the future? We are not ashamed to proclaim that we begin with God's revelation. The Book of Daniel has given us an exhilarating understanding of Biblical prophecy. These predictions have answered many of our questions about the future. But we have to admit that we have unanswered questions – lots of them! Can we get more details from Scripture about the attempts to form a one-world government? Recent news articles placed this question in the spotlight. Can we clarify the identity of the Antichrist? On what date will Daniel's 70th week (commonly called "The Tribulation") begin? Verses 8-10 of Daniel 12 help us to restrain our speculations as we work through careful Biblical interpretation.<sup>i</sup> This passage helps us to freely confess our human limitations as we place our trust in the infinite God who is fulfilling His purposes on the earth; the wisdom of the wise is to wait on the Lord.

### God's Purpose in Giving Us His Prophecies

In Isaiah 45, the Lord God revealed His purpose by asking a question: **"...who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I the LORD? And there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."** (Isaiah 45:21b-22)

Here the unique exceptionalism of God is on display. His prophecies prove that He is worthy of our complete trust. Gary Smith wrote, "In [Isaiah] 45:21 the nations are challenged to consult together and present their evidence that can document which God or idol declared what would happen in the future. This is the same argument used in 41:21–26 to prove that idol-gods do not have the basic power to predict the future. The purpose for this collaborative research is to present the facts about which god/God has announced what would happen "from the distant past" (*miqqedem*) before it actually took place."<sup>ii</sup>

Such a display of God's power humbles us. Seeing His incredible ability causes us to be painfully aware of our limitations. And in Daniel 12:8-10, we find that Daniel is our companion in grappling with our limitations: **And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.** (Daniel 12:8-10)

In this passage, we can see 5 principles for understanding the wisdom of the wise. These principles give us guidance about the prophecies of coming events and the destinies of human beings.

### Concerning the Prophecies of Coming Events

1. You can humbly admit that there are aspects of Biblical prophecy that even the wisest of men do not understand. 8

Daniel frankly admitted, "I heard, but I did not understand." Calvin pointed out that "By the word 'hearing,' he bears witness to the absence of ignorance, slothfulness, or contempt. Many depart without any

perception of a subject, although it may be very well explained, because they were not attentive to it.”<sup>iii</sup> We have received even more detailed information (especially in the New Testament); but we still have to confess with Daniel, “I heard, but I did not understand.” By diligent study of Scripture and current events, our understanding will undoubtedly grow.

But for the rest of our lives, we will still be agreeing with Daniel’s humble statement. The Apostle Peter described Daniel’s question when he wrote that, in their day, the Old Testament prophets were **“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”** (1 Peter 1:11). Thomas Schreiner commented that “...the prophets predicted these matters but did not know when they would be fulfilled, and they hoped upon hope that they would be fulfilled in their days.”<sup>iv</sup> Today when we face critics, it’s hard to admit that we are sometimes uncertain about some things. Even when we are among friends asking us for more, we often have to shrug our shoulders. During this series, when we have faced these uncertainties we have tried to present the legitimate options. We are not free to make stuff up as we go along. With Daniel, we must humbly admit that there are aspects of Biblical prophecy that even the wisest men do not understand. The wisdom of the wise is to wait on the Lord.

## 2. You can humbly admit that there are aspects of God’s final plans that have not yet been revealed.

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In verse 8 Daniel records **“...then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”** He had heard the angel’s question (in verse 6). Now he asks a question of his own. And according to what we see in verses 8 and 9, that question went unanswered. We are not absolutely sure about the scope of Daniel’s question. It may have been a narrow question about the nation of Israel near the end of the age. But he may have been asking about all of the prophecies (of Daniel chapters 10-12) combined.

Why didn’t the Lord answer his question? Perhaps it was a question of timing; in God’s good time, it was not His will to reveal the answer at that moment. Subsequent revelation in Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi and the New Testament might have answered the question. Certainly the Book of the Revelation fills in some of the gaps in the Book of Daniel for us to understand today. Even Jesus said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). So perhaps it was a question of timing.

But we know that the Lord determined to reveal some things while keeping others secret. Deuteronomy 29:29 helps us to understand this: **“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”** This verse leads us to carefully consider our stewardship of the things which *have* been clearly revealed to us. “Those things which are revealed” are clear communications for all generations to obey. As Daniel studied Jeremiah, he diligently applied himself to Jeremiah’s prophecies (compare Jeremiah 29:10-13 with Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:1-4 and following). We can humbly admit that there are things that God has not revealed to us. But if anything, this heightens the importance of what He has revealed to us. Today, we could apply the zealous diligence of Daniel with Paul’s words to Timothy: “Study to show yourself approved unto God...” (2 Timothy 2:15).

But **“the secret things belong unto the Lord our God...”** We know that God has a sovereign, secret will as He controls all things. We can see this as we observe His providence in the progression of human events. And we must learn to be patient. On one occasion, Peter wanted to know what God’s will was for John. Jesus said, “If I want him to remain here until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” (John 21:22). So

it's important for you and me to humbly admit that there are aspects of God's final plans that have not yet been revealed.

This is especially true because the abuse of Biblical prophecies has led to the formation of cults. We labored on this point in a message entitled "Deceptive Prophecies"<sup>v</sup>. If God has not clearly revealed what people want to know, we are not free to make stuff up, even when we are longing for the Lord to come. In case you missed it, the tabloids quoted some kook who insisted that the recent "blood moon" meant that that world would end the next day.<sup>vi</sup> (That was four days ago, in case you missed it.) According to NASA, the partial lunar eclipse caused us to see a reddish hue around the moon lasted for a whopping 15 minutes! But as our bodies grow older, we have to be careful not to look upon the world through tired eyes. On one occasion, Martin Luther wrote to his friend Jacob Probst, "I am weary, tired, and chilled; in short, an old man who is of no more use. I have run my race, and nothing now remains but that I should be gathered to my fathers, and the worms and corruption receive their prey. I have lived long enough ... It appears to me as if the world itself were approaching its end, and, as the Psalm says, waxing old like a garment that is soon to be renewed." That letter was written nearly five hundred years ago on December 5, 1544. Martin Luther certainly had a keen, Biblical faith. But from his experience we can learn a simple lesson: Don't let your personal fatigue influence the way you feel about the timing of Biblical prophecy. The wisdom of the wise is to wait on the Lord.

### **3. You can zealously press on with life knowing that God will show you His sovereign will in His good time. 9**

"And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." As Pastor Rodney King explained to us in his message<sup>vii</sup> from Daniel 12:4, that which was sealed in Daniel was unsealed and revealed in the Book of the Revelation of Christ. So like Jesus speaking to Peter in John 21, the Lord said to Daniel, "Go your way." In other words, "press on with life." Dr. Richard Snavelly<sup>viii</sup> used to say, "Keep on keeping on." (This is repeated in verse 13.) We may have unanswered questions about the future, but we presently have everything we need to do God's will. You know that the Most High God reigns over all the kingdoms of men, and you can trust Him to appoint whom He will (Daniel 4:17). So it's the right time to persevere in honoring the Lord. And this is especially true as you consider the truth in verse 10: "**Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand**" (Daniel 12:10).

### *Concerning the Destinies of Human Beings*

### **4. You can trust God's purposes as you watch Him try and purify those whom He would make wise. 10**

By the use of parallels, verse 10 helps us to make the right connections. Those persevering saints of God who shall be purified, made white and tried are the wise who shall understand. But the wicked who do wickedly shall never understand. While this has been generally true throughout history, the special focus of this verse is on the saints of God during the Tribulation. At the Jerusalem council, Peter made the point about Jews and Gentiles that God who knows the hearts has been "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Peter apparently had this emphasis in mind when he wrote, "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit..." (1 Peter 1:22). The only way anyone has his or her soul purified is by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Have you personally placed your faith in the Savior who died on Calvary's cross for you? He rose again to show you that you need not fear death if you are embracing Him.

The work of God's promised Savior can purify your soul. During the Tribulation, many Jewish people will embrace Him for the purifying of their souls. But Daniel 12:10 is also showing us that God purifies His people through trials: **"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried..."** Just imagine how the words of James will echo through the minds of the Tribulation saints: **"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"** (James 1:2-4). But the understanding of the wise is to wait on the Lord; wait for Him to fulfill His purposes.

#### 5. You can trust God's purposes as you watch Him confirm the wicked in their wickedness. 10

As we wait on the Lord, we wrestle with the reality of wickedness: **"...but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand..."** Even today, God's wise and purified people marvel over the foolish, mindless wickedness around us. There are those who try to purify society with moral emphasis, ignoring the fact that **"evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived"** (2 Timothy 3:13). A careful reading of Exodus chapters 7-10 shows that Pharaoh hardened his heart and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. In other words, the Lord gave Pharaoh what he really wanted. If you have not purified your soul by faith in the finished work of Christ, stop to consider the awful alternative. What if God were to give you your evil desires? What if He were to harden your heart in your iniquity for all eternity? The emphasis of Daniel 12:10 is wisdom for the wise. Daniel was supposed to go his way, to press on with life. As the Lord said the Ezekiel, **"Thus says the Lord GOD; He that hears, let him hear; and he that forbears [refuses], let him forbear: for they *are* a rebellious house"** (Ezekiel 3:27). But in all this, the wisdom of the wise is to wait on the Lord for the Most High God rules in the kingdoms of men.

*For the Most High God reigns over kingdoms of men; He ordains all its rulers for just where and when  
They have served His best purpose, fulfilling His will and today all the nations are serving Him still  
In the fullness of time, our God sent forth His Son to fulfill His predictions of His Promised One  
That in living and dying and rising again, He redeemed us to show His great work unto men  
For the Ancient of Days sits enthroned up above; His ten thousands of angels serve Him whom they love  
And the Son of Man serves this great Ancient of Days to rule over the nations and show them His ways  
All the glory and honor belongs to our God! He will rule all the nations with His iron rod  
Everlasting dominion and glory enthroned and our Sovereign Redeemer will come for His own*

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<sup>i</sup> In these messages available at [www.cbfindlay.org](http://www.cbfindlay.org), we provide documentation so that you can review the sources we cited, including commentaries, news articles and opinions. Discussions of Biblical prophecies can become spectacular fodder for tabloids, so we are providing these message manuscripts (as well as audio and video) to help you think carefully about these remarkable prophecies.

<sup>ii</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. 15B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 277.

<sup>iii</sup> John Calvin and Thomas Myers, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 385.

<sup>iv</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 73.

<sup>v</sup> "Deceptive Prophecies" November 5, 2017 (audio and manuscript). Note the documentation for the formation of cults at <https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1161792422.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Jake Loader, "Super blood moon: Ancient Bible prophecy predicts end of the world tomorrow" Daily Star, May 25, 2021 accessed at <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/weird-news/old-bible-prophecy-says-world-24180859>

<sup>vii</sup> "The Sealed Will Be Revealed" May 2, 2021 accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=53211755516070>

<sup>viii</sup> Dr. Snavely served as pastor here at Calvary for more than 28 years.