



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 19

#### The Telos of God's Word

Listen to the following passages; they are quite important. After Christ walked on the water we read this:

Mark 6:51-52, "And He got into the boat with [His disciples], and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of* the loaves, but their heart was hardened."

Referencing those in the wilderness who died, the Hebrew writer says:

Hebrews 4:2, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

Contrast this to this statement by Paul:

1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal [τέλος (*telos*)] of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

It is clear from these passages and many more that God did NOT give us the Bible so that we might wow one another on account of the insight gained from reading it. The Bible was not given simply for the sake of orthodoxy- "...the demons believe and shudder" (James 2:19). The clear intent was NOT simply right-doctrine, BUT right living! Listen! If the reading of the word of God does not impel you unto love, then you've missed the boat! If it doesn't feed your faith (John 20:31-32), then clearly your study is unprofitable! Arthur Pink made this observation:

The objects [doctrines/truths] which are revealed in Scripture are not bare abstractions which are to be accepted as true, nor even sublime and lofty concepts to be admired; they are to have a powerful effect upon our daily walk. There is no doctrine revealed in Scripture for a merely speculative knowledge, but all is to exert a powerful influence upon conduct. God's design in all that He has revealed to us is to the purifying of our affections and the transforming of our characters. (Pink, 2001)

It is so important that we keep this in mind as we continue in our study of Daniel 11. This portion of Scripture is prophecy through and through; fulfilled prophecy at that! Accordingly, our study no doubt will have an *intellectual twang* to it. But it must do more than stimulate our minds, it must strengthen our faith. Our study must inspire greater love for and devotion to God. If it doesn't we remain the Pharisee!

God gave this section to enable the child of God not simply to know that God is sovereign, but to see His sovereignty in action; so that in seeing, we might have hope!

Daniel 12:8-9, "As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, 'My lord, what *will be* the outcome of these *events*?' And he said, 'Go *your way*, Daniel, for *these* words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.'"

Family of God, we are in the "end time" (they began when Christ ascended into heaven). Accordingly you must see that this prophecy was written NOT for Daniel's generation, BUT for ours!

We have considered God's sovereign election and control of world events during four eras: Persia, Greece, the Ptolemaic Empire, and the Seleucid Empire. Now consider with me the sovereign election and purpose of God during the Maccabean Era. We begin with the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes.

### Antiochus Epiphanes

Daniel 11:21, "And in his place [Seleucus IV, v. 20] a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue [lit., 'slippery ways' (Ps. 35:6; 73:18)]."

The struggles between the Seleucids (Syria) and the Ptolemies (Egypt) culminated in one ruler, here described as a "despicable person" whom we know to be Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BC)! The assessment given here of Antiochus Epiphanes- the "little horn" of Daniel 8:9-12, 23-25- is based solely on the turmoil that his rule created in Jerusalem against God.

From the perspective of world history and world atrocities, Antiochus really doesn't stand out. He wouldn't be on a top ten list of evil men, dictators, or generals. But from the perspective of God, and that is key, he is one of the more vile men to have ever lived! Why? As we'll see, because he used his God-given position to attack God!

From this we must learn that every providence, action, or thought is deemed right or wrong NOT on account of how it might impact an individual, BUT on account of its impact against God and His Kingdom. Our world may not be God-centered/Kingdom-centered. WE may not be God-centered/Kingdom-centered, BUT we must see that God is God-centered and so Kingdom-centered in all that He does! Acts are deemed significant in relation to Christ and Him alone! T. H. L. Parker put it this way in his article *Providence of God*:

The creation is the stage on which are enacted God's dealings with mankind... [And] from the beginning God has ordered the course of events toward Jesus Christ and his incarnation. From the biblical point of view world history and personal life stories possess significance only in the light of the incarnation. The squalid little story of lust in Judah's dealings with Tamar (Gen. 38) falls into place in the genealogy of the Messiah (Mt. 1:3). Caesar Augustus was on the throne in Rome for the sake of the unknown baby in its manger. (Elwell, 2001, p. 891)

That is why in eternity, if there were an awards banquet, we would be shocked today to see those whom God would honor! It won't be the Bill Gates or the Alexanders, but the widow who didn't give out of her wealth, RATHER she gave her entire wealth to the praise and service of the Lord (Mark 12:41-44)! So Antiochus Epiphanes is referenced as an evil/wicked man NOT because he inconvenienced God's people, BUT because he attacked God! And that alone places him on a list of evil monarchs! So three hundred years more or

less after Daniel, a “despicable person would arise.”

Daniel 11:22, “And the overflowing forces will be flooded away before him and shattered, and also the prince of the covenant [a reference most likely to the high priest in Israel whom we’ll talk about in a moment].”

This verse speaks of Antiochus’ rise to power as a rather improbable beginning. See Antiochus had no legitimate right to the throne; it belonged to Seleucus IV and his heirs. However through intrigue, flattery, and bribes, Antiochus ascended to the throne.

Daniel 11:23, “And after an alliance is made with him he will practice deception, and he will go up and gain power with a small *force of people*.”

Antiochus received the news of his brother’s death, Seleucus IV, while he was in Athens. There he also heard that Heliodorus (one of the advisors/ministers of Seleucus IV) was plotting to seize power. This put ALL of Seleucus’ heirs in peril including Antiochus’ nephew who also was named Antiochus. Accordingly, Antiochus Epiphanes made haste to return to Syria under the guise of helping his nephew; and through political intrigue along the way he got the support of the King of Pergamum. Accordingly when Epiphanes arrived in Antioch, he was established as the co-ruler of Syria along with his nephew Antiochus; it was exactly as God predicted, “...through deception, he gained power!” Now in 170 BC, his nephew died which left Antiochus Epiphanes as the sole ruler of Syria.

Daniel 11:24, “In a time of tranquility he will enter the richest *parts* of the realm, and he will accomplish what his fathers never did, nor his ancestors; he will distribute plunder, booty, and possessions among them, and he will devise his schemes against strongholds, but *only* for a time.”

The beginning of Antiochus’ regency was accompanied by further bribes and pay-offs intended to solidify his power. This enabled him to bring down “strongholds” of political alliances that normally would have been against him. These “strongholds” even existed amongst God’s people. For example at this time, Onias III was high priest in Jerusalem and as such, and we must recognize this, he was placed there by God!<sup>1</sup> As high priest, Onias III was quite powerful. He held the highest political office in Jerusalem and so held great sway over the people of God throughout the Syrian empire. The problem was that he was pro-Egyptian.

Yet, he had a young brother named Jason who, like Onias, was a member of the priestly family and so qualified to be elected as High Priest had the people/God wanted him. It just so happened that he was pro-Syrian; in fact, he publically announced his desire to turn Jerusalem into a Greek city if only he were elected High Priest.

Based on the passage before us it would not surprise you to learn that Antiochus

manipulated the situation such that Onias was replaced by Jason as high priest!<sup>2</sup> God's people hated this! A pagan, outsider dictating who would represent them before God?<sup>3</sup> The result was great enmity between Antiochus Epiphanes and the people of God, an enmity that would result in great persecution against the people of God (which we'll see).

That is just one example of how this man involved himself in the political movings of his day. He constantly was manipulating people and situations to the benefit of himself. Accordingly, at times he could look like a Robin Hood, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor (an unprecedented act which "his fathers never did"). At other times, he came across as a ruthless leader, at the slightest provocation people died, were imprisoned, or deposed. Accordingly, he truly was a slick, evil man; just as God predicted, "...he w[ould] distribute plunder, booty, and possessions among them, and he w[ould] devise his schemes against strongholds..."

With this, Daniel's prophecy here turned its focus to Antiochus Epiphanes' first campaign against Egypt.

## Antiochus's First Egyptian Campaign (170 BC)

Daniel 11:25, "And he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army [this once again is the Ptolemies]; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he will not stand, for schemes will be devised against him."

Cleopatra, the daughter of Antiochus III and the wife of Ptolemy V, was the reigning power in Egypt. In 176 BC her son, Ptolemy VI Philometer, was finally old enough to take the throne, which he did. Perhaps to demonstrate his power, we do not know, Ptolemy Philometer began threatening his Seleucid neighbor which Antiochus was not going to long-endure. Accordingly Antiochus went out in battle against the Ptolemies near Pelusium. And it happened just as God's word predicted:

Daniel 11:26, "And those who eat his choice food will destroy him [Ptolemy VI], and his army will overflow, but many will fall down slain."

The battle was a route with Antiochus thoroughly destroying the forces of Ptolemy. However the blame for the loss rested with Ptolemy's advisors, who at this time were the power in Egypt. It was their counsel that Ptolemy followed in the conflict; it was their counsel that led to defeat. So it truly was "those who [ate] his choice food" who ultimately "destroyed him" at this time. The battle ended with discussions for surrender and reparations.

Daniel 11:27, “As for both kings, their hearts will be *intent* on evil, and they will speak lies *to each other* at the same table; but it will not succeed, for the end is still *to come* at the appointed time.”

Both kings sat down at a table and basically lied to one another, “*I’ll do this if you do that... and I’ll do that if you do this!*” Neither would hold up their side of the bargain. In the end however, Antiochus left the battle field the winner with a large payout in tow.

Daniel 11:28, “Then he will return to his land with much plunder; but his heart will be *set* against the holy covenant, and he will take action and *then* return to his *own* land.”-

Following the battle, Antiochus returned home which meant he had to pass through Jerusalem. We don’t know the cause of the ire here, perhaps it was on account of Jason’s high priesthood the people of God publically criticized Antiochus, his policies, and the war effort? Again, we don’t know. But this we do, when Antiochus arrived in Jerusalem he sacked the city, slaughtered people, and brought on cruel suffering amongst God’s people.

1 Maccabees 1:20-26a, 28, “After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance. Israel mourned deeply in every community, rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint... the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.”- hadn’t God promised to be God to these people and so protect them, look after them, and care for them? He did! That is why Antiochus’ abuse of the people here was seen as a direct attack against “the holy covenant.”

When our world attacks a Christian, they are attacking God; and God won’t be mocked! Remember what Christ told Saul when Saul was persecuting the church:

Acts 9:4, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Truly if you attack a child of God you attack his Lord! Accordingly, what Antiochus did here was a serious affront to God; eventually this evil man would pay the penalty (in fact, he is paying it now as I speak)! The next section advances the clock two years to Antiochus’s second Egyptian campaign.

Second Egyptian Campaign (168 BC)

Daniel 11:29-30a, “At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before. For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened...”

Once again, let me give you the historical background. Shortly following the military disaster of Pelusium, Ptolemy VI’s younger brother, Ptolemy VII, declared himself king. Accordingly, Egypt had two reigning kings at the time: Ptolemy VII who ruled from Alexandria and Ptolemy VI who ruled from Memphis. This kind of division was too good to pass up, and so Antiochus in 168 BC roused his troops in order to deal a deathblow once and for all against the Ptolemies. However as Antiochus moved toward Egypt, the Ptolemaic brothers reconciled and so stood as a united front against Antiochus.

In the meantime, “ships of Kittim... came against him.” Kittim was an ancient name for the Island of Cyprus. As this Island at the time did not have a navy, the reference of Kittim obviously refers to those who occupied the island at the time and who did have a navy... the Romans! Accordingly, the Ptolemy brothers appealed for help to Rome. In response the Roman consul, Popillius Laenas, presented Antiochus a senatorial decree that he remove himself from Egypt. Yet it wasn’t enough to order Antiochus to leave Egypt, Popillius Laenas thoroughly humiliated Antiochus! Truly, “it did not turn out the way it did before.”

Notice the first part of v. 30, “For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened...” The Roman consul, in front of Antiochus’ entire army, drew a circle in the sand around the Seleucid leader. He told Antiochus that he could not leave the circle until he gave his verbal response to the Roman decree. Talk about humiliating! Yet Antiochus knew better than fight with Rome, and so he gave his reply and withdrew from the battle plane.

This raised an important question! What was he to do? Any time he endeavors to flex his muscles, Rome would be there to stop him, yea, to humiliate him (think of his father, Antiochus III [Daniel 11:18] and what Rome did to him)! What he needed was a united base! Accordingly, from this point forward he acted to solidify his kingdom.

Daniel 11:30b, “...and [he] will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant.”

Prior to his second campaign against Egypt, Antiochus sold the High Priesthood to a Jewish man by the name of Menelaus. Yet Menelaus was regarded by the Jews as unfit to serve!<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, when word of Antiochus’ defeat at the hands of the Ptolemies/Rome got out, it was rumored that Antiochus had been killed. Accordingly, Jason (the previous High Priest whom Antiochus appointed) organized a regiment of a thousand armed supporters for a *coup d’etat*. He massacred a large number of citizens and shut Menelaus up in a citadel in Jerusalem.

On his return home, Antiochus received word that the High Priest whom HE appointed had been removed from office. In response, he began a religious persecution of unprecedented bitterness in which:

- Over 80,000 men, women, and children were put to the sword (2 Maccabees 5:11–14).
- Sabbath-keeping and the practice of circumcision were forbidden under pain of death.
- Pagan sacrifices and prostitution were established in the Temple.
- On a given Sabbath (because he knew God’s people wouldn’t lift a sword to protect themselves because they thought it would break the Sabbath), Antiochus sent his soldiers into a Jewish city under the guise of a parade. Many Jews came out to watch the excitement. He then ordered the soldiers to slaughter anyone and everyone they found: children, women, the elderly, etc... They pillaged, they burnt houses. In broad daylight they raped and defiled women and children. No effort was spared to destroy the faith of the people of God!

Daniel 11:31, “And forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.”

This reflected the second stage of Antiochus’ unification program. Again knowing that unity was the only way he could withstand the threat of Rome, Antiochus chose one of the many religions in his kingdom to be THE religion and so THE only valid god that could be worshipped. He chose the worship of Baal Shamem (the Syrian version of Zeus which represented their deity on earth as a pig). Accordingly, every person in the Seleucid Empire had to sacrifice a pig to honor their now, *one and only true god!* This meant that Syrian soldiers came to God’s temple in Jerusalem and forced the Jewish priests to sacrifice a pig on the altar and so worship Baal Shamem on behalf of the Jews. This is what was meant in this verse as “...the abomination of desolation.” What do you suppose God’s people did? They rebelled; well, not all of them, but a significant portion.

Daniel 11:32, “And by smooth *words* he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action.”

As you can imagine, there were Jews on both sides of the issue. Some thought it best simply to compromise and in time Antiochus would go home; so they compromised and sacrificed the pig. Others responded violently. In fact one such group known as the *Hasidim* (or men of the covenant; it is where the moniker “Hasidic” comes from today) took up arms and began fighting their Syrian taskmasters. One particular Jew at the time, an elderly man by the name of Mattathias, angrily killed another Jew who was endeavoring to sacrifice a pig on a local altar as well as his Syrian overlord. Mattathias then called all faithful Jews to follow him and his five sons to the mountains where they would mount a



rebellion which Antiochus and his descendants would NOT overcome. We know this rebellion as the Maccabean revolt!

Daniel 11:33, “And those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder, for *many days*.”-

This era would be a time of great conflict involving the loss of many lives. Because of the Maccabean revolt, Jews living throughout the Seleucid Empire would be slaughtered wholesale. Yet those who genuinely knew the Lord would inspire devotion and courage on the part of many. In Daniel’s day, godly devotion resulted in a powerful deliverance (Daniel 3:19-27). Such would NOT always be the case. During the era prophesied here, godliness would be met with severe persecution! Joyce Baldwin described it this way:

Daniel and his friends had been delivered by unusual divine interventions from death, but the warning here is that this will not always be the case. Sword and flame, captivity and plunder sum up the sufferings of faithful men and women to this day. (Baldwin, 2009, p. 217)

Daniel 11:34-35, “Now when they fall they will be granted a little help [this again is speaking about the Maccabean revolt], and many will join with them in hypocrisy. And some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure, until the end time; because *it is still to come* at the appointed time.”

There is much debate as to what the latter part of this verse means. However one might take it, we know that a horrible baptism awaited the people of God in the coming years. It wouldn’t always be a route. At times there would be “a little help.” Yet through it all, God would have His remnant of faithful servants who would not bow their knee to Baal!

In the next chapter we will study verse 35, “The Final Era.” For now, I want to pause with you and consider the significance of this passage!

As horrible, ruthless, and detrimental as was Antiochus Epiphanes when it came to the people of God, nevertheless that God gave this revelation to Daniel 400 years prior to the time indicates that even this was of the Lord! Secondly, truly, “the king’s heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord” (Proverbs 21:1)! Truly, the “nations are indeed a drop in a bucket” to the Lord (Isaiah 40:15)!

In referencing Isaiah 40:15, Spurgeon made the following comment with which I close:

Within the compass of a drop of water we are told that sometimes a thousand living creatures may be discovered; and to those diminutive creatures, no doubt, their size is something very important. There is a creature inside that drop which can only be seen by the strongest microscope, but it is a hundred times larger than its neighbor, and it

feels, no doubt, that the difference is amazing and extraordinary. But to you and to I, who cannot even see the largest of these creatures with the naked eye, the larger animalcule is as imperceptible as his dwarfish friend; they both seem so utterly insignificant that we squander whole millions of them, and are not very penitent if we destroy them by thousands. ¶ But what would one of those little imperceptible animals say if some prophet of its own kind could tell them that there is a 'giant being' living that would reckon the 'whole world of a drop of water' as nothing, and could take up ten thousand, thousands of those drops and scatter them without exertion of half its power; that this 'giant being' would not be encumbered if it should carry on the tip of its finger all the thousands that live in that great world; that this 'giant being' would have no disturbance of heart, even if the great king of one of the empires in that drop should gather all his armies against it and lead them to battle?

Why, then the minuscule creatures would say, 'How can this be? We can hardly grasp the idea?' But when that microscopic philosopher could have gotten an idea of man, and of the utter insignificance of its own self, and of its own little narrow world, then it would have achieved an easy task, compared with that which lies before us when we attempt to get an idea of our great God. We think of the infinite nature of God in being able to marshal all the stars, and govern all the orbs which bespangle the brow of night; but I take it to be quite as great a wonder that He should even know that such insignificant nothings as we humans are in existence..." (Spurgeon, 1862)

God not only knows of the most insignificant happenings of our lives, but He has ordained them- and get this, "that he might refine, purge, and make [His people] pure" (v. 35)! And because we know Him, by way of conviction we can say:

- There are no surprises to the Lord; what is, is as our kind Lord intended!
- "All things must therefore work together for good" in our lives!
- Though the present at times may look bleak, ours is a glorious future and so a "...well-spent journey though seven deaths lay between" (Red Trinity Hymnal #546)!

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> cf. Romans 13:1b-2a.

<sup>2</sup> Eventually, Onias would be assassinated on account of the plots which Antiochus initiated against him.

<sup>3</sup> More importantly, God hated Antiochus' actions. Again, from the outside what he did may have seemed insignificant, but realize he was playing with and so interfering with God!

<sup>4</sup> In order to pay his bribe to Antiochus, Menelaus sold some of the votive offerings and golden utensils of the temple.