

How Long

Background

In the previous newsletters we have concluded that Daniel 11:21-45 refers to Emperor Tiberius and when Daniel 12:1 starts with: “At that time” it refers to that same time. According to most commentaries Tiberius reigned from 14 A.D. – 37 A.D.

We also saw how the first three verses of Daniel 12 refer to the time of Christ’s Ministry. This was the most severe conflict ever waged on this earth. Heaven and the whole universe were involved as well. Everything was “in the balance” during this time. And hallelujah praise be to God, the victory was won through the blood of the Lamb, i.e. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross! The devil and his angels were hurled down to earth and since then they know that their time is short.

Seal the Book

Now the prophecy “takes a break” for a couple of verses. The Man Dressed in Linen has given Daniel the first part of the explanation. We don’t know how satisfied Daniel is with the information he has received thus far. Maybe he has understood everything very well up to this point. But now something unexpected happens. The Man Dressed in Linen commands Daniel to “shut up the words” and to “seal the book.” Daniel 12:4:

*But you, Daniel, **shut up the words**, and **seal the book** until the **time of the end**; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase. (NKJV)*

This is a clear order given by the Man Dressed in Linen. The Hebrew word for “shut up” also means “to keep secret.” Why was that necessary? Why shouldn’t this prophecy be an “open book?” Only God knows. His plan is perfect and we just need to trust Him. The prophet John had an experience similar to Daniel’s in Revelation 10:4:

*Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, **I was about to write**; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "**Seal up the things** which the seven thunders uttered, and **do not write them.**" (NKJV)*

Because of what this text says, I feel inclined to believe that Daniel had understood fairly well the information given to him thus far. But according to Daniel 12:8 it seems he had trouble understanding the continuation of the prophecy. The important question for us today is whether this prophecy still is sealed – because it was supposed to be sealed “until the time of the end?” If it still is sealed, there really is no point in going any further. But if it is *not*, the challenge is to study and pray until we understand.

The Time of the End

So what does “the time of the end” in Daniel 12:4 mean? Most Christians believe that the current time, the time in which we live, is the end-time. Yes, that is true, but even if the prophecy is *unsealed* today, it wouldn’t imply that its message suddenly would be clear to everyone. No, when the prophecy is “unsealed” it means the divine “protection” of the text is taken away and instead divine help to understand it is available.

As we have seen in earlier newsletters I believe that the “time of the end” again refers to the cross; the time when Israel ceased to be a chosen nation of God. Let us now read the last part of Daniel 12:10:

None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. (NIV)

How appropriate! The wisdom here has nothing to do with earthly wisdom, but rather with spiritual! Therefore, let us do what Daniel did in Daniel 10:2-3 and 12. These verses tell us how Daniel humbled himself before God and set his mind to gain understanding *from God*. This means we cannot necessarily trust theological tools, earthly training or tradition. Only as we humble ourselves before God, can He fill us with His Holy Spirit, who according to the promise will lead us into all truth, 2 Peter 1:21 and John 16:13. I believe this is the wisdom Daniel 12:10 refers to.

How Long

In chapter 12:5-6 Daniel sees “two others,” one on each side of the river, probably the river Tigris mentioned earlier in Daniel 10:4. Now Daniel interacts once more with the Man Dressed in Linen, who was “above the waters of the river.” Again, this “Man” continues to be Christ, as shown earlier in Daniel 10:5-6. Of course, Christ is “above” the “flow” of the “waters,” which in Revelation 17:15 and Daniel 7:3 is a symbol for nations. Daniel 12:5-6:

*Then I, Daniel, looked, and there **before me stood two others**, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “**How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?**” (NIV)*

The Bible does not specifically tell us who these two beings are. Very likely they are two angelic beings who converse with the Man Dressed in Linen. In their conversation one of them asks, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” The expression “these things” must refer to what has already been spoken about. The only “thing” and the only “time” mentioned earlier, is the “time of trouble” in Daniel 12:1.

When you ask the question “how long” you’re asking for duration and so you need either the beginning or the end point to have it make sense.

If the “time of trouble” or the “great war” truly is the focus of this question, the question that this angelic being asks could be rephrased as follows: How long will it be before the “time of trouble” will come to an end? With this question we are back to the introduction or rather the summary in Daniel 10:1 where we understood that this prophecy concerned the Truth, Jesus Christ and a great conflict.

Prophetic Climax

So now we are approaching the climax of the prophecy! What will the answer be? This answer will be of utmost importance. Let’s read the first part of Daniel 12:7:

*The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him **swear by him who lives forever...** (NIV)*

The Man Dressed in Linen acts very powerfully here. He lifts “his right hand and his left hand toward heaven.” He will now announce something totally unique to mankind and to the universe. He will now reveal God’s plan. Therefore, he swears by Him “who lives forever.” This must refer to the Father in heaven. Christ will now proclaim what He and the Father have agreed upon from before the creation of the world.

Remember, the Book of Daniel had the same importance for the Old Covenant people, as the book of Revelation has for the New Covenant people. God gave these two books to His faithful believers to reveal His plan and actions to them. Both books contain promises as well as rebuke. The description of what the Man

Clothed in Linen does here is very similar to how the mighty angel acts in Revelation 10:1-6. I believe both these passages describe Jesus Christ.¹

So here is the crucial statement regarding “how long” this “time” would last. The answer is very clear: “It will be for a time, times and half a time.” If this is literal time, it is 3½ years. Daniel 4:16, 23, 25, 32, etc. uses the word “time” literally and “one time” equals “one literal year,” “seven times” equal seven literal years, etc. This would imply that the “war” mentioned in Daniel 10:1 just as the “war” in Revelation 12:7-11 lasts for 3½ literal years. If this is the correct interpretation these 3½ years correspond to the Messiah’s time of ministry, from His baptism to His death on the cross.

Prophetic Time

Now someone may object and ask, shouldn’t the three-and-a-half times indicate prophetic time? If so, 3½ times would be 3½ multiplied by 360 = 1,260 days, subsequently equaling 1,260 years! If a Bible passage gives a clear indication of prophetic time, of course, the Day-year Principle should be applied. But that is not the case in this passage! Consider how many times these numbers need to be calculated back and forth! It takes three different calculations to get prophetic time:

- 3½ times = 3½ years
- 3½ years = 1,260 days
- 1,260 days = 1,260 years

Do you follow me? We go from *times* to *years* to *days* and then back to *years* again! There is something we call the “Day-year Principle” – but do we have biblical support to create a Year-day-Year Principle? It seems questionable to turn 3½ years into 1,260 years! I will devote a later newsletter to a detailed study of the so-called Day-year Principle. Let’s go back to Daniel! The sentence that follows also indicates literal time. What happens at the end of the 3½ times? Daniel 12:7:

*The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, “It will be for a time, times and half a time. **When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.**” (NIV)*

The question in Daniel 12:6 was “how long will it be before all these astonishing things are fulfilled?” We found that the answer to that question was three and a half years. But the word “fulfilled” makes us focus on what will happen at the end of the 3½ years. But there is more to the answer. How did the last sentence of Daniel 12:7 read?

Power Completely Shattered

It seems this is very important information. It says that the three-and-a-half times will end when “the power of the holy people has been finally broken.” That is a unique statement! Some translations write, “When the power of the holy people has been completely shattered,” (NKJV). So when is it that the power of the holy people will be completely broken or shattered and what people is the text speaking about?

Well, since we are dealing with “holy people” it must refer to faithful believers!

If this sentence refers to New Testament end-time saints, as most interpreters seem to believe, there must be a time in the future when the power of the believers will be completely taken away. I hope that shocks you! Is that really going to take place? When will it happen – or has it already happened? Well, it is tempting to say that

¹ Revelation: Toby Joretg, pages 156-157.

many Christians do live powerless lives. But that is not what this passage speaks about. The prophecy foretells that according to God's plan there will come a time when God will take His power away from the saints.

If you think about it, we all seem to anticipate the opposite! Many believe that the power of the Holy Spirit will be poured out more and more as we get closer to the second coming! Furthermore, at His coming the saints will reign with Christ for 1000 years. That certainly sounds like *more power*, doesn't it, Revelation 20:4?

Some believe that this prophecy of 3½ times ended in 1798 A.D. I think it is difficult to prove that 1798 was the year when this "time of trouble" ended and that 1798 was the year when the saints became totally powerless! Therefore 1798 A.D. (or any time in the future for that matter) does not seem to be believable options.

Literal Time

However, if we take the 3½ years literally and continue to apply it as we have done in our study of Daniel 10-12, we find a simple and clear solution to this problem. Then the "holy people" refers to the Old Covenant people and the 3½ years end at the cross. Then it all makes sense! The power of God's "holy people" was truly broken at the cross, Ephesians 2:11-22, Romans 11:11-24, Matthew 23:37, etc. This is confirmed over and over again in the last verses of Daniel 12, as well as in Daniel 8 and 9.

The Old Testament prophets used the symbol of marriage to describe the relationship between God and His people. There were only two situations where divorce (the breaking of the marriage covenant between a husband and a wife) was accepted. One was adultery and the second was the death of one of the spouses.

As we study the Old Testament we see how the Old Covenant people committed spiritual adultery over and over again for hundreds of years. But in His grace God did not use that as the reason for a separation or a divorce. His grace was and still is amazing! The other situation when divorce was accepted was the death of one of the spouses, Romans 7:2. When a spouse died separation was a fact.

Therefore, the divorce/separation happened when Christ died on the cross, in A.D. 31. That was the time when the power of the holy people was "completely shattered" or "finally broken."

Shall Be Finished

There is another phrase that deserves attention. The NIV says that at the end of the three and a half years, when the power of the holy people has been finally broken, "all these things will be completed." The NKJV has similar words: "all these things shall be finished." That resembles the words Jesus spoke just before he died: "It is finished," John 19:30.

With this study we have seen that the three-and-a-half years should be taken literally. Thus, this time period began when Jesus was baptized and ended when He died on the cross. Again we find harmony with our previous studies.

Daniel's Challenge

Have you ever received some really bad news? It may have hit you so hard that you almost refused to accept it. At least it takes a while before it sinks in. But, gradually you realize that you need to accept the facts presented to you. We said earlier that Daniel was comforted by God's promise of salvation to those of Daniel's people who were faithful. It is easy to accept good news. But Daniel 12:7 was a tough message! Daniel realized that the final outcome for his people, the Old Covenant people, *as a nation* would one day come to an end. Listen to Daniel's deep concern in Daniel 12:8:

Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" (NKJV)

The good thing with Daniel is that he doesn't give up. He continues to ask for more information. This should encourage us to persevere in prayer. Daniel truly interceded for his people. He cared deeply for them and their destiny. That is why he was so persistent. At first, it looks like the prophecy would end with Daniel 12:7, because as verses 9 and 10 say the message was supposed to be sealed. But Daniel had asked a question. Let's read the answer he receives in Daniel 12:9-10:

*And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are **closed up** and **sealed** till the **time of the end**. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but **the wise shall understand**." (NKJV)*

We have concluded that "the time of the end" refers to the time when Israel as a nation ceased to be God's Covenant people. Thus, this prophecy was unsealed at the cross! We can also understand what it means to be "wise." The one who is wise trusts in the Lord with all his/her heart and doesn't lean on his/her own understanding, Proverbs 3:5.

Because of Daniel's question, the prophetic information did not stop there but continues. His question in verse 8 gets a very detailed answer in verses 11 and 12 despite the fact that the words were "closed up." The answer was not to be understood at that time – but today, by God's grace and through the guidance of His Spirit, we should be able to grasp the message.

In the next two newsletters we will in detail study the answer to Daniel's question:

"What shall be the end of these things?"

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