



Have you ever peeked ahead when reading a book to find out how it ends? You might find the story so intense that you just have to find out how it ends right away. Some might call that cheating because you're supposed to read the book not knowing how it ends. Some, like my wife would disagree. When she is reading a story that is full of conflict and suspense she likes to look ahead. More than once I've found her turning to the end of a book to figure it out before she's finished reading it. I know some people that will do this when watching movies. They'll turn to a friend who has seen it before and ask in front of everyone, "Does it have a happy ending?" They just can't wait to find out. **Do you ever wish that we could do that with life?** Especially during the hard times we'd like to know how it all ends. Today we read a revelation from God recorded over 2500 years ago in Daniel chapter 12. We get a **glimpse of the conclusion of all of history and of each of our own stories too.**

Daniel is given a glimpse of the end of everyone's story. The final three chapters of the book of Daniel record one of the longest and most detailed prophecies in all of Scripture. Someone comes to speak to him. The speaker is described as a messenger of the Lord, but he appears to be even more than that. Daniel describes the one speaking to him as "like a man." Yet this man has an air of divine awe about him. Daniel is struck with reverence and fear at the sight of him. The description he gives is very similar to the one the apostle John gave of Jesus. The one speaking to Daniel reads from "the book of truth" as he shares the details of history from the time of Daniel until the last day. And the details of the prophecy are so numerous that it is as if the speaker knows history as only God can. This isn't just a glimpse of history. This is more than a preview of the chapters ahead. This is a behind the scenes view that could only come from the author of history.

The pages of history reveal a great struggle between the forces of evil and those who serve the Lord. It will be a struggle against the servants of God and those who are under the influence and power of the devil. This is a fulfillment of what was spoken to Adam and Eve in the garden. God said there would be hostility between those who serve Satan and those who trust in the Lord. We've seen this throughout history. Christians who promote peace and declare freedom in the name of Jesus are the object of scorn and persecution. Why were Daniel's three companions thrown into the furnace of fire? Why was Daniel thrown into the lion's den? Why were men like Stephen and the apostles put to death two thousand years ago? Why do we have to read about Christian men and women in parts of today's world being slaughtered in the sand? These are only outward visible glimpses of the war which wages a front over all the world. There has always been a spiritual war going on. This prophecy indicates it will continue until the end.

It's easy to lose sight of the struggle. Sometimes when we don't see some things, we forget it is actually still happening. We don't see the police officers as they handle so much of their important work. But they are there. We don't see the undercover drug stings. We aren't witness to every midnight pullover and arrest. We only catch glimpses in the news reports. Yet the law enforcement officers are the reason that we enjoy much of the peace in our communities and highways. The same could be said for soldiers around the world. Just because we don't always see it or think about it doesn't mean it isn't going on. So it is with the spiritual struggles in the heavenly realms. There is a real struggle between the spiritual forces of evil and the good angels, spiritual beings sent to serve believers. You can't see it, but it is happening all the time.

Some news lets you hear a glimpse of that struggle going on. You can hear about men like Abraham Ben Moses imprisoned in Indonesia for speaking about Jesus. Others in China, Iran, Pakistan, and many parts of the world are in jail for sharing Jesus. In our country there is more freedom, but some churches and Christians face fines and lawsuits. One of our WELS churches in Wisconsin faces potential fines from a city and is in a legal battle to defend the right to hold to its teachings. And though we have much religious freedom, the enemy is just as active here with spreading false teachings.

The news doesn't report on all the spiritual struggles, **you have to take a look in Scripture to find out about them.** That's how the revelation in Daniel 12 begins. "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people will arise." Michael is one of the chief leaders of the angels who wages war against the demons which follow Satan. God send them to guard and watch over us. As sure as we pray, "deliver us from evil" God answers that prayer daily by sending his angels.

That struggle will only become more evident as the end comes closer. "There will be a great distress unlike any the world has ever seen before or will see until that time." Some Christians teach that if you follow Christ you will be prosperous and successful in this life. But the Spirit clearly teaches that there will be distress for God's people. The devil also knows his time is short. He rages against the people of God to destroy them. Daniel foretold this great distress. Jesus foretold it too. Christ teaches, "if you follow me...all men will hate you because of me." That means that times will get so bad and the persecution against believers so great that it will appear to many as if the kingdom of Satan has won. It will be such a time of distress that Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Lk 18:8) In the verses right after our reading in Daniel 12 it even says, "The power of God's holy people will be broken before the end." We'll look around and the world and opposition to the gospel will be so strong that you only say, "Who will ever believe our message?" Many more believers will be jailed, scorned, and killed. In fear and despair many will wonder, "Did the saints who lived and died before us die in vain?" Those who die serving Jesus and trusting in him don't appear shining in victory. They appear at this point in the book of history to have lost. Their bodies lay in their graves. They are dust while the struggle goes on for all the living saints.

I don't have the habit of reading the end of a book first or asking how a movie ends. But who wouldn't want to know the conclusion of the spiritual warfare? God knows that we need to see the end of history so that we don't lose heart as we live in the struggle against Satan and the spiritual forces of evil. **That's why this portion of Scripture is so comforting for us today.** It tells us what's next and what we have to look forward to in the end.

God's people will be delivered. You might be tempted to wonder, "Did I struggle enough for God? Did I run my race good enough to be saved from Satan and all evil?" But here it stands written your struggle is already over. "Everyone whose name is written in the book." God has a clear record of who belongs on his list of "those to be delivered from distress." He began by putting his name on you in the water and cleansing gift of your baptism. He sealed it as he poured out his Spirit into your hearts. Each one of us walks around with the inscription: "This one belongs to God." Stamped on our heavenly passport it says, "recorded in God's book."

You and I have no right to have our names inscribed in such a book. Like Daniel we fall in terror before the presence of a holy God. But he has your name written down. That's because you could not write your name down in that book. So, God's Son fulfilled the plan to write it down to include you. God's plan to deliver goes even beyond sending his angels to protect us. God's plan included the Son of God coming to this world. He left the bright glory of heaven and came from the Father's side to be at our side. God sent his only Son to this world. The spiritual warfare was fought in the flesh as he walked this earth. He waged the battle against the devil as he resisted temptation and evil perfectly.

Then he stepped into the arena to fight the battle once for all. He faced the dark forces of evil as they raged against him in delight. How the demons must have rejoiced when they nailed him to a tree! The battle seemed lost as Jesus hung in scorn and shame on his cross. But he did not call on Michael and all his holy angels to come rescue him from the hands of his enemies. He tasted the shame and scorn, the death that we deserved. He came to deliver us from sin and shame. Then same one who is so powerful that he formed man from the dust, who sends all people back to dust, himself was laid in the tomb.

But his dark tomb was vacated. He rose to life and to bright glory. He proclaimed to the spirits and demons in hell, "I have won!" Death could not hold him. He woke, rose bodily and lives forever as king! Now we see the conclusion of it all: When the angels of God come to gather the harvest and destroy all evil, they will pass over every believer who bears the name of our Triune God. Through faith in Jesus your name is written down in that book of life! "That one's name is recorded in the book. That one must be spared!"

And what about those who have already died? They are not lost. They are delivered from sin and from its curse, the grave. Here is a certain record in Scripture of the coming resurrection of the dead. When the end comes, God has a plan to deliver our bodies. *Do you know someone who has died in faith in Jesus?* They have their names written in the book. Their bodies are merely sleeping in the dust until that day when God will raise them up. Your Christian friend who died. The missionary who was killed. The man who you might have heard about in the news that was forced to watch his own Christian family be crucified before they killed him. They will be delivered from the distress of this life. We remember two members of Rock of Ages who have fallen asleep just this past year. David Sweet and Jerry Bakker. You can probably think of other Christians who have fallen asleep and are dead. We pray, "deliver us from evil." God has already answered it with "I surely have and will."

Then the final fate of the dead is revealed. Those in the dust of death will wake to very different ends. Those who are not in the book of life remain condemned for sin. They will be raised for eternal shame and punishment. But those who are "wise" those who "lead to righteousness" will enjoy bright glory.

"Those who lead many to righteousness." The power of the holy people is not broken. Those who died before and supported churches like ours have had a lasting impact. In wisdom they led you and others to the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus. There's a proverb in Scripture which states: Proverbs 11:30 *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives.* You by your prayers, offerings, and public confession of faith also join in bringing others to the righteousness of Christ. When you speak share the message we hold, you lead others to join in the righteousness of Christ and the glory that awaits us. *You and I do this as we shine today in this world. It's a dark world. So many are headed for the grave. The body destined to lie as dust in the ground. But we know the conclusion!*

The story of history and of our struggle is intense. That's why God has shown us the conclusion. All those who set themselves against the Lord will fail. All who trust in Jesus will be triumphant. We will not remain in our graves. He will deliver us from the sin, from death, and the devil. We will stand triumphant with new and glorious bodies! **You've been given the ending of the story!** God has told you, "This is how it will all end." That vision makes your life not just bearable but one you will live out with joy! Let others share in seeing that ending! Shine brightly now with this message of hope. Because you will shine forever. He will deliver us from dust to bright glory.

This is our life forever after. Its greater than any story ever told. THE KING WILL COME TO WAKE THE SLEEPING.