

Alex Sanders, Jr., was the Chief Judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals from 1983 to 1992. When his daughter Zoe graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1992, he told this story about his daughter that happened when she was just three years old.

Sanders came home from work one day to find his home – and especially his young daughter – in a state of turmoil. Zoe’s pet turtle had died, and she was crying as if her heart would break. Zoe’s mother had been dealing with the situation all day and declared that it was now dad’s turn to try and make things better.

Although he was successful both as a lawyer and a politician who confidently faced all kinds of complex issues and problems, this one seemed out of his league. He knew the mysteries of life and death can be difficult for the mature mind to comprehend, but the task of explaining them to a three-year-old was completely beyond his confidence and his experience – but he tried.

First, he told Zoe that they could go to the pet store and buy another one just like the one who had died. Even at three years old, Zoe was smart enough to know that a turtle is not a toy. There’s really no such thing as getting another one just like the one who died, and so, Zoe’s tears continued to flow.

Desperate to help his little girl, he said, “I tell you what, we’ll have a funeral for the turtle” but being three years old, she didn’t know what a funeral was. Scrambling to come up with an explanation, he said “A funeral is like a birthday party. We’ll have ice cream and cake and lemonade and balloons, and all the children in the neighborhood will come over to our house to play.” Well, the idea of a turtle funeral did the trick, and instantly, Zoe was her happy, smiling self. The turtle’s death was no longer a cause for tears, but a reason to rejoice.

So, with visions of cake and ice cream and balloons in their heads, the two looked down on the turtle lying at their feet, and as they did, the turtle began to move. A few moments later, he was crawling away as a very lively turtle. Sanders – a politician and a lawyer – was speechless, but Zoe was not. After considering her options, she looked up at her father with her big beautiful eyes and – with all the innocence of her tender years – she said quietly, “Daddy, let’s kill it.”

Well, that’s cute and a little scary, but obviously this three-year-old didn’t understand the mysteries of life and death, and sadly, some adults don’t either or at least they just can’t come to terms with it, but this morning we are going to see that death helps us to understand what life should really be all about.

We have come to the last chapter of **Daniel**, finishing up with this vision from the angel concerning the future. If you remember, this vision began in **Chapter 10** which served as an introduction. It's where I believe Daniel saw the Lord in all His glory, and it's where Daniel also learned about warfare between angels and demons in the unseen spiritual realm. Then we tackled the vision in **Chapter 11** – where we got into the weeds so to speak. In the first 35 verses, we looked at 135 detailed prophecies that were primarily focused on the conflicts between Grecian kings from Egypt and from Syria and how their conflicts impacted Israel who was stuck in the middle between them. Last week, we jumped at warp speed from Daniel's future to ours where we focused on the last half of the Tribulation period and the prominent figure of that time who is still yet to come – the Antichrist.

Now we have made our way to **Daniel 12**, where we come out of the weeds to what seems like an overview. So, if you have your Bible, let's begin with **verse 1**.

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

Now at that time – the same future time we've been looking at – the last half of the seven-year Tribulation period – we are told the archangel **Michael** will arise. He's the head of the angelic realm, he's the general, and he has a specific assignment – to **stand guard** over Daniel's people. Michael is the guardian angel of Israel, but ironically, we are told the nation he guards is going to experience a time of **distress** like never before, and let me explain this by using a passage found in **Revelation 12**. This is what the Apostle John tells us beginning with **verse 7**.

⁷And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, ⁸and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. ⁹And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

I believe this occurs at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation period, where Michael and his angels go to battle against Satan and his demons. Satan and his demons are cast out of the heavenly realm – they no longer have access, and they are thrown down to the earth – and in Satan's rage – it literally becomes *hell on earth* – a time of great distress and terrible wrath, especially towards Israel.

The archangel Michael is Israel's protector, and yet ironically, his war with Satan will lead to their greatest suffering – but according to God's plan, their greatest suffering will lead to their greatest deliverance. God has chosen to bring about the salvation of His people by means of suffering, and despite the terrors of that time, there will be a *remnant* of Jews who will be **rescued**, and I say “*remnant*” because this promise is not for every single Jew – the promise is for those who trust Jesus as their Messiah – who's names are **found written in the book** – I believe the Lamb's Book of Life.

So, there's a lot of suffering and death during this terrible time, but **verse 2** tells us that death is not the end. We are told,

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

In this verse, we get hints of a resurrection – a resurrection to **everlasting life** but also a resurrection to **everlasting contempt**. So, the angel is telling Daniel about two resurrections, and for some clarity on this, let's jump ahead to **Revelation 20**. Here, the Apostle John tells us beginning with **verse 4**,

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

In this passage, John also makes reference of two resurrections separated by a thousand-year period – one to life and one to death – the one to life being called the *first resurrection*.

Now, one of those two words has created a lot of confusion, and the word is not the word “*resurrection*” – it's the word “*first*.” When we hear the word “*first*,” we tend to understand that word as referring to something that comes ahead of all others – meaning what comes first is *number one*, and that makes complete sense, but if we see the *first resurrection* mentioned here by John in that context – as being *number one*, then we have problem, because both historically and

chronologically – the *number one* resurrection was Jesus. Jesus was the first raised from the dead and whose body was transformed and glorified, never to die again. Jesus gets the distinction of being *number one*, and as a little side note, if you recall, after Jesus was resurrected, **Matthew** tells us many saints were raised to life and came out of their tombs.

So clearly, the Lord's resurrection occurred first, along with some saints who were right on His heels; therefore, John's use of the word "*first*" cannot be simply seen as *number one* – it has to be interpreted differently – and it is.

In the Greek, that word "*first*" is "*protos*" and it has a couple of meanings. It means "*before*" – as in this comes *before* that, but it also means "*better or best*" – as in I like this *better* than that. So, the word "*first*" does not necessarily mean *number one*. It can simply refer to a place in sequence or it can refer to the importance or the priority of something, and in context – I think both of these meanings apply and let me explain.

There are two bodily resurrections – a resurrection of the righteous for life, and there is a second or a final resurrection which is a resurrection of the spiritually dead for judgment and condemnation. There are two resurrections, separated by the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom and that is key to understanding this first resurrection. It is called the **first resurrection** – because it comes *before* the Lord's earthly reign and it's *better* than the resurrection that comes afterwards.

So, who is being resurrected and when does the first resurrection occur? The first resurrection is the resurrection of all the chosen, the called, and the faithful throughout history. It will include believers who died in Christ, you could add the raptured church, it will include Old Testament saints who are resurrected at some point, and last but not least, it will also include the martyred Tribulation saints.

And as for when it occurs, I don't see the first resurrection as a *single event*, but rather I see it in *stages* – and if it helps, picture the stages of a harvest in Old Testament times. In those days, when harvesting a grain field, there would be a gathering of the *first fruits* which were taken to the temple and presented to God as an offering, then there was the *main reaping* of the field, and afterwards, as a service to the poor and the needy, they were invited to *glean* the field of whatever remained. If you remember, that's what Ruth was doing when she met Boaz.

So, using the *stages* of a harvest as a frame of reference, the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that when it comes to the resurrection, Jesus is the *first fruit* – offered

to God on our behalf. It started with Him. Then comes the *main reaping*, when Jesus returns for His church – His bride. Paul described it in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**,

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

In this *main reaping*, the dead in Christ rise first in transformed bodies and afterwards believers who are alive are raptured and their bodies are changed as well.

Then, last but not least there is the *gleaning* – the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs. So, the first resurrection – the *better* resurrection – which is for all believers, comes at various *stages* in history – but all coming *before* the Millennial Kingdom and *before* the final resurrection of the spiritually dead for judgment.

So, according to both Daniel and John, there are two resurrections – a resurrection to eternal life and a resurrection to eternal condemnation. It's going to happen, it's sobering to think about, but the next verse is a good kick in the pants to actually do something. Let's continue with **verse 3**.

Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

How do the wise respond to the days of trouble? What do the wise do knowing that the end is coming? They impart wisdom and they lead many to get right with God, because right with God means your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The wise – the ones who really get it, the ones who understand this truly is a matter of eternal life and eternal death – they will shine like the **stars**, and remember – the stars shine their brightest when it's the darkest. It will be the darkest of times, and for those who share their faith and literally put their lives on the line for doing so, they will shine like stars.

So, Daniel is taking all this in – and it's a lot to take in because remember this all started back in **Chapter 10**, and then he's given a command. In **verse 4**, he is told,

But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.

This is a puzzling verse. Some have taken it to mean that in some way these words are to be hidden until the end of time, or in some way these words will be rendered incapable of being understood until the time is right, but I think what Daniel is being told is to preserve these words because there will come a time when people will be seeking knowledge about the end of time.

As the end of time draws near, as things start to develop, as the access to knowledge increases, people will be seeking answers, and the answers will be found in God's *completed* word – not just from Daniel but from other biblical sources as well. The book of **Daniel** is called the “*ABC's*” of end times prophecy, whereas the book of **Revelation**, written over 600 years later, is called the “*XYZ's*” and when put together – that's the intent, everything becomes much more obvious. As the end draws near, with all that God has given us in biblical wisdom, we can now see the stage being set – it's so clear to us, and what Daniel has written becomes evident and much plainer to us.

Now, we come to **verse 5** where the scene shifts. Let's continue.

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river and the other on that bank of the river. ⁶ And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long will it be until the end of these wonders?” ⁷ I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.

It would seem we are back at the Tigris River near the city of Babylon where this vision all started, and Daniel is still with these angels. Daniel sees two angels standing on either side of the river, and then one of them asks someone else who is above the waters, “*How long? How long will it last before it is over?*”

The one above the waters – maybe this is Jesus again or another angel – whomever it is, he raises both hands and swears it will be **for a time, times, and half a time** – that being three and a half years. **Do you see how I got that?** That's the last half of the seven-year Tribulation period – the last half which begins with the invisible war between the archangel Michael and Satan, and the visible Abomination of

Desolation in the temple of Jerusalem and it ends with the **shattering** of Israel – in other words, the holy people of God must be broken until they are willing to accept Jesus as their Messiah and be made whole. It's been decreed – God's plan and purposes will be accomplished for His people.

Well as you might imagine, Daniel's head is spinning, he's still wondering how this will work out, and then beginning with **verse 8** something encouraging is said. It reads,

⁸ As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" ⁹ He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. ¹⁰ Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.

Daniel said, "*I heard it but I could not understand it.*" Thank God – it's not just me.

Daniel wants clarity, but the angel tells him you don't need to understand it all. You have received all you are going to get, and it's enough – **go your way**. In the end it will make sense because it's meant for those in the end, and that's why we can understand it now. It's obvious to us. The wise will understand but the wicked will not. God refines and purifies the wise, but the wicked will remain in the dark and just keep on being wicked.

So, Daniel is left scratching his head, and what is said next leaves me scratching mine. Beginning with **verse 11** we are told.

¹¹ From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!

Every else in the Bible its 1260 days or 42 months or three and a half years – it's all the same. **So, what in the world are these 1290 days and 1335 days?**

We are not told, so I can only speculate, but after the end of the Tribulation period, we know from **Matthew 25** there is a *judgment of the nations*, or you might remember it as the judgment of the sheep and the goats. This is a judgment for those who physically survived the Tribulation period, and in this judgment, some will physically enter the Millennial Kingdom to repopulate the earth, and others

will be sent to eternal punishment. It might take some time for this judgment, it might take some time for the Lord to establish His kingdom – to gather His people throughout the world, and it might take some time to allow the waters and the land to be cleansed and healed after being decimated during the Tribulation period. Again, this is only speculation, but it's the best I can do to explain this.

Now we come to the last verse – **verse 13** where the angel has some final words for Daniel.

But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age.

Daniel, who saw kings and kingdoms come and go, ultimately lived to please the King of kings. Now, this old man is near the end of his life, his journey has come to an end, we will not hear from him again, and here he is told, *“Go your way to the end – finish well, for your rest is coming and one day you will rise again.”*

What a great promise given to Daniel, and it's a promise for everyone who trusts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Unless the rapture comes first, when your work here is done, you must face the reality of death, but don't worry – real life is beyond the grave and you will rise to enjoy your eternal rewards, and there's no mystery there.

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