

SECRET KNOWLEDGE

Have you even had someone tell you that they knew when Jesus was returning or that there were secret plans that most people don't know about?

When Diane and I were first dating, I was listening to people who were sure they had figured out when Jesus was returning. Oops – he was off by at least 55 years since Jesus has not yet returned!

Throughout history, there are thousands of examples of people who claim to have secret knowledge. In fact, soon after Jesus' ministry, people offered up secret insights in a movement called Gnosticism. Some became outright false teachers sponsoring heretical religions like Mormonism.

People have misused and abused apocalyptic Scriptures (Daniel, Revelation, et al) to promote ideas and movements that are in error. Some have claimed to know when and what things are going to happen, such as the rapture of the church or the return of Jesus. Some have claimed fanciful understanding of elements contained in Scripture.

God knew this would happen and yet inspired writers of Scripture to use this genre of visions and dreams to encourage, inform, and give hope to His people.

ABOUT APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

- "Apocalyptic" means "revelation," the unveiling of something (that was /is hidden)
- This genre is used in the Bible in multiple places (e.g., Daniel, Revelation)
- Though the word commonly has a sense of 'doom,' the books of the Bible that use apocalyptic language are filled with joy and optimism. Though they sometimes picture 'the end' of things, they also have positive results:
 - The end of human violence, corruption
 - The end of the oppression of God's people
 - The victory of God over the Devil, demons, evil people
 - The ushering in of God's good, heaven, being with God (Revelation 21:3)
- We need to avoid misunderstanding, misuse, and abuse
 - We need to see them in the plain sense to the original audience
 - We need to avoid having them say more than what is clearly revealed in other Scripture
 - We need to avoid abuse of the visions such as ...
 - assigning a date to the Second Coming of Christ (this has happened many times in the past)
 - wasting time and effort solving mysteries that God has not revealed
 - spending time and effort on the signs of the times rather on our mission to follow Jesus in our days

LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

In the previous chapter, God gave Daniel dreams of hybrid beasts to represent kingdoms that were to come. In this chapter, Daniel has a vision of common animals, and then God sends the angel, Gabriel, to help him understand the meaning.

Suggestion: Read through the entire chapter, highlighting key places to gain an overview.

Consider the following questions after you have read it through:

This is two years after the “dream” in chapter seven. How would you summarize the “vision?” (Who are the main players, what happens to each of them, etc.)

God gave Daniel a vision of the future of his known world:

- A ram with two horns representing the Medes and Persians
- A goat with one horn representing Greece led by Alexander the Great and followed by four more horns/kings which resulted after the death of Alexander.
- One more horn came up from the Seleucid kingdom who was a king with a “bold face” and grew in power.
- This final king would bring evil destruction and deceit for a long time in Jerusalem (“the glorious land”). He would perform prideful acts against God, His people, and His temple.
- This king would be “broken – but not by a human hand.”
- This vision left Daniel overcome, appalled and needing more understanding.

The theme of “human evil” is reoccurring in these chapters. What evil do you notice?

The understanding of the “vision” is revealed by Gabriel at the command of God. Who are these animals and what will they do?

Evil is throughout this vision:

- Multiple kings murdering, conquering, etc.
- Judah and Jerusalem destroyed again
- The temple and Jewish worship desolated
- The Jewish people and their worship of God trampled
- A king that blasphemed and revolted against God Himself

I tend to notice the prideful actions of men who think it is their prerogative to rule over people that were created by God. Their violence and blasphemy are appalling to me.

Each of these kingdoms: Medes-Persians, Greece, Antiochus were hateful, violent nations that destroyed people’s lives and suppressed the peace of all people in their times.

The last king mentioned (v. 23) is Antiochus IV (Epiphanes, a name he gave himself). What was prophesied that he would do? (23-25)

Antiochus killed and betrayed many thousands of people, and especially those in Judea and Jerusalem. He would also end worship and blaspheme God.

In the end, Antiochus IV will be “broken but not with human hands” (i.e., by God. He died of grief after a defeat.) Why is this an important part of the vision?

Throughout the book of Daniel, God is repeatedly demonstrating that though there is much evil and misuse of power, He is sovereign and will in the end judge the evil ones and bring back blessing to those who trust in Him.

How might this vision have affected the Jews, (both the people in exile and those still in the land)?

For Daniel and others who were thinking that they would be back in the land and living in peace and safety, these visions would remind them that there were more evil kings, more pain and suffering ahead. But it would also tell them that God can and will overcome.

DISCUSS TOGETHER

The accuracy of this vision fulfilled centuries later is striking, amazing, and even doubted by critics. How might this impact how we see biblical prophecy and the Bible overall?

The revelation of what was to come over a period of 500 years was nothing short of supernatural. The vision revealed kings, trends, actions, and locations that only God could know.

Since the writing of the Bible, archaeology has repeatedly confirmed places, people, and actions reported in the Bible. There isn't a year in the last 50 when something wasn't discovered that affirms the veracity of what is written.

God's omniscience as revealed in these prophecies should give us full confidence in all of biblical prophecy as well as all of Scripture. 2 Peter 1:21 informs us: "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Throughout history, people have misused apocalyptic literature to propose secret or never before known dates or conclusions. Why do you think that we are drawn to this or attempt this?

Throughout the Bible and our lives, people want to be God, want to inform others about what only they know. Adam and Eve did the same in the garden, i.e., they claimed to know something about the fruit that was beyond or better than what God had revealed to them.

In fact, we are warned about false teachers in every book of the New Testament except one (Philemon). The book of Revelation ends with a warning (22:18-19).

For us, who now see these things as history, how should we then live? How does knowing how God worked in Daniel's times help shape how we are to live in our times? What is God encouraging us to be or do?

Three significant words come to mind. We should live . . .

Faithful – continuing to love and follow Jesus, continuing His mission and showing His love

Enduring– trusting in Him even when life is difficult and times are hard, remembering to trust and worship Him at all times

Watching – looking for the blessed return of Jesus, trusting in God's power, timing, and plan

APPLY IT THIS WEEK

Every generation struggles with the illusion that things are just going to go on as it is now. But the Word of God repeatedly teaches us that things will change, hard times will come, and that we need to live out being faithful to God throughout our days. If you knew that Jesus would return in a week, what would faithfulness look like in your life? What if it was a year? a decade? God gave us four very powerful aids to live faithfully: (1) the Holy Spirit indwelling us, (2) The Word of God, (3) prayer, and the (4) the people of God. Do you feel ready for the King?

PLEASE PRAY

- Please pray for and contact your Global Partner this week. Plan a special time to encourage them, pray with them, and help as needed.
- Please pray for parents, friends, and grandparents of students as they encourage and shape their beloved teens.
- Please pray for Pastor Jerrod and those giving leadership to our Young Adults and for them to continue to make disciples who make disciples.

Hey, my Brothers and Sisters,

I know that these chapters are challenging to understand, to discuss, and to apply. But I believe that as we persevere and learn, God has rich and life-changing truth for us every week.

Grace to you,
Steve