



THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Well, we're finally at the end of the book of Daniel. And what is the main point, the theme of the book? How to live out our faith in a place of exile. A place that is not our home.

But as you make your way from the Israelite folktales and Babylonian court-records in the first half, to the personal accounts and apocalyptic visions in the second half, you begin to realise that exile is something we can all experience, even when we're living in our own land.

Because this world is not as it should be. Not yet.

But as we reach the final chapter, we get a glimpse of the world as it *will* be. A world that *will* feel like home. And just like exile, this is something we can all experience. Even now.

Daniel 12

We all have an idea what hell-on-earth looks like: just switch on a 24-hour news channel or click on your go-to online news-outlet and you'll see all the proof of hell's existence that you could ever possibly need.

But what do we see of heaven? Have a think about it:

- Relationships (marriage, family, friends).
- Acts of kindness.

- Holidays / special occasions.
- Beautiful places.
- A sense of God's Spirit / presence.

Heaven is all of the above – whacked up to 11!

Now in a similar way, in vs1, 5-7 we get a glimpse of hell; then, in vs2-3 and 13, a glimpse of heaven. But to truly understand this vision, we need to realise that it's fulfilled in 2 different, but not unrelated, ways: the here-and-now, and the there-and-then.

1) The here-and-now. It's easy to assume that Daniel is talking end of the world, resurrection of the dead, last judgement stuff. Now don't get me wrong: ultimately, he is. But that's not the immediate, the initial fulfilment.

Initially, Daniel is looking forward to a spiritual revival, and he uses the language of resurrection to describe it (a bit like the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37). Historically, this occurred with the defeat of Antiochus IV by the Maccabees in the 2nd century BC. That's the meaning of the 1,290 days (the Antiochian persecution) and the extra 45 days (the rededication of the temple). Israel was free for the first time in over 400 years; Jewish worship was restored; and most important of all, Israel experienced a national revival, a spiritual resuscitation.

I.e. they experienced resurrection.

But this sense of 'here-and-now resurrection' is also available to us. Now in case you think I'm barking up the wrong tree – or just plain barking – understand that Jesus uses resurrection language in exactly this way. E.g. "A time is coming, and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). The early church followed suit, hence this ancient hymn which gets quoted by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:14: "Wake up, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The point is: resurrection is not just a there-and-then experience – it's a here-and-now one. In fact, in order to have the there-and-then experience, you *have* to have the here-and-now one! You have to experience the death of the old you, and the birth of the new. You have to receive the fresh start, the new life, that Jesus offers you.

Even so, that is just the appetiser. Because you've also got ...

2) The there-and-then. Daniel's wording suggests that the immediate is a glimpse of something even greater: an eternal fulfilment. So, where is this 'eternal fulfilment'? Ask the average punter where they think they're going to spend eternity, and their answers will look like this:

- Heaven.
- Nirvana (after who-knows how many reincarnations).
- The ground.

And they're all wrong. Because the promise of Scripture is none of the above. It's resurrection: restored bodies in a restored world. How do we know? Because of Daniel 12. Revelation 21. But most importantly:

Because of Jesus.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He made it very clear He wasn't just some disembodied spirit, floating around, appearing in rooms and scaring the life out of people. "Touch Me and see," He said. "A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones like I have" (Luke 24:39). Why say this? To demonstrate that He has power over death? Yep. But also, to give us a glimpse of the future. *Our* future.

That is what Daniel 12 and other passages are looking forward to, ultimately. But it also comes with a warning – one that the average punter rarely wants to consider: "Some will wake to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." As NT Wright puts it, if we live our lives rejecting God, God will respect that decision for eternity.

But that's not what He wants for us. What He wants is eternal life with Him: and He proved it in the coming of Jesus. But we have to want that, too.

Rest, Then Inherit

As we draw to a close, I want you to notice something. Twice here there's a reference to the closing / sealing of the scroll, "until the time of the end." And twice Daniel is told, "Go your way, Daniel." I.e. "You won't live to see these things." Which must have come as a bit of a bummer.

However, he is also given a promise, in the final verse:

"You will rest (*nu'ah*). And then, at the end of the days, you will receive your inheritance (*goral*)."

The same words are used in the book of Joshua. The point being: "There's a better Promised Land to come, Daniel."

We all need to hear this – because how we live today affects where we'll spend eternity; conversely, where we'll spend eternity affects how we live today. How we pray, how we treat others, how we handle the difficult times. To adapt Pascal's wager: I'd rather trust in Jesus and be wrong, than trust in, say, Nietzsche, and be right. Because living for Jesus, even if it's just in *this* life, is better by far.

But even so, the best *is* yet to come! So, may we live as Daniel did, in exile in Babylon – standing with God in the here-and-now; reigning with Him in the there-and-then.