THE END TIMES

Daniel 11:36-12:13
Key Verse: 12:3

“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.”

In the last passage, we studied the explanation of Daniel's vision of a Great War up through the suffering of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes. A world ruled by men whose only desire is for power is a terrible place to be. Some hoped that political marriage might bring peace, but it was a disaster instead. Those Jews who hoped for a political solution to their problems were also surprised when their nation was nearly destroyed by the political subterfuge of Antiochus Epiphanes. On the other hand, those who held on to the holy covenant with their God were given strength and guidance to be refined, in spite of the difficult political situation. To stumble in the world is to fall victim immediately to all the beast-like people of the world, like a wounded animal surrounded by chomping piranhas. But to stumble in God is the way to be purified and made ready for his coming kingdom. May God help his people to realize the power that is theirs in their covenant of life with him! The conclusion of the explanation of Daniel's vision moves beyond the suffering under the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and points toward the great salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. But this salvation is not at all what we might expect of a heroic defender of God’s people. May God help us through this study of Daniel to understand his plan of world salvation, and may we give thanks and praise to God!

I. The king who exalts himself (11:36-45)

First, He honors a god of fortresses (36-39). In the visions of Daniel, there are two distinct flows of history. The first flow was outlined in chapter 7, in the vision concerning the four great beasts and the little horn that spoke boastfully. The conclusion of this vision was the coming of the Son of Man, and the establishment of the eternal
kingdom of God and of his saints. The second flow was outlined in chapter 8, concerning the ram and the goat, and the horn that grew in power until it occupied the Beautiful Land and trampled down the host of saints and the daily sacrifice. In this second vision, there is no triumphant conclusion, but only a hopeful reconsecration of the temple and of God's people. Daniel's final and greatest vision was given to him in chapters 10-12. In this vision, both flows of history are brought together, and we see God's hope and prayer for his people until the very end. Daniel 11:2-35 brings us up to the conclusion of the second flow, as Antiochus Epiphanes indeed tramples the temple and takes away the daily sacrifice from God's people for a time. But it was not the end. The people of God were purified and refined, but it was for the sake of the end that was still to come. Look at verse 11:35, “Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.” As history attests, after Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jewish people again regained their independence, briefly, and also their freedom to worship God in their temple under the Asmonean dynasty started with the Maccabees.

Look at verse 36. “The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.” This verse now brings us to the broader flow of history that Daniel's vision of the four beasts first introduced. As that vision declared, the kingdom following that of the Greeks would be like one the world had never seen. This beast/kingdom would sweep through the whole world, devouring people with its iron teeth. And out of that kingdom would come a little horn, one that would enjoy great success and speak boastfully against God and man. This verse clearly refers to this boastful horn and king. Some have thought that he refers to Herod the Great, during whose kingdom over Judea, the baby Jesus was born. The iron beast and the “raging” king of the North may well be the Roman Empire under Caesar Augustus. Others, however, put the fulfillment of this vision far into the future. Whoever he may be in human history, this king is the tool of the devil for the sake of leading all men astray.
The main characteristic of this king is his boastful and self-glorifying character. He will be given power to do as he pleases, and he will use that power to set himself up as god, denying the gods of men and even the God of gods as he pursues his own selfish desires. His crucial mistake will be to forget that his power and glory are temporary and are allowed him by the God of heaven. He will not worship anyone or anything except that which gives him power, glory and recognition. Look at verses 37-39. “He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.” The boastful king will worship whomever it seems expedient to worship, and he will honor whomever he wishes to honor, for his own purpose. For example, Herod became a circumcised Jew for political reasons, though he was from the nation of Edom. He switched alliances as he saw fit, and really put his hope in the power of the Roman empire. It was all to preserve his power and glory. As we know, he even stooped to killing all the baby boys of Bethlehem because of the message from the Wise men that the king of the Jews had been born. When men love power and recognition more than anything, they become totally unfaithful men who set themselves up against God himself. In short, those who love power and recognition become tools of the devil in his fight against the coming kingdom of God!

Second, He will extend his power until the end (40-45). Look at verses 40 and 41. “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.” According to this verse, the time of the end was near. A great battle would be fought, leading to the king of the North winning a complete and total victory
over the king of the South. It is an interesting fact of history that after the battle of Actium, in which Octavius and the Romans defeated the alliance of Marc Antony and Cleopatra of Egypt, troops were sent to defeat the region south of Judea, containing the peoples of Edom, Moab and Ammon, but they failed to do so. Octavius later became Caesar Augustus, who issued the decree for a census during which the baby Jesus was born. He certainly gained for himself all the treasures and power of Egypt, and made the Roman Empire great and matchless. The power of man seemed to be fully concentrated under Caesar's Rome. Herod's position in the Holy Land seemed secure because of his rapid and opportune change in friendship from Antony to Caesar. In the same way, the boastful king would be very confident of his power and position, until rumors about opposition would arise. He would be enraged and go out to defend himself and his kingdom, only to face a total and embarrassing loss. No one would help him. It means that when one lives to please himself and serve his interests only, he will be left alone at the time of the end. There is nothing worse than to be alone at the end. We should not imagine that we will live forever. We must remember that after enjoying success in this world, we must return and stand before the judgment seat of God. Those who use worldly wealth to make friends with others will be welcomed into his kingdom. Those who follow worldly wealth will be destroyed along with it, in utter loneliness.

II. God's world salvation plan (12:1-13)

First, Judgment and salvation (1-4). If we take the fourth beast to be Rome, and the boastful horn to be Herod, this places the end at the time of Jesus, and then the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70. The end would then be the end of the nation of Israel, and the beginning of the time of the Gentiles. There is a lot of support for this interpretation in the new testament Scriptures, as well as the historical events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. It would also place the ministry and redeeming sacrifice of Jesus properly at the end of times for the Jews. But with our limited knowledge of history and God's will, we cannot be sure that this is the fulfillment of what was shown to Daniel. We can learn from these verses God's will and purpose for world salvation.
Look at 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.” As we have studied, God's protection of his people does not include shielding them from distress, trials or hardship. It is a hard lesson. But God protects his people nonetheless. How does he protect them? He writes the names of those who keep their covenant with God to the end in the book of life. And if their names are found in the book of life, they will be delivered, according to the promise of God. Jesus, as he marched under the cross toward Golgotha, told the weeping women that there would be a time when men would ask the hills and mountains to fall on them to cover their shame and save them from God's judgment. Those whose names are not written in God's book have no hope, regardless of their worldly success or achievement. But those whose names are found there have a living hope, though they pass through the valley of the shadow of death. May God bless you with the confidence that your name will be found in the book of God when you stand before his judgment seat.

Look at verses 2 and 3. “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 for ever and ever.” Verse 2 reveals to us the resurrection power of God to bring those who are dead to life. We can understand this power in two ways, for it is the power of God through Jesus to bring the Gentiles, who were far away from God, back into his kingdom. They were dead, like the prodigal son, but they and we have become alive again by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. It is also the power of God to defeat the power of death that has been at work in us from the fall of man until now. Because of this power, even the noblest of men became corrupted and full of shame because of their sinful desires. St. Paul himself cried out, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” The power of Jesus’ resurrection is the power that sets men free from the power of death, and finally completes the transformation begun in us through our faith.
in God and in his promises. Because of the power of the resurrection, sinful men have hope to be changed into the holy and godly children of God. But the resurrection is not good news for everyone. For those who remain self-seeking, in the image of the antichrist, to the end, there will be shame and everlasting contempt. To deny our self-seeking desires to the end is a life and death struggle. May God help us to stand by faith in God's promise of the resurrection, and experience the final victory over the power of death.

Not only do those who remain standing in God's grace receive abundant and everlasting life, they also receive heavenly glory. Like the prodigal son who only wished to be hired as one of his father's hired men, so our sins make us shameful and doubtful even to be a hired hand in God's heavenly kingdom. But we must know that our God has far greater plans for his people than that. Look again at verse 3. “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” After we have received the gift of life, there is also the gift of heavenly glory. Heavenly glory is for those who shared with Christ Jesus in the work of world salvation by imparting God's wisdom through his word, and leading many to righteousness by shepherding them according to Jesus’ example of disciple-making. Many Christians have poured out their lives to bring the gospel truth to every nation under heaven, and in every language. Many UBF shepherds and missionaries have humbled themselves, giving up their dreams of worldly success and fame in order to participate with Jesus for the sake of shepherding God's flock of sheep at the college campuses of the world. They became worn out and tired. They suffered shame and rejection at the hands of selfish and violent people. But they did not give up. Sometimes, their hearts were so heavy because of sorrow and anguish. But it was God’s great will for them, that through such sufferings and pain, they might be refined and purified to the end. Then, when they enter their inheritance and receive what has been promised, their joy and thanksgiving and praise to God will shine from within like stars and like the brightness of the heavens. We all like human glory and praise. But the glory that belongs to those who are faithful to God’s world salvation plan to the end is beyond description and imagination. Still, Daniel gives us a glimpse of this amazing glory.
May God comfort you and encourage your hearts, so that you may know fully what God's promise only darkly reveals. May God bless you from your youth to lead many to righteousness, and to hold on to the wisdom of God to the end!

Second, How long will it be? (5-7) The man’s explanation of Daniel’s vision came to an end. Several angels had begun listening, too! They longed to know fully God’s world salvation purpose. So one of them asked the man in linen, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” As Gabriel had answered before, so the man answers now, “It will be for a time, times and half a time.” The time of distress and suffering of God's people will not be forever. It has an appointed duration, and it will come to an end. But the man’s answer is even more distressing this time. Look at v. 7b. “When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.” In his earlier vision, Daniel had seen how the boastful horn made war against the saints and was defeating them when the court of the Ancient of Days was set up and the horn thrown into the fire of judgment. That terrible battle had made Daniel tremble. Now, the man reveals the extent of the victory that worldly kings will have over God's people. The power of the holy people must be finally broken, and then the end will come. This conclusion is very distressing, because we all hope and pray to win the victory over all of Satan’s forces and attacks. It is hard to understand why the power of the people of God must be fully broken! But it is God’s truth, spoken from the beginning. When God cursed the serpent in the garden of Eden, he said to him, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” The destruction of evil and the devil could not take place except through the death of the one who struck him down. Indeed, Jesus died on the cross to defeat the devil by declaring God's forgiveness from the cross to wash away all our sins. And Paul understood that the defeat of God's people by the Romans would be the way for God to bring all men to repentance and God’s mercy. The message is hard to accept. Nevertheless, we must understand God’s truth that the way to win the victory is to lose the human battle. Only those who lose the human battle can experience God's saving grace and final victory.
Third, What will the outcome be? (8-13) Daniel was distressed at the message of suffering for his people. He heard, but he couldn’t understand. The man assured him that it was not for him to carry this cross. He had done enough. Now, he should deliver the message and entrust his future and hope to God. Through his message, God would encourage his people to wait to the end, and see the accomplishment of his plan for world salvation.

May God help us like Daniel to go our way to the end, participating in God’s world salvation work, trusting in his power and the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. May God bless us to be faithful to our holy mission to bring the gospel of salvation and life to the students of WIU.