

# Blessed Is He Who Waits

*Daniel 11:36–45; Galatians 4:4–7*

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## Closing a Journey

Today we close our journey through the intertestamental period — those four hundred years between the testaments. I know this has been a great deal of new material, but I hope it has strengthened your faith. We have traveled through the time of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and the Hasmoneans. Now Rome is just entering the scene, soon to become the rulers of Judea and Jerusalem.

The prophecies of Daniel have interpreted this history for us. There are five prophecies in Daniel — chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10–12 — and though each one differs in its details, imagery, and place on the timeline, they all follow the same pattern. The kingdoms of this world are like beasts: they destroy, devour, smash, and terrify. But there is an anointed one coming, one who is like the Son of Man, an uncut stone of divine origin. And this anointed one — this prince of the covenant — will demolish the kingdoms of the world, establish an everlasting kingdom, bring an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in an everlasting righteousness, and receive all power, glory, and authority. That is the pattern we have seen running through all of Daniel's prophecies.

Today we will see it again as we focus on the final prophecy and the time leading up to the coming of the anointed one. We will be looking at Herod the Great, the king who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth. Last week we focused on Daniel 7 and talked about Herod as the horn that rises among the ten Hasmonean rulers and kills the last three — see Daniel 7:20. Herod does exactly this when he seizes Jerusalem as King of the Jews in 37 BC. The prophecy of Daniel that focuses on King Herod is Daniel 11:36–45.

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## The King Who Worshiped Force

*“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 pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.” (Daniel 11:36–39)*

This passage describes Herod perfectly. The only god Herod worshiped was the god of the fortress — the god of military might and power. In the land he ruled, he built eight different fortresses to police and control the people. I have personally visited three of them. The most famous is Masada. The most outrageous was the Antonia Fortress, built in Jerusalem and positioned to overlook the temple — a garrison designed specifically to control the religion of the Jews, which is exactly what Herod did.

Herod rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem not to honor the Lord, but to glorify himself and as a means of religious control. When he became king in 37 BC, he slaughtered the Sanhedrin, installed his own high priests, confiscated the priestly garments and kept them under lock and key, required all Pharisees to take loyalty oaths to him — executing those who refused — and brought into Jerusalem the Greek-style theaters and games that the Jews despised. Outside Jerusalem, he built at least six temples to other gods. And close to the time of his death, Herod installed a giant golden Roman eagle above the temple gate, and those who attempted to remove it he burned alive. He worshiped no god except the god of force, power, and control.

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## Rome, Civil War, and Herod's Entanglement

*“At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him, but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, and the Libyans and the Cushites shall follow in his train.” (Daniel 11:40–43)*

This passage does not fit Herod when viewing him alone. But viewed as a client king under Rome, it fits him perfectly. Verses 40 to 43 describe the Roman civil war between Octavian Caesar Augustus and Mark Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC. Octavian wins, captures Egypt, plunders it, and grants to Herod massive wealth and land. Though Herod did not do these things directly, his constant politicking entangled him in all these events. His fingerprints are everywhere. Then we read:

*“But news from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction. 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.” (Daniel 11:44–45)*

Herod did indeed build palatial complexes between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as near the Dead Sea. They can be visited today — Caesarea Maritima by the sea, or Herodium near Bethlehem, the place where Herod dies a horrible death, alone.

But verse 44 is the bridge that carries us into the New Testament. In Matthew 2:1, Herod receives news that alarmed him from the east:

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled...” (Matthew 2:1–3)*

And what does Herod do?

*“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under...” (Matthew 2:16)*

*News from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction.* This prophecy was fulfilled at the time of Jesus' birth.

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## **The Blessing at the End of Daniel**

At the close of the book of Daniel, Daniel himself asks: “*How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?*” (Daniel 12:6). An answer comes in verses 11 and 12:

“*And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.*” (Daniel 12:11–13)

And there the book of Daniel ends. The book of Daniel — and its final prophecy — both end with a blessing. *Blessed is he who waits.*

Remember the pattern of Daniel's prophecies: the kingdoms of the world are like beasts. Chapter 11 describes both Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Herod the Great — among the greatest of beasts — and it ends with a blessing in chapter 12. So the question becomes: how do we get from the great beasts to the blessing? Where in chapters 11 or 12 is the Messiah — the anointed one, the Son of Man, the bringer of everlasting righteousness?

I will tell you where he is. We find him in verse 11 of chapter 12.

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## **The True Temple and the True Abomination**

To explain this passage, I need to begin with some biblical theology about Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of both the law and the prophets — he says so himself in Matthew 5:17. This means that not only is Jesus sinless, but the law itself points to him. And what part of the law points to him most clearly? The entire sacrificial system, including the tabernacle and the two great holy days of Atonement and Passover. The tabernacle — later the temple — is the place where the High Priest intercedes for all of humanity through an atoning sacrifice and enters into the glory of God. Jesus says about himself that the tabernacle and temple were only a shadow of him, because he is the true tabernacle, the true temple, who intercedes on our behalf through his atoning sacrifice and brings us with him into the very presence of God.

I share this theology with you because when most people read about “the abomination that makes desolate” in verse 11, they rightly understand that it involves the temple — but they often fail to see that the temple being spoken of ultimately is Jesus. Jesus is the true temple. Which means his death upon the cross is the true abomination.

Consider what happens at the cross:

The Creator is murdered by his creation. The one who knew no sin is judged guilty and sentenced to death. The true King of the Jews is rejected by his own people. The King of Glory is mocked and stripped and taken to Golgotha, the place of the unclean. The Holy One is treated as a vile criminal. And Christ himself becomes sin — that is what 2 Corinthians 5:21 says. And because he becomes sin, God the Father forsakes the Son. Divine wrath and judgment are poured out upon him — all leading to the abomination of the cross and ending in desolation: the death of Jesus, the King of Glory. The Living Word of God dies and is buried.

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## **The Archaeological Moment: The Talmud and the Day Atonement Ceased**

When does this take place? Verse 11 says it takes place 1,290 days from the time the regular burnt offering is taken away. Now, I know that whenever we start working with numbers in the Bible things can get strange quickly. And so, at the risk of sounding very strange, I want to offer one plausible interpretation of these numbers — one that connects them to the resurrection.

1,290 days is roughly 3.5 years, which is the length of Jesus’ ministry. The cross takes place approximately 3.5 years after Jesus’ baptism, which marks the beginning of his ministry. This reckoning is based largely on the chronology of the Gospel of John. But Daniel 12:11 tells us to start counting not from a baptism, but from the moment “the regular burnt offering is taken away.” There is no biblical mention of that happening in 29 or 30 AD. Historically, it appears that the regular burnt offering continued right up until the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD.

So what could this be? Thinking through this, I remembered a tour guide on my first trip to Israel mentioning that some of the rabbis speak of the sacrifices no longer being accepted by God around 30 AD. I asked her for more information or historical references, but she didn’t know where to point me. So I went searching for any historical record of something happening to the sacrifices around 29 or 30 AD.

And I found it in the Jewish Talmud. The Talmud consists of the historical and religious writings of the Jewish people compiled around 200 AD. It forms the basis of Jewish religious life today. It is not Scripture, and it carries no canonical authority, but it does preserve historical memory we would not otherwise have. In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Yoma

39b, there is a remarkable description of what happened on the Day of Atonement in 29 AD — specifically, that the sacrifices were no longer being accepted by God. The priests continued to sacrifice right up until the destruction of the temple, but from the Day of Atonement in 29 AD, God no longer accepted them.

Here is what the Talmud records: the heavy temple doors could no longer be kept closed — they kept swinging open on their own every night for forty years. The perpetual menorah would go out each night for forty years. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would reach into a vessel and draw out either a black or a white stone indicating which goat was chosen for the Lord — and for forty years, it was always the black stone. But most tellingly: they would tie a red cloth to the temple doors, and when the sins of the people were forgiven, that cloth would miraculously turn white — fulfilling Isaiah 1:18, “*though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.*” From the Day of Atonement in 29 AD onward, it never turned white again.

The Jews themselves, in their own historical writings, record that on the Day of Atonement in 29 AD, God stopped accepting their sacrifices. To me, that fits Daniel 12:11 exactly — *the regular burnt offering is taken away*. God took it away, because the Lamb of God had come.

According to the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement in 29 AD fell on approximately September 26. When did Jesus die? I believe — and have argued at length — that he died on the Passover of April 3, 33 AD, the Friday on which the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. Finding and converting ancient dates to our modern calendar is never perfectly precise, but that date is broadly accepted. How many days is it from September 26, 29 AD to April 3, 33 AD? 1,285 days. It is not exactly 1,290 — but given the difficulty of converting ancient calendrical systems, that is remarkably close, and it fits the length of Jesus’ ministry.

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## **The Blessing: Ascension, Pentecost, and Adoption**

But what about the blessing? *Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days*. The 1,335 days is 45 days beyond the 1,290 — 45 days after the abomination that makes desolate, which I am interpreting as the cross and death of Jesus. Forty-five days after the cross and resurrection lands us squarely between Jesus’ ascension — he appeared to many for 40 days — and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost at 50 days. I interpret the 1,335 days as pointing to both events, and we are blessed by both.

By Jesus ascending, we are blessed through his intercession on our behalf. He tells us he is preparing a place for us. And because he has ascended, he has sent the Spirit to us. And because of the Holy Spirit given to us, we are blessed indeed. The Holy Spirit is God dwelling in us — the down payment of our inheritance, our Comforter, our Guide. What greater blessing could there be than God himself dwelling within us through the presence of his Spirit?

I believe Paul describes this very blessing in Galatians 4. He writes:

*“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (Galatians 4:4–7)*

Notice what Paul is saying. God sends the Son to redeem us. To redeem means two things simultaneously — saved *from* something and saved *to* something. We are saved from sin’s penalty and bondage. We are saved *to* a new status: adoption as God’s children.

In the Roman world, adoption was not primarily about giving orphans a home. It was about legally changing a person’s status — transferring inheritance, power, name, and position. If a slave was adopted by a free man, he instantly became free. If someone carried debt, that debt was erased; they were legally a different person with a different identity.

Consider: at the very time Paul was writing this letter, emperors rose to power through adoption. Julius Caesar adopted Gaius Octavius in his will, transferring all his authority to him. Through that act of adoption, a young man became Caesar Augustus, ruler of Rome. Augustus adopted Tiberius. Tiberius adopted Caligula. Claudius adopted Nero in 54 AD — quite possibly right when Paul was writing these words. Imagine the talk around the city square: *I wish some great king would adopt me and give me all his wealth and power.*

Paul says: there is a great King — the King of Kings — and he has adopted you. God sent his Son to redeem you so that you might receive adoption as sons and daughters. What a status change. You are a child of the Most High God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Your inheritance and position are higher than the angels themselves.

But God did not stop there. He not only sent the Son into the world to redeem us — he also sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. Not to change our status; the Son has already done that. The Spirit comes so that we can *experience* the intimacy that goes with that status. The Spirit enables us to cry “*Abba! Father!*” — to experience real fellowship and kinship with the Father.

That is the blessing Daniel was waiting for. And it is a blessing that has been given to you in Christ.

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## What This Means for Monday Morning

I realize this has been a journey through history, prophecy, and some complex calculations. So let me be direct about what it means.

**The pattern in Daniel has not changed.** The kingdoms of this world are still like beasts — they devour, destroy, and terrify. Look around. The same spirit that drove Herod still drives the powers of this world: the worship of force, control, and self-glorification. You see it in governments, in corporations, in workplaces. The beast-like kingdoms haven't disappeared; they've simply changed their names.

But here is what we must hold onto: the pattern always ends the same way. The Son of Man wins. The uncut stone demolishes the kingdoms. The everlasting kingdom is established. This isn't just ancient history — this is the arc of all history, including yours. Whatever beast-like powers press against you today — tyrannical leadership, unjust systems, the chaos of our current moment — they are already defeated. Christ has already won.

So when you read the news and feel sick, say to yourself: *The beasts do not get the last word. Jesus does.*

When you feel small and powerless, remember that your King has already outlasted Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Herod, and every empire since.

When evil seems to be winning, remember: the abomination of the cross looked like the victory of darkness — but it was actually the victory of God.

Some of you need to take your fear, your anxiety, your anger about the state of the world, and lay it at the feet of the Son of Man who already reigns.

**The blessing Daniel prophesied is yours right now.** You are adopted as a child of God. Your status has fundamentally changed. You are not trying to earn God's favor — you already have it. You are not a slave hoping someday to be noticed — you are a son, a daughter, an heir. When you wake up tomorrow morning, you wake up as a child of the Most High God. That is your identity before you accomplish a single thing. So — do you live like this is true? Or do you still live as though you are trying to earn your place, prove your worth, win God's approval?

You cannot earn what you have already been given. You cannot prove what God has already declared. Your Father has already placed his name on you, transferred his inheritance to you, and seated you with Christ in the heavenly places.

And the Spirit dwells in you. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your heart. Right now, in this moment, the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in you. And through the Spirit, you have fellowship with the Father. No matter where you are — in your car, at your desk, in the middle of the night when worry grips you — you can cry out "*Abba! Father!*"

Do you live according to this blessing? Or do you live as though you are on your own — as though you have to figure everything out yourself, as though God is distant and unconcerned? The Spirit is your Comforter when life crushes you. The Spirit is your Guide when you do not know what to do. The Spirit is the down payment of your inheritance, the guarantee that everything God promised will come to pass.

*Blessed indeed is he who waits.*

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## **A Word to Those Outside of Christ**

The same God who ordered all of history to the exact fullness of time has ordered that you would hear this message today. In a moment we are going to sing, and as we do, I want to invite you to come. I or one of our leaders would love to pray with you, to help you call on the name of the Lord, and to walk with you into this new life as a son or daughter of God. If you are not ready to come forward, you can call out to him right where you are — he hears. But do not ignore his voice.