



Lesson 6: Daniel

Dear friends,

Not long ago, I read David McCullough's wonderful *John Adams*. The book greatly increased my appreciation for the founders of our political system, John and Abigail Adams in particular. McCullough transported me back into the hot and turbulent summer of 1776, heightening my awareness of the drama of that critical moment. So much was at stake. Adams himself saw quite clearly that history was balanced on a knife's edge. The smallest events could tip it to one side or the other.

McCullough's book also encouraged me to reconsider the freedoms I take for granted as a member of this society. Most of us possess liberties that only a tiny minority of the human population has ever enjoyed. Naturally, I am grateful for the freedom to practice religion undirected and unhindered by the state. Indeed, I am so accustomed to religious liberty that it seldom crosses my mind that hundreds of millions of people in the world today do not share it.

Such liberty was even scarcer in the ancient world. This is a reality with which the author of Daniel was intimately acquainted. It seems likely that Daniel was written in response to attempts by the Syrian king Antiochus IV to outlaw the practice of Judaism. Its author faced a situation that I can scarcely imagine, when observance of the law of Moses was an act of political defiance punishable by death. As you probably know, the book of Revelation was written in a very similar context. This simple fact explains a great deal in both books. Apocalyptic writing has been called "the literature of a besieged minority." That description certainly seems apt in the case of both of the biblical apocalypses.

The question of God's future victory pressed hard upon these authors. Violent death had come to others and might well come to them. It took an act of faith to imagine a future beyond the immediate horizon of injustice. Would evil triumph? No, it would not be so.

The United States is not the new Israel. Obviously, we as a nation have made some terrible mistakes and have much to answer for, slavery and the decimation of native populations being at the top of the list. Still, I believe that the freedom we enjoy is a gift of God. Without question, John Adams himself saw it that way.

What does it mean to be faithful to God's word in Daniel? Undoubtedly, there are many answers to that question. One that had not occurred to me earlier is to work to make sure that the oppression that occasioned Daniel is not repeated elsewhere. We cannot in our own power bring in the Reign of God, but, like Adams, we can anticipate it in the kind of societies we build.

Grace & peace,

Craig