

Daniel 12:1-3 *“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. ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 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.*

The Glorious Future of the Church of God

1. The Church’s protection
2. The Church’s distress
3. The Church’s salvation
4. The Church’s resurrection
5. The Church’s glory

We could summarize the message of Daniel in one sentence: God is in control of history. Daniel lived in Babylon during the Babylonian Captivity of the Jewish people in the 6th Century B. C. The last half of Daniel’s book is a series of prophetic visions about the future of the world. In those visions, God outlined the fall of Babylon, the rise of Persia, Alexander the Great’s conquests, the Roman Empire, the development of the Holy Roman Empire and the Antichrist, and finally, in this text today, the end of the world and Judgment Day. All this God told Daniel before it happened so that we could know that God is in control of history. He also gave these visions to Daniel so that we could know the glorious future of the Church of God.

We heard in our gospel lessons last week and this week that the end of the world will be a time of distress. We heard about wars, famines, persecution and other physical hardships. But the great and more dangerous hardships will be spiritual in nature. There will be many false teachers who twist God’s Word. Satan will also use evil governments to make it harder for Christians to proclaim God’s Word. Satan is not happy that you are here. He is not happy that you have a place to come and hear God’s Word. He doesn’t like it that you can bring your children to be baptized or that you can regularly receive Holy Communion.

You can be sure that Satan will try to divert your attention from God’s Word and sacraments. He will make you think that family, school, sports, music, and work are more pressing. The sad reality is that Satan will win some victories. We will feel hard pressed and under relentless pressure. But we are not alone in the fight.

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. Michael is called a great prince here. In another place, Michael is called an archangel, that is, chief angel or prince of angels. Think of the angels like an army. In the army there are different ranks: privates, sergeants, lieutenants, colonels, and generals. So among the thousands and thousands of angels there are different ranks. Since our battle is primarily a spiritual battle, we can take comfort that Michael is leading the army of angels to fight spiritual battles against Satan for us.

When I was young, my older brother always stood up for me. When a big kid would try to pick on me, my brother would step in and do something about it. Knowing that Michael and the angels are fighting for us, we can face the challenges that are coming with confident faith. And there will be challenges.

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. The key word here is distress. We fight against enemies in the world who want to rob us of faith and eternal life. On campuses, believers are assaulted with anti-biblical ideas. Outside of class, they are confronted with anti-Christian enticements. And it’s not just in the schools. It’s in our workplaces, neighborhoods, TV and internet.

It’s not just out there, either. Right here in our own hearts. Our own desires war against us. We can often be our own worst enemy. There’s a battle right inside of us and too often the evil wins out.

And it’s not going to get any easier. Jesus foretold those days would get so bad that even the elect would be lost if he didn’t shorten the time of that distress. But don’t fear! *But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.* What list is your name on? If your name is on the board at school, that’s probably not a good thing. Is your name on the Dean’s list in college? That is a good thing. God has a list. It’s his family album. Everyone who is on this list will be saved. So how do you get your name written on this list? How do you get your name in the book? You can’t write it yourself. Our sins-stained hands can never grasp this book any more than bare hands are able to grab a bar of gold that’s sitting in a fire. And even if we could get our hands on it, we can’t write

in it. Only God can do that and he does so with Jesus' blood. Only Jesus' pure blood, shed for the sins of the world can do it.

God said that all those written in the book would be delivered. Delivered from what? From sin and death. *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.* Have you ever heard someone say that death is a good thing, that it's the end of suffering? Not true. Death is not good. It's not the end of suffering, but what all suffering leads up to. It's the culmination of suffering and the final result of sin.

Death is not a kind friend. It's the goal Satan had in mind when he first deceived mankind in the garden. Death is all about separation. It not only separates our souls from our bodies, but also separates us from our loved ones.

Death is not good. Life is what's good. Life was God's plan from the beginning. He created Adam and Eve, body and soul, to live with him. He creates us all still today with a body and soul. Your body was made especially for you by God. But now our bodies are subject to a terminal illness called sin. Sin brings death. So Jesus had to die because he became sin for us. Jesus' death was not good. Life is good, not death. Jesus' death was the horrible culmination of our sin. Jesus' death is not good, so he rose again. That is the main event of Jesus' life. Jesus' death was swallowed up by life and that has changed everything for us.

You have heard that when we die, we go to be with Jesus. That's true. Is being with Jesus in heaven paradise? Of course, it is. Is that all we hope for? No. Our souls don't just float up to heaven and play a harp on a fluffy cloud for all eternity. To end the story there is to miss out on the main event of our lives! We were created body and soul, and Jesus came to redeem body and soul. He took on a body to save our bodies. Our body is an indispensable part of who we are. When our souls go to be with Christ in heaven and our bodies are still buried down here, we still have separation.

(Kristopher Morris)

On the last day we will get our bodies back, and they will be perfect. The curse of Adam is undone. The decay that started with the bite of fruit will be gone. And we will be glorious!

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. For the Christian, Judgment Day is like taking off an old coat, and putting on a new one called immortality, sewn for us by the resurrection of Jesus.

We see sports and Hollywood stars get all kinds of publicity and honor. They are often treated like royalty. Now, imagine being treated like that by God himself! That's the glory in store for us.

How do those NFL and NBA stars get their glory? By being really good at what they do. By having special talents that make them better than most people. The stars in the next life don't have special talents. They don't become stars by performing miracles. What makes them stars is when they instruct their children about Jesus. Stars of heaven invite their friends to church and talk to their neighbor about Jesus. They give their time, talents and treasures to support the gospel ministry and see to it that their church is generous in giving to missions.

Ask a 4th grade boy what he wants to be when he grows up. They will often say that they want to play in the NFL. That's fine, if you can do that. But if you want to shine like the stars forever and ever, make it your life's purpose to lead many to righteousness as a fulltime called worker.

Daniel presents us with some disturbing visions about what's in store for God's people on earth. There will be difficult times, times of distress. But, in the end, at the last day, we have the promise of resurrection, life and glory. That's the glorious future of the Church of God.