



God's Rule through History

Pilgrim Living for the 21st Century

Daniel 11:2-45

Patrick Havens

November 13, 2016

We've been studying the book of Daniel for several weeks, and today we'll be in chapter 11. But the story begins with teenagers being kidnapped out of Jerusalem and carried off to a foreign land. What was so surprising was their faithfulness to the Lord. They had wisdom to deal with their new situation, even though they were persecuted. Whether they were thrown into the fire, or fed to the lions, they remained faithful to the Lord.

What we're learning is that Daniel himself was not the superhero, but rather it was his God. God was the secret behind their faithfulness. Daniel 11:32 says, *"The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action."* This is the behind-the-scenes insight that is the reason we find this book so engaging, and why, as God's people, we are reading it today.

If you recall, the first half of the book contained riveting stories and narratives of these men. But the genre changes, beginning with chapter seven, with Daniel's prophecies, and can be described as apocalyptic literature similar to the book of Revelation. Chapters seven through 12 reveal secrets about the Kingdom of God and how the history of the world will end. Apocalyptic literature is especially valuable during times of stress, when God's people need to have their imaginations lifted above their circumstances.

Our reading today in chapter 11 picks up in one of Daniel's visions that began in chapter ten and which actually isn't completed until chapter 12. So be sure to be here next week for the rest of this vision.

In review, what prompted Daniel's vision was that he was in a time of deep prayer and petition. If you haven't been with us, let me give you a little background. God's people had been in exile, and now Cyrus the king of Persia is finally releasing the Jews to go back to Jerusalem. They are leaving, but Daniel realizes things are not going well. He spends three weeks fasting and praying to the Lord. In Daniel 10:12, a heavenly being—either an angel or perhaps Jesus Himself—comes to him and says, *"Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I*

have come because of your words.” The messenger then begins to unfold for Daniel what is going on, the spiritual warfare that is being waged against God’s people.

Now in chapter 11 we turn to the physical warfare that takes place on earth. It describes the hardships and persecutions God’s people will face here. And you’ll want to be here next week for chapter 12, which tells about God’s bright future for us. If you’re a follower of Jesus, your future is very bright.

But the theme of chapter 11 is that despite the battles that take place here on earth, God rules history and is building an everlasting Kingdom. And we are to live in light of that truth. This chapter is like a dense forest: we could focus on a few trees and perhaps miss the primary meaning of this chapter. We’ll look at three aspects of this today and here’s an aerial view of Daniel 11:

- God’s providence and the failure of human power (11:2-20). Daniel introduces the major players, the kings and kingdoms that will come on the scene after the kingdom of Babylon. It covers a period of about 360 years. Then in verses 20-21 he begins to talk about a particular contemptible person. These two verses span maybe a five-year period, and speak of the rise to power of Antiochus IV and the persecution he inflicts on God’s people.
- God’s rule in difficult times (11:21-35).
- Forecasting the time of the end (11:36-45). This section prophetically describes things that have yet to take place, including a king to come who will look like Antiochus. In the New Testament this man is called the antichrist, or the “man of lawlessness,” but these names refer back to the man Daniel tells of in this chapter.

1. God’s providence and the failure of human power (2-20).

Let’s first consider God’s providence and the failure of human power. We’ll begin in verse two. *“And now I will show you the truth.”* What truth is he talking about? In Daniel 10:21, the heavenly visitor tells Daniel, *“But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth.”* This vision is revealing what has already been written in the book of truth. Remember, all that Daniel is hearing is being said prior to any of it taking place. Daniel is 80 years old, and he won’t see any of these things himself.

² *And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece.* ³ *Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills.* ⁴ *And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor*

according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.

Looking at maps, we see that the Babylonian Empire was small (625-539 B.C.), the Persian Empire was somewhat larger (539-331 B.C.), but the Greek Empire (331-63 B.C.) , under the rule of Alexander the Great, stretched from Greece to Egypt to India. Jerusalem was just a small town in these big kingdoms. Actually, a fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, would include nearly all of the nations that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea. And all these empires rose to power before the birth of Christ described in the Gospels.

So even though we speak of the 400 years between the writings of Malachi and Matthew as being the “silent years,” in fact Daniel is now describing what would take place during that time. We now know that the kingdom of the “mighty king” mentioned in verse three, who was Alexander the Great, did not go to his posterity, even as Daniel foretold.

Alexander was a young man who had been a disciple of Aristotle in Greece, who conquered much of the known world. When he conquered Egypt, he founded a city there which he named Alexandria. But after reaching and conquering parts of India, he died at the age of 33 (323 B.C.). His children and his three wives were murdered, and the rulership of his kingdom was passed to four commanding officers.

It's interesting to note how quickly the vision passes over this man. Most of our history books spend a lot more time on Alexander the Great. But God's purpose here is not to consider the rulers in history. Rather, His concern is what would be happening to His people over the course of these years. They were the “apple of His eye,” His real interest in this vision.

In verses five and following, Daniel will be describing Ptolemy and Seleucus, who became the next rulers. And in the vision the focus is on two parts of the kingdom: the south and the north. We might ask what the reference point is that divides these two sections, and the answer is Judea. Ptolemy ruled the land south of Judea, and Seleucus was over the land to the north. Then they continually battled each other and of course God's people ended up in the middle of their wars.

So when verse five tells us, *“Then the king of the south shall be strong...”*, it's referring to Ptolemy. But then the vision quickly moves to Ptolemy II, saying, *“But one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority.”* So again, although years are going by, the references to these rulers are quite brief. In fact, between verse five and verse 20, there are six kings in the south and seven in the north, including Selucius and

Antiochus, who were stationed in Antioch and Syria. But all of them were nicknamed “king of the north,” or “king of the south.” Even Ptolemy IV was called king of the south.

Let's read this passage and consider its weight, and also note verse 14 that tells how the people of God responded.

⁵ Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority. ⁶ After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those years.

⁷ And from a branch from her roots one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall deal with them and shall prevail. ⁸ He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold, and for some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north. ⁹ Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land.

¹⁰ His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. ¹¹ Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight with the king of the north. And he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand. ¹² And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. ¹³ For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the first. And after some years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies.

¹⁴ In those times many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail. ¹⁵ Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siegeworks and take a well-fortified city. And the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand. ¹⁶ But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him. And he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand. ¹⁷ He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage. ¹⁸ Afterward

he shall turn his face to the coastlands and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him. ¹⁹ Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.

²⁰ Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle.

These are typical human powers, right? They had different strategies for engagement between the north and south. One was this: “Let’s make an alliance. I’ll give you my daughter.” We see this in verses five and six. The daughter’s name was Beatrice. Ptolemy II gave her to Antiochus II who divorced his previous wife to marry her. But then when Ptolemy II died, Antiochus decided to send her back, and then remarried his former wife. But that wife was not happy with the arrangement, so she poisoned him and sent an entourage to kill Beatrice and her children.

Moving to verse seven, one of Beatrice’s relatives is determined to seek revenge. His strategy was to go to the fortress and take Antiochus’ gods. So the people in the south take the gods of the north and bring them down to Egypt. As a side note, when Babylon captured the people in Judea and brought them into captivity, we never read that they took their gods. You don’t take Yahweh as spoil of war. But in this case, the gods were taken.

We know all these stories—not from Scripture, but from historians such as Josephus or the Book of Maccabees. This is truly a unique chapter of the Bible, accurately foretelling what would happen between the time it was written and the coming of Christ. But they also provide us with insight into how human power works—alliances, revenge, and then in verse 13, having a bigger army.

Another alliance was tried in verse 17, but this one was foiled as well. Antiochus III gave his daughter—named Cleopatra, but not the famous one—to Ptolemy V, thinking she would be a faithful spy. But instead she falls in love with her husband and refuses to act as a spy. So as verse 17 relates, his plan “*shall not stand or be to his advantage.*” Thus the plans of entire nations are foiled through single acts like a poisoning or someone falling in love. Human power is very fragile, and can easily be overturned.

Now, a secular historian would read these words from Daniel and consider it all a coincidence. But God is not reading it that way, nor is Daniel, nor should we. For example, in the story where we read that Antiochus gave his daughter as a spy but lost his “advantage,” do you know what he wanted to do? Verse 16 tells us this: “*But he who comes against him shall do*

as he wills, and none shall stand before him. And he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand.”

When it mentions “the glorious land,” it’s talking about the area around Jerusalem. He was intending to destroy Judea. But the love of his daughter for the other king foiled that plan. If you were a secular historian, would you make that connection as being an act of God? For us, however, it becomes an example of what we learn in Proverbs 21:1: *“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”*

God is directing everything. If this were a stage play, we might see the actors in the play, but we wouldn’t see the screenwriter or the director. In the same way, we see the activity in the Bible, but we need to realize that behind the scenes God is directing everything according to His purposes. Which of course leads to the theological question: if God is directing these events, are the people responsible? Or are they puppets on a stage?

In 1998 there was a classic movie called “The Truman Show.” The show stars Jim Carrey as Truman, who unknown to himself is growing up in a television stage show. Everyone in his life is a paid actor. Over time he begins to realize he wants to have an autonomous life, and by the end of the movie the audience is cheering for him to escape out of the show.

But is it actually to one’s benefit to be autonomous? Do you want to live in a world where there is no director? Do you want to live in a world where you are free from God’s sovereignty? When you look at this list of how humans used their power, you will scream, “No! I want to be in God’s Kingdom.” God’s sovereignty is good news for us. It’s so reassuring to realize that these people are held responsible for their actions.

- 11:2, *“...he shall stir up all...”* This is talking about King Artaxerxes, a Persian king who was the richest of them all. He went to Greece, which was kind of like batting at a bees’ nest.
- 11:3, *“Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall...do as he wills.”* This was Alexander the Great who wasn’t doing God’s will, but acted as he willed.
- 11:12, *“...his heart shall be exalted...”*
- 11:16, *“...shall do as he wills...”* speaking of Antiochus II.

Thus we see that human powers are responsible for making their own choices—and do we want to live under people who follow their own wills? But God’s Kingdom is different. He’s in charge. So when we see flattery, lies, deceptions, using political alliances to win over one’s enemy or to build fortunes we’re just reading about ambition, pride, arrogance. This is what it means to be dominated by the world. These leaders would be held responsible by God for what they did, yet somehow God is in control of all the events.

Verse four describes how Alexander's kingdom "*shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity...for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.*" His vast kingdom was going to be "given" to others. We see this verb quite often in Daniel. For example in Daniel 1:2, it says, "*The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand.*" It wasn't that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was more powerful than Judah, but rather that the Lord was judging them. The ultimate power was in God's hands. Another example is found in Daniel 1:17, where it says Daniel and his friends were "given" wisdom and skills. We don't need to be under the impression that they were simply amazing young men. They had gifts that were deliberately given to them by God. John Newton is credited with writing, "The chief means for attaining wisdom...are the holy Scripture and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water; the other the bucket with which we are to draw."

Here's the comfort we can find in reading these details: God is aware of everything and He is control. In their evil situation, God was in control. Imagine what it was like to be caught in the middle of these warring nations. We can understand why the people responded as they did. Daniel 11:14 says, "*The violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision.*" They thought the world was ending. But notice their efforts were not looked on favorably by God, for it says "*they shall fall.*"

And in some ways that's how we're feeling today. We're caught in a national tension and wonder, "Isn't this out of control, God? How can we think You're in control when everything is so evil? What's going on?" But Daniel's stories can convince us that God is in control, because we're seeing the truths of history unfolded before they actually take place.

We can see this in other times in history as well. Christ came when the Romans ruled and when there was an alliance formed between the Pharisees, Sadducees and other groups. He brought them a "peace treaty," good news: the Kingdom of God is in your midst. But they refused to accept it and they killed Him. But Acts 2:23 tell us Jesus was "*delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, [yet] you crucified and killed [Him].*" The people were to blame for His death—God wasn't the author of the sin. Nevertheless, it was according to His ordained plan. So when we consider the difficulties and challenges in our own lives, we can press in to the truth that God is in fact in charge of every aspect of history.

Our country has had a stressful week, and in a sense Christians were caught in the middle of the struggle. We had two disqualified candidates, and we really couldn't understand what was going on. How should we respond? How do we love our neighbor in this context? As a church, we really need to consider how we love people in a country that is so divided.

2. God rules in difficult times.

If you thought the text leading up to verse 21 was bad—the fighting between north and south—well, it gets worse. Verses 21-25 cover a five-year period of living under the reign of a particularly heinous person, whom the text calls “contemptible”:

²¹ In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. ²² Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant. ²³ And from the time that an alliance is made with him he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people.

But this time is all very much part of God’s appointing. We see in verse 28 that “*his heart shall be set against the holy covenant.*” This is Antiochus IV, or Antiochus Epiphanes. Verse 22 tells us, “*Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant,*” and history records that this evil man killed the high priest, Onias III.

Still, Antiochus Epiphanes was not God. Verse 30, “*For ships of Kittim,*” that is, from the western coastland, “*shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant.*” Let me describe this scene: Antiochus IV is standing in Egypt claiming Alexandria for himself. But these ships from Kittim—guess who they are? They’re the Romans, and they’re bringing a letter to Antiochus. History tells us that when the ship’s captain handed Antiochus the letter, he drew a line around him in the sand, saying, “You decide now. Either you agree to go to war with us, or you leave Egypt.” As Daniel’s vision foretold, he decided to leave.

When Germany was brutally defeated in World War I, they came back with World War II and Adolf Hitler. Antiochus did the same. In alignment with the prophecy— “*he...shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant*”—Antiochus Epiphanes went on a rampage against Israel. Verse 30 goes on to say that he would “*pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant.*” And in fact the people in Jerusalem did divide. Some went along with Antiochus and were “Hellenized”—conforming themselves to the Greek culture.

But others did not, including the famous Maccabean revolt. Antiochus then organized a major attack to wipe out all the Jews, as described in verses 31 and following. History records that he slaughtered 80,000 people—men, women and children. He burned the Torah—Moses’ writings. He outlawed daily sacrifices. He told the people they could not circumcise their children. He removed everything that was distinctly Jewish in an effort to unify the entire region around the Greek culture. To defile the temple of God, he brought in a new altar for the worship

of Zeus and required the people to sacrifice pigs on that altar. His efforts to desecrate the temple are a matter of clear historic record. And for the Jews of that day, it was hard to imagine anything more offensive.

Antiochus decided to expand these practices to the entire region. So his men went to a small village called Modine which was northwest of Jerusalem, where they came to the house of an old man named Matthias, who lived with his five sons. They told Matthias that he had to sacrifice to Zeus, that he could no longer worship Yahweh—God Almighty. But Matthias rebelled so they killed him, but his five sons were so angry they began to do guerilla warfare against the forces of Antiochus, led by the oldest son Judah. Later, Judah's son agreed to an alliance with Rome against Greece. This was the reason why when Jesus was born there was a season of peace in the land, which began when Rome protected them against Antiochus IV.

But think about the fear and suffering the people would have experienced in these times. History is full of people who have abused power. In 1949, Chairman Mao Tse Tung led a campaign in China to purge their society of everything religious. Even as recently as the '70s Chinese forces were raiding homes, disrupting any sort of Bible studies. One account I read said this:

He came in the small congregation, glanced around and said, "We will let you go, but first you must spit on this book of lies," and he threw a Bible down. "Anyone who refuses will be shot." The soldier pointed his gun at them. "You first," he yelled. A man came over, reluctantly spit on the Bible, and walked out. They called out another person, who came over, spit on the Bible, and walked out.

Then they called a young girl around 16 years old. She quietly came forward, and overcome with love for her Lord, she knelt down and picked up the Bible. She wiped the spit off with her dress and prayed, "What have they done to Your Word? Please forgive them." And then she was executed on the spot.

So whether it's a Communist country, an Islamic country, or any place where Jesus is hated, Christians will be persecuted. Yet amazingly, at the same time Christianity also flourishes. We see this in our text in Daniel, picking up in verse 32:

But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined,

purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.

As God's people were revolting, some of those who had gone with Antiochus came back. Look at the hope here! God uses these intense hardships not to destroy His people, but to refine them for His purposes. I believe it was John Calvin who said, "What Satan intends for poison God uses for medicine." That's what we see happening in the events that are represented in this prophecy. God is accomplishing His purposes in a very dark and evil time.

3. Forecasting the time of the end.

Verses 36-45 are understood by commentators to describe a king who is yet to come, as the prophecies they contain have yet to be fulfilled. They appear to be talking about the end times, when the antichrist, the "man of lawlessness," will come to power—although much of what is in these verses could also be said of Antiochus IV. But consider what it reveals about the strategy of the dark lord. His primary goal will be to reorient the loves of the people away from God and toward the things of this world. Verses 37-38 tell us he will "*pay no attention to the gods of his fathers,*" but will "*honor the god of fortresses*" instead.

This man is embracing the god of power. "God of love? God of money? Nah. God of power? Yes!" He will worship the god of power in order to accomplish what he desires. And as a counterfeit of Christ, he will offer the people land and riches—things Christ has prepared for His people as well. In a sense he will bring a false gospel through false promises. But they are promises he cannot fulfill. At the very end of chapter 11 we're told, "*Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.*" The final help will be for God's people.

This is a great warning against idolatry—and a call to know God and be deeply committed to Him. There are three final thoughts I want to leave you with:

1. There is only one eternal Kingdom. Everything else you can visit in a museum. What are you living for?
2. Battles rage north and south. Human power will fail. Knowing God will give you wisdom.
3. Going deep in your knowledge of God will equip you to resist idolatry and take action in His Kingdom.

In order to enter the Kingdom of God, you must be born again. His Kingdom is present with us, and we're born again into it through faith in His Messiah. That's good news, because

every other kingdom has failed or will fail. Every other kingdom is a false promise, a counterfeit of the true Kingdom.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You even for complicated passages that we need to read and which are good for us. I pray that we can take encouragement from these words of Scripture, knowing You are Lord in the midst of complex and hostile times in history. We want to be committed to Your purposes. Thank You that Your Kingdom rules the nation in a way that is surprising. Jesus came as a humble servant, suffering and giving His life for us.

Remind us that Your Kingdom priorities are not power or money or pleasure or fame, but rather serving and giving and loving our neighbors. Help us to live distinctly in Your Kingdom. I pray we wouldn't be fooled by the schemes of this world and its anti-God ideologies. May our lives show that You have called us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net