

DANIEL 12:1–3. (EHV)

Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time. At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever.

Scientists have tried to classify us as a species in various ways. We are “thinking man,” “upright man,” or “laughing man.” Of course, none of these labels really captures our uniqueness as a species. The octopus is a great problem solver. Birds stand upright. And even lab rats can laugh.

Perhaps a better identifier would be “justifying man.” We are always trying to justify ourselves. We always want to be in the right. That’s not really a characteristic you find in any other creature. Of course, in order to justify oneself, someone else needs to be wrong. You need to judge others. In fact, we are so adept at judging others and we do it so often that our culture has become annoyed with judging. More and more people try to pass themselves as tolerant and as people who don’t judge others. The problem is that those who say they are tolerant and non-judgmental like to compare themselves favorably to those they think are not—and so they are still justifying themselves by judging others.

Judging, in and of itself, is not bad. It implies there is right and there is wrong, and there is. The problem is that we too often judge to glorify ourselves or on the basis of our own imperfect standards. Even in courts of law, those whose job it is to judge sometimes judge incorrectly. But there is a perfect judgment coming. It will be conducted by the only perfect judge, the judge who always gets it right. His judgment is called the last judgment, or the final judgment. Daniel talks about it here.

1. Before the Final Judgment

In Daniel 10–12, God gives the prophet Daniel a vision about the future. The vision starts out describing things that will happen not long after Daniel’s time. Then it jumps to events that will have multiple fulfillments, both before the birth of Christ and after his ascension into heaven. And by the time we get to Daniel 12, God is clearly telling Daniel about the very end of time.

We first notice that the time leading up to the end is called “a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time.” This fits with what Jesus tells us in the New Testament, when he says that there will be signs indicating that the end is approaching—signs in nature, like famines and earthquakes, signs in the political realm, like wars and rumors of wars, and signs within the visible church, like false prophets and false teachers who deceive many. Jesus tells us the love of many will grow cold and many will betray and hate each other (Matt. 24). Life on earth will not get better as time goes on; it will get more and more distressing. The Bible also talks about how Satan will be released just before the end; it will get darkest just before the eternal dawn (Rev. 20:3).

So the time of distress mentioned here could simply be talking about the earth getting progressively worse, or it could be talking specifically about the short period right before the end of time, when things will be particularly distressing. In any case, distressing things in our communities, in our country, and around the world should not surprise us.

2. The Final Judgment—Shame and Contempt

But then, God tells Daniel, the end will come. Michael, the great prince who stands over God's people—elsewhere he is called the archangel Michael—will arise. And when he does, God's people will be delivered—everyone who is found written in the book. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul similarly says that Jesus will return from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.

And when Jesus returns with the angel armies led by Michael, “many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake.” Sometimes “many” doesn't mean all, but sometimes it does mean all and simply emphasizes how large a number all is. Here it clearly does refer to all, as the rest of Scripture makes clear, like John 5 which we heard earlier.

Notice how God refers to death as a sleep here. He can do that precisely because of what he describes here—the fact that on the Last Day he will wake everyone up from death.

But that waking up from death will not be happy for everyone: “Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt.” When the dead rise, they will appear before the judge, Jesus Christ. And as the entire assembly of the living and the dead appear before him, all of those for whom he shed his blood and died, he will not simply usher everyone into heaven. He will not just wink at everyone's sins and shortcomings and say, “Aw, come on in! I was just scaring you with that hell stuff so that you'd shape up a bit.”

No, some will be judged and will go to everlasting life. Within that group, some will shine like the brightness of the sky forever and ever, and others will shine like the stars forever and ever. But others will be judged and will go to shame, to everlasting contempt. Obviously the one outcome is describing heaven and the other outcome is describing hell. But we usually think of hell as eternal fire, eternal pain, eternal agony. Here Daniel wants us to think about the psychology of hell.

Those who go to hell will first of all experience everlasting shame. The public shaming or cyber-shaming that takes place today can definitely get out of hand. Oftentimes, it is just people trying to justify themselves and make themselves look and feel better by magnifying the faults of others and making them feel as little as possible and as much like scum as possible. An actor says the wrong thing and everyone jumps into the comments and tells him what a horrible person he is for having said that, and they share it so that others can tell him what a horrible person he is for having said that. They overwhelm the person with so much guilt and shame that he either apologizes, in which case nearly everyone tells him it's too late and his apology is worthless, or he loses his job and retreats into obscurity.

It's horrible behavior, but if there's a silver lining in this kind of shameless shaming, it's that we're getting a small taste of hell, so that we hopefully want to avoid hell all the more. Hell is not just pain and agony; it's also everlasting shame—the shame of all your sin being exposed by the judge of all in front of all, the shame of being condemned to hell in full view of all the

living and the dead, not just your contemporaries but also your great-great grandparents and all the caesars and the apostles and Alexander the Great and Adam and Eve, shame from all the demons and all the other residents of hell, but also righteous shame from God himself.

And to go with the everlasting shame, everlasting contempt. The word in Hebrew could also be translated *abhorrence*. To abhor something is to regard it with utter disgust. The residents of hell will be the objects of contempt and abhorrence, and again, worst of all, on the part of God himself. He has done everything necessary to keep us from such fate, but multitudes will experience that fate anyway because they will have spurned God and his mercy and salvation. And now they will be judged and will get what such humans deserve.

3. The Final Judgment—Life

But some, on the other hand, will go to everlasting life and will shine like the brightness of the sky or like the stars forever and ever. They are described in two different ways. They are called Daniel's people, those "found written in the book," and "those who have insight."

Books will play a critical role on Judgment Day. Those who will go to everlasting life are called Daniel's people: "At that time your people will be delivered." Daniel's people are the Israelites or Jews. The Israelites or Jews were God's people, but not because of their descent or where they lived. They were God's people because God revealed himself to them in writing, in the Scriptures. So the phrase "your people" reminds us that all those who go to heaven will have an intimate connection to this book we call the Bible.

Earlier in Daniel, Daniel describes the Ancient of Days taking his seat on the throne of judgment with tens of thousands of angels attending him, and then he sees the court seated and the books opened. The most important of those books is the book described here simply as "the book." Elsewhere it is called the Book of Life. In Revelation it is described as the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb, that is, Jesus Christ. It is also described there as the book having names written in it from the creation of the world.

This stresses that those who will enter eternal life will not enter it on the basis of their own natural merits, worthiness, or works. If they are entering life because their names were written in a book from the creation of the world, then they were already chosen for eternal life before they were alive to do anything. If they are entering life because their names were written in a book belonging to the Son of God, then they are saved for his sake alone, for the sake of the ultimate "justifying man"—the one who proves he is always right not by justifying himself, but by justifying others.

But those who go to eternal life are also described as "those who have insight," because if their names are written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world, then their lives will show it. They will have wisdom and insight that those going to everlasting shame and contempt do not have. This is not wisdom and insight that the world esteems and respects, but wisdom and insight that has value before God. And the Scriptures tell us where that insight comes from: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

They will have insight because they fear, love, and trust in the Lord. They will have insight because they were they joined to his saving name through God's gift of faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:2–3). Since

they know Jesus Christ, they know God, who he is and what he is like—that his is just and punishes wickedness, rebellion, and sin, but also that he is gracious and merciful and exercised his justice by punishing his Son in our place.

To put it another way, those going to everlasting shame and contempt will get what they deserve. Those going to everlasting life will go there because they know everlasting life is not what they deserve in themselves, but that it is nevertheless their due because of the saving work of Jesus Christ and that alone.

“Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever.” We usually understand the phrase “those who bring many to righteousness” to refer to public ministers of the gospel—the priests and prophets of the Old Testament, the apostles, missionaries, pastors, and teachers of the New Testament. But it doesn’t have to be just them. Righteousness through faith in Christ isn’t just a gift to be enjoyed by ourselves. It is a gift meant to be shared.

There are many people headed for everlasting shame and contempt in the final judgment. And you know some of them. You do not want them headed there. Share God’s gift of righteousness in Christ Jesus with them and ask God to bless your work, and you too may be among those who do not simply shine like the brightness of the sky on a clear, crisp day, but who shine like the stars forever and ever. Amen.