

MISTAKES 11 AND 12

THE PROPER MEANING OF TWO PHRASES IN DANIEL 12:4: “MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO” AND “KNOWLEDGE SHALL INCREASE”

In Daniel 12:4, there are a couple of phrases that have caused people to come up with some mistaken interpretations as to what they mean. We read the following:

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase (Daniel 12:4 ESV).

The New English Translation puts it this way:

But you, Daniel, close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will dash about, and knowledge will increase” (Daniel 12:4 NET).

What do these phrases mean: “many shall run to and fro” or “many will dash about,” and “knowledge will increase?”

IT DOES NOT REFER TO INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND THE EXPLOSION OF KNOWLEDGE AT THE TIME OF THE END

It is common to hear people say that “running to and fro” in the last days has the idea of people traveling globally. It is also often claimed that the statement “knowledge will increase” indicates that there will be a worldwide explosion of knowledge at the time of the end.

Hence, they see the fulfillment of these predictions in the ability to travel internationally at a moment’s notice, as well as the vast growth of knowledge which we now have in our modern times.

Is that what is predicted here in Scripture? No, it is certainly not.

THE MEANING OF “PEOPLE WILL RUN TO AND FRO”

The idea behind these words is that people will go everywhere in an attempt to understand the meaning of the prophecies of Daniel. We have this same idea in the Book of Amos where people will seek the word of the Lord:

Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it (Amos 8:11,12 ESV).

They will wander everywhere to seek the word of the Lord but will not find it.

Therefore, to run “to and fro,” or “dash about,” has the idea that many will attempt to understand the meaning of these prophecies of the last days. In doing so, they will search everywhere to try to discover what these prophecies mean.

WHAT IS “THE KNOWLEDGE” THAT WILL INCREASE

The second prediction is clear: as time passes “the knowledge” of the meaning of the prophecies that Daniel wrote about would increase. The Hebrew has the article “the” before the word “knowledge.” In fact, this increase of “the” knowledge was specifically promised in the Book of Daniel:

Many will be purified, made clean, and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, though the wise will understand (Daniel 12:10 NET).

As we get closer to the time of the end, we are specifically told that many will seek to find answers. The wicked will never understand the meaning of these words of Daniel but the wise will indeed understand what these predictions mean.

Therefore, the going to and fro is not predicting more people traveling at the time of the end but rather they will be going everywhere looking for answers as to the meaning of what Daniel wrote. The knowledge that will increase is not knowledge per se, but rather knowledge of the meaning of the predictions found in the Book of Daniel.

To the point, the believers living at the time of the end will be able to make sense of those things which Daniel wrote about so long ago. Warren Wiersbe offers a sensible perspective to these statements:

“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” is not a reference to automobiles and jet planes or the advancement of education. It has reference to the study of God’s Word in the last days, especially the study of prophecy. Amos 8:11-12 warns us that the day will come when there will be a famine of God’s Word, and people will run here and there seeking for truth but won’t find it. But God’s promise to Daniel is that, in the last days, His people can increase in their knowledge of prophetic Scripture as they apply themselves to the Word of God. Some interpret “to and fro” to mean running one’s eyes to and fro over the pages of Scripture (Warren Wiersbe *Be Series, Daniel* 12:4-5).

Stephen Miller gives an excellent summation of this passage in Daniel 12:

Gabriel therefore was instructing Daniel to preserve “the words of the scroll,” not merely this final vision but the whole book for those who will live at “the time of the end” when the message will be needed. This future generation will undergo the horrors of the tribulation (“time of distress”) and will need the precious promises contained in the Book of Daniel—that God will be victorious over the kingdoms of this world and that the suffering will last for only a brief time—to sustain them.

An increase in travel toward the end of the age is not the idea of the phrase “will go here and there.” In a number of Old Testament passages (e.g., 2 Chr 16:9; Jer 5:1; Amos 8:12; Zech 4:10), [the] Hebrew ... denotes “to go here and there” in search of a person or thing, and that is the meaning here. An “intense” searching seems indicated by the verb form. The purpose of this search will be “to increase knowledge.” Yet Gabriel was not predicting a mere surge in scientific “knowledge,” and so forth, in the last days. The article appears with “knowledge” (lit., “the knowledge”), showing that a particular kind of “knowledge” was intended, that is, when and how Daniel’s message is to be fulfilled. As the time of fulfillment draws nearer, the “wise” will seek to comprehend these prophecies more precisely, and God will grant understanding (“knowledge”) to them (Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, Broadman Holman).

Daniel himself did not understand what he saw and heard at the time he recorded this prophecy. It is humbling to know that we, living at this time in history, are able to see so many of the things falling into place that the ancient prophets wrote about. The words that the Lord Jesus said to His disciples are pertinent to us living at this time in history:

Two Statements In Daniel 12:4 That Need Clarifying

But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Matthew 13:16,17 NET).

We are indeed blessed to be living at this time! This should be the lesson that we learn when we correctly understand the meaning of Daniel 12:4.