

## THE SAINT'S SURE HOPE: CHRIST WINS ... FOREVER!

A Sermon on the Book of Daniel

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As a summary of our journey over the last several months, the elders have asked me to proclaim the overarching message of the entire book of Daniel. I summarize the whole this way: The Most High God who rules all history and powers deserves worship and will eventually triumph over every proud kingdom through his Messiah's saving death and everlasting dominion, which God proves by raising his humble saints from death to life.

Rather than leading you again from the beginning of the book to the end, Daniel's cyclical message has encouraged me to divide the main point into four parts and to highlight how the book discloses each. The four key movements in this message are these:

1. The God who rules all history and powers deserves worship.
2. God opposes proud kingdoms but gives grace to humble saints.
3. God's kingdom will triumph through the Messiah's saving death and everlasting dominion.
4. God proves his triumph by raising his saints from death to life.

### **1. The God Who Rules All History and Powers Deserves Worship**

Foundational to Daniel's message is how he portrays the Most High God as sovereign over time and kingdoms and as worthy of all humanity's full surrender and highest praise. Daniel 1 highlights God's rule from the start:

- God and not Babylon was the decisive cause of Judah's exile. "And *the Lord* gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand" (1:2).
- 1:9: "*God* gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the [Babylonian] chief" who was over him and his three friends.
- Then in 1:17, 20, it was *God* who gave Daniel and his three companions "learning and skill in all literature and wisdom" so that "in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom."

The end of the book emphasizes God's absolute control of all history and powers in a different way. You will recall that Daniel speaks of five successive kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, a horrific unnamed kingdom, and God's kingdom, which will overcome all others at the end of the age through his Messiah. Amid this future vision, chapter 11 supplies what may be the Bible's most detailed and verifiable prediction since it addresses a progression of events that already occurred during the third kingdom—Greece's empire. Note with me 10:21. Here God's messenger tells Daniel, "I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth." Then, at the head of 11:2, he says again, "And now I will show you the truth." God has a book of truth that lays out all his purposes for history, down to the very details of our lives. Upholding the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1:3), he is truly "the founder/author and perfecter of our faith" (12:2). As Paul reflected in Acts 17:26, "[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place." Yahweh declares in Isaiah 45:7, "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things." In Psalm 147:15–18, the psalmist declared, "[Yahweh] sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow." These are significant words as we consider the recent hurricane and its massive devastation. Reflecting on the reality of the curse, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes said, "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him" (Eccl 7:13–14). "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps 115:3). As Job declared, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). "He works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:11). And because "from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11:36), his supremacy is to move us to worship.

Consider with me Daniel 2. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, and God revealed both the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. He thus declared in 2:20–23:

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings [consider the recent elevation of King Charles III; God did that, and the same is true of President Trump's loss and President Biden's victory and of any ruler,

good or back, across the planet and throughout time]; [God] gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding [if you find yourself walking in wisdom, “what do you have that you did not receive?” 1 Cor 4:7]; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise.

After Nebuchadnezzar heard the mystery God revealed, the king asserted in 2:47: “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”

The initial three narrative episodes in the first half of the book describe how King Nebuchadnezzar progressively grew to worship the God who rules all history and powers. In chapter 2 the king still distances himself from him but says to Daniel, “*Your* God is God of gods and Lord of kings” (2:47). Through the account of the fiery furnace, however, the king learns more. His dream in chapter 2 was of a giant human image that represented a succession of four world kingdoms, of which Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar was the head. In chapter 3, though, it appears that he wanted to be the entire image, so he crafts a giant image of gold 75 feet high and calls all the peoples, nations, and languages under his rule to bow and worship it. Yet Daniel’s three friends, whose Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to bow, even in the face of a fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar queries, “Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” (3:15). Yet in 3:17–18, the three men stressed God’s absolute ability and worth: “Our God who we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if [he does] not [preserve us from the furnace], be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” The three’s conviction in God’s greatness made them know that no earthly person or power was worthy of their worship; God alone deserved this place. When the flames did not even singe the three (3:26–27), Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, called them “servants of the Most High God” (3:26), and then declared at the end of 3:29, “There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”

Something similar happens to King Darius in chapter 6. Daniel worshiped God no matter the cost, and his loyalty draws attention to the greatness of his God. 6:3 notes that Daniel “became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him” so that “the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” Yet some were jealous, and in 6:7–9 we learn that they tricked King Darius into decreeing that “whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days,” except to the king, “shall be cast into the den of lions.” Daniel learned of the decree yet kept praying to his God (6:10), thus forcing the king’s

hand. In sending Daniel to the lion's den, Darius cried in 6:16, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" Daniel's witness was clear, and it had already impacted the king. Then, as Darius approached the den the next day, he asserted in 6:20, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" God had saved Daniel, and in 6:25–27 Darius decrees to "all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth": "In all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

There are so many other texts in this book that highlight that the God who rules all history and powers deserves worship. But we must move on to our next point.

## **2. God Opposes Proud Kingdoms but Gives Grace to Humble Saints**

Nebuchadnezzar's last episode in chapter 4 includes a letter that the king himself wrote to all in his kingdom. Just see how he now talks, not as an unbeliever who like Pharaoh sees the power of God but stands distant but as a believer who embraces Daniel's God as his own. He has learned a great lesson through God's discipline, so he writes in 4:1–3 "to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation."

Nebuchadnezzar recalls his pride and how God removed him from his kingdom until he learned, as it says in 4:25 and 32, "that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a great tree whose "top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth" (4:11). We're told "its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, all flesh was fed from it" (4:12). 4:22 states that this tree represented the king's greatness, which reached to heaven, and his dominion, which spread to the ends of the earth. Yet the tree was chopped down, and its stump left among the beasts of the earth, so that, as 4:17 says, "the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to

whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” As God declared in the dream, so history played out as it foretold. God opposes proud kingdoms.

Nebuchadnezzar declared in 4:30, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” Look now at vv. 31–33:

While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

Pride led Nebuchadnezzar to become like a beast of the field, and by this he proved that he was an offspring of the serpent, who was more crafty than any other beast of the field (Gen 3:1, 15). Originally God created mankind in his image, commissioning them to subdue and have dominion on his behalf (1:28). Thus, in chapter 2’s dream, the kingdom’s of men are portrayed as a giant image that should have been reflecting, resembling, and representing the greatness of the living God. But here in chapter 4, and again in chapter 7, the earth’s human kingdoms are portrayed as beasts, as offspring of the serpent, and contrasted with the kingdom God gives to one like a son of man, a son of Adam. Human pride of position, power, or prestige takes glory away from God, who alone controls all and who set humans apart to rule the earth on his behalf. To be truly human means that your life will bear witness to God’s greatness and not your own. And this is the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar wanted all his subjects to hear.

He ends his letter to all peoples, nations, and languages in 4:34–37:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My

counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

The Most High God opposes proud kingdoms but gives grace to humble saints. The very next story reemphasizes this point. Nebuchadnezzar's descendant Belshazzar was now on the throne, and rather than recognizing and praising the true God's greatness, 5:4 declares that he and the leaders of his kingdom "praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone." Those present in Belshazzar's assembly saw a vision that no one other than Daniel could interpret. As he does, he recalled in 5:20–21 Nebuchadnezzar's story, how his pride led his mind to be "made like that of a beast . . . until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will." Daniel then charged the king in vv. 22–23:

And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. . . . And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

The interpretation of the vision was that Belshazzar's kingdom would come to an end, and we read in vv. 30–31: "That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom."

The end of the book speaks of an evil, proud king, an anti-Christ figure, with similar words. Beginning in 11:36 we read:

And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. . . . He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. . . . [He is proud, so what do we expect God to do with him? 11:45 declares:] And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.

God opposes proud kingdoms. Pride can display itself in many ways: (1) self-reliance and prayerlessness; (2) prejudice and self-exaltation at others' expense; (3) forms of despondency and hopelessness wherein you act as though God is not willing or able to meet your need. God opposes the proud, but he gives

grace to humble saints, who affirm his supremacy and his sufficiency, his trustworthiness and compassion.

Thus, when faced with potential death, Daniel urged his friends “to seek mercy from the God of heaven” concerning the mystery of the king’s dream (2:18). And when God disclosed it, Daniel prayed in 2:23: “To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have made known to me what we asked of you.” Similarly, after God delivered him from the lions, Daniel said in 6:22, “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” The narrator then tells us in 6:23, “No kind of harm was found on him, because he had trust in his God.” God gives grace to humble saints. We see this again toward the end of the book.

We go first to chapter 9. After recalling Yahweh’s promise to Jeremiah that Judah’s exile would be seventy years, Daniel says in 9:3, “Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and please for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” He then tells us in 9:21, “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at first, came to me in swift flight.” God always responds to the prayers of his people, yet the answers could be delayed. In chapter 10, God reveals a word to Daniel that moved him to mourn for three weeks (10:1–2). But one of God’s messengers finally comes to him, declaring in 10:12: “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.” In this book, God opposes proud kingdoms but gives grace to humble saints.

### **3. God’s Kingdom Will Triumph through the Messiah’s Saving Death and Everlasting Dominion**

The vision of God’s triumph begins in chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image in the form of a human with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron with feet partly of iron and partly of clay (2:32–33). But then a stone, cut from a heavenly mountain, fell as if from David’s sling, broke the image in pieces, and then became a great mountain that filled the earth (2:34–35). Babylon was the head of gold, and each body part moving from top to bottom represented four successive human kingdoms with various kings, the fourth of which would be excessively destructive. Yet the stone represented a fifth kingdom, superior and more lasting than all the others. Reading in 2:44–45:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

The same story is foretold again in chapter 7, but now with further details. The four human kingdoms are all portrayed as beasts coming up out of the sea: the first a lion, the second a bear, the third a leopard, and the fourth, simply described as “terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong” (7:7). Significantly, 7:4 recasts the story we have already read of Nebuchadnezzar, for it tells us that the lion with eagles’ wings had its wings “plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.” By recognizing that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (4:32), Nebuchadnezzar changed from a beastly king and the serpent’s offspring to a truly human ruler who fulfills his role of imaging God’s greatness.

The second beast was to “devour much flesh” (7:5), and the terrible fourth beast we’re told “devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet” (7:7). Yet into this season intrudes a vision of one Daniel calls the Ancient of Days and another who is like a Son of Man. 7:9–14:

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

This depiction clarifies at least two important realities: (1) God’s kingdom will triumph. Take hope today. As the kingdoms of mankind become increasingly



bestly, remind yourself that the great judge of the universe will sit on his throne and declare his vengeance against all his enemies, even the worst of them. (2) Not only does God win, the text implies that he does so through this victorious son of man, to whom he gives “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” as he bears an “everlasting dominion” (7:13–14). In Romans 1:4, Paul notes that Christ Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power ... by his resurrection from the dead.” Similarly, in Philippians 2:8–9 we learn that, because Jesus was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.” With an allusion to Daniel 7:13–14, Matthew notes in 28:18–19 that, upon Jesus’s resurrection and just before his ascension in the clouds, he declared to his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” And before his death, when asked if he was the Christ, the Son of God, he asserted in 26:64, “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

In the end, God wins, and he will do so through his victorious Son of Man. Yet it will not happen immediately, and it will not happen without great cost. We will consider here the cost to the Son of Man, and my final point will note the cost to the saints who follow him. The Son of Man will triumph over all evil influences and proud kingdoms and will gain everlasting dominion, but only through personal tribulation. The anointed Son of Man will have to die a substitutes death, but he will rise, overcoming death and securing atonement for the many. We see this in chapter 9.

As already noted, the chapter opens with Daniel recalling that Judah’s physical exile from the promised land was to take only seventy years, and it moves Daniel to pray for God to act on behalf of his own. But now, while the physical return to the land would happen after 70 years, the angel Gabriel shows up and declares to Daniel that the spiritual restoration to God would happen only after seventy sevens, that is seventy weeks of years. A week of years is seven, and seventy sevens is 490 years. Only after four successive kingdoms and nearly five centuries from Daniel’s day would the Messiah deliver and restore. We pick up in 9:24: “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.” Within the timeframe set here, God will atone for transgression, sin, and iniquity, thus defeating their power. But he will do more than overcome the curse; he will also bless, establishing everlasting right order in his world,

confirming or authenticating the prophetic word, and anointing a most holy person or place. This term for anointing is related to the word for Messiah, whom we then read about directly in 9:26.

With respect to time, 9:25 speaks of 69 weeks of years (7 + 62). Then we read in v. 26 that in 70<sup>th</sup> week, “After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one [a Messiah] shall be cut off and shall have nothing.” I believe this Messiah is Jesus, the Son of Man from Daniel 7, who is cut off in weakness and emptiness on behalf of the many. It is possible that the Hebrew even reads, “An anointed one shall be cut off, but not for himself,” meaning that he dies not on his account but on behalf of others. Daniel does not say much more, but several features in the passage indicate that he is thinking about Isaiah’s earlier predictions. Isaiah was the first to foresee a two-stage restoration, with one named Cyrus calling Israel to return to the land and rebuild Jerusalem (Isa 44:28; 45:1, 13), but then one called the Servant securing reconciliation with God. Seeing the salvation Yahweh would secure in the future, Isaiah declared of the Servant: “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.... It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa 53:5, 10). Isaiah foresaw not only the sacrificial death of the Servant; he also saw his triumph, such that on the other side of his offering himself as a sacrifice, he would “see his offspring” and “prolong his days.”

The OT mentions the angel Gabriel only in Daniel 8–9. He was the one to announce the anointed person and the time of his coming. The only other time we read of Gabriel is in Luke 1 in association with the coming of Christ. In Luke 1:26, it is Gabriel whom God sends to Mary to announce that she will mother Jesus, who “will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” [that’s Daniel language], enjoying the throne of his father David and reigning forever with a kingdom that will have no end (1:32–33). Gabriel’s presence in Luke’s Gospel signals that God is indeed initiating the 70<sup>th</sup> week that Gabriel himself predicted in Daniel 9. With Christ, God will overcome the curse and bring everlasting righteousness. He is the stone cut from the heavenly mountain that will destroy the kingdom’s of earth and create an everlasting kingdom that will fill all (Dan 2). He is the Son of Man who has risen on the clouds and received everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days (Dan 7). He is the Messiah whose substitutionary death overcomes the curse and secures everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9). God’s kingdom will triumph through the Messiah’s saving death and everlasting dominion.

#### **4. God Proves His Triumph by Raising His Saints from Death to Life**

In my second point I stressed that God opposes proud kingdoms but gives grace to humble saints. Every example I showed of God's giving grace to his saints was in his protecting them *from* suffering. But the book also highlights that God protects them *through* suffering, even through death, en route to eternal life.

We as believers today need to hear Jesus's statement to his disciples in Matthew 10:24–25: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household." Look with me again at Daniel 7, picking up in v. 19. Daniel writes:

Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

In the interpretation that follows, we learn that the fourth beast is a fourth kingdom on the earth, which devours, tramples, and breaks (7:23). The ten horns are ten kings, and the additional horn is another king who will put down three kings (7:24). We then read in 7:25–27:

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Tribulation is real for the saints of God, and the beastly kings in the various periods of history will stand against the saints, who are the holy ones hoping in the

victory of the Son of Man. In chapter 8, we read of the second and third kingdoms, which Daniel learns refer to Medo-Persia and Greece. 8:20–21 says, “As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king.” The horn in chapter 8 associated with the third kingdom recalls the little yet bold horn in chapter 7 associated with the fourth kingdom. By this link Daniel tells the reader that the offspring of the serpent in every generation bear similar traits, and that the anti-Christ tendencies of the fourth kingdom were already present during the third. Two features characterize the spirit of these anti-Christ figures: (1) persecution of the saints; (2) false teaching that deceives. Look with me at 8:24–25, which characterizes the chief king of the third kingdom, whose life anticipates the beastly king of the fourth kingdom that will stand directly against the messianic Son of Man:

His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand.

God does not preserve in this life all saints like he preserved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fire and Daniel from the lions. Indeed, the beastly kingdoms of mankind destroy many saints, and in doing so stand against the very Prince of princes himself, which I believe is another title for the Son of Man and the Messiah.

Many of the visions with the beastly kings in the second half of Daniel refer to “the time of the end” (8:17; 11:40), “the appointed end” (8:19), “the times” (11:6), “the appointed time” (11:35), “his end” (11:45), “that time” (12:1), and “the end” (12:13). What is important to note is that in Daniel’s Greek translation (and only here in the OT) are these phrases all translated as “hour.” And in the NT, John commonly speaks of the last “hour,” and it signals an allusion to Daniel. Thus, we read in a text like 1 John 2:18: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” While John recognized with Daniel that there is a chief anti-Christ figure coming, more beastly than any earthly ruler before him, the spirit of persecution and false teaching was already apparent from Christ’s first coming forward. So, we need to be both on guard and hopeful.

Jesus told his disciples in Luke 21:16–19: “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.” Did you catch that? “Some of you they will put to death... But not a hair of your head will perish.” When God gives grace to humble saints, he often chooses to carry them through suffering, even unto death, but he will preserve their lives.

And this is the point of Daniel 12:1–3.

At that time [which in the Greek says, “At that hour”] shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. [What book? The Book of Truth that lays out God’s providential purposes and in which is written the names of all those he would save.] And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

It is Daniel 7’s vision of the victorious Son of Man in the clouds and Daniel 12’s vision of the resurrection that stands behind Jesus’s words in John 5:24–29. As I read these words, saint, if you find yourself suffering, take hope.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

## **Conclusion**

I have summarized Daniel’s message under four headings:

1. *The God who rules all history and powers deserves worship.* May we be a people today who seek to spread a passion for God's supremacy in all things.
2. *God opposes proud kingdoms but gives grace to humble saints.* Do not rely on your own strength; do not exalt yourself above others; and do not despair as if God does not care. Instead, as the apostle urges in 1 Peter 5:6, knowing that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble," "humble yourselves ... under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."
3. *God's kingdom will triumph through the Messiah's saving death and everlasting dominion.* Through the cross, God "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]" (Col 2:15). Christ "appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:26–28).
4. *God proves his triumph by raising his saints from death to life.* "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:1–2, 4–6).

[And] the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:16–18)

The Most High God who rules all history and powers deserves worship and will eventually triumph over every proud kingdom through his Messiah's saving death and everlasting dominion, which God proves by raising his humble saints from death to life. This is the saints' sure hope: Christ wins ... forever! Amen!