

The Rebels Before the King *Daniel 11:1–4¹*

Introduction

Recently Pastor Gordon Dickson preached a series of messages from the book of Habakkuk.² The prophet asks questions that many Christians ask: *Why is it that the wicked prosper? How is it that justice is perverted? Why do you let the wicked live?* The Lord responds with words which resound with Kingly authority:

Habakkuk 1:5–11 ⁵ Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: For *I* will work a work in your days, *Which* ye will not believe, though it be told *you*. ⁶ For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, *that* bitter and hasty nation, Which shall march through the breadth of the land, To possess the dwelling places *that are* not theirs. ⁷ *They are* terrible and dreadful: Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. ⁸ Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, And are more fierce than the evening wolves: And their horsemen shall spread themselves, And their horsemen shall come from far; They shall fly as the eagle *that* hasteth to eat. ⁹ They shall come all for violence: Their faces shall sup up *as* the east wind, And they shall gather the captivity as the sand. ¹⁰ And they shall scoff at the kings, And the princes shall be a scorn unto them: They shall deride every strong hold; For they shall heap dust, and take it. ¹¹ Then shall *his* mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, *Imputing* this his power unto his god.

God assures Habakkuk that His rule had not been overridden by the evil “reign” of pagan nations. He had not abdicated His divine throne. Yet this can at times be hard to keep in our minds when we see nations (including our own) affirm that which God condemns and deny that which God commends.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; That put darkness for light, and light for darkness; That put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Still, even when we know that God condemns (i.e. pronounces “woe”) to those who are evil we face the question *Why?* Keep in mind one of the overarching purposes of Scripture (apart from the glory of God): *redemption of rebellious humanity*. To bring about His plan to redeem humanity God purposed to endure the wickedness of man for a season. Furthermore, He employed the evil acts of sinful man to accomplish His *good* purposes (cf. Gen. 50:20).

Psalms 76:10 (ESV) Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt.

God can and will accomplish His purposes even with the wicked acts of sinful people.

¹Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible King James Version.

²You can access recordings and pdf manuscripts from this sermon series here: <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/sermon-audio/>

Truth: *God permits evil to “reign” before the coming of the King.*

Daniel 11:1–4 Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, *even I*, stood to confirm and to strengthen him. ² And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than *they* all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. ³ And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. ⁴ And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.

This sermon will be a little different than what I normally preach. I will begin by explaining the historical correspondence to this prophetic text and then draw some principles and application at the end.

Review (Daniel 11:1)

Verse 1 of chapter 11 may seem somewhat confusing and out of place. Who is speaking? Who is the speaker “confirming and strengthening?” The simple answer is that this is the same messenger who was speaking at the end of chapter 10 who confirmed and strengthened Michael, the archangel. Apparently, there was a time earlier in history (first year of Darius, 538 B.C.) in which the archangel Michael needed the help of this messenger angel.

The Kings of the Persian Period (v. 2)

The angelic messenger continued his missive: “And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia” (v. 2). We have already learned about the Persian’s rise to dominance through Daniel’s previous prophetic utterances (Dan. 2:39; 8:1ff).

The main kings of the Persian period³ are as follows:

- ❖ Cyrus (539–529 B.C.)
- ❖ Cambyses (529–522 B.C.)
- ❖ Darius Hystaspes (521–486 B.C.)
- ❖ Xerxes (486–465 B.C.)

³There is some debate as to whether the phrase “there shall stand up yet three kings” (v. 2) *includes* Cyrus or whether it refers to three other kings *after* Cyrus. Some scholars suggest that these are in fact three kings after Cyrus, in which case the identity of these three kings would in all likelihood be Cambyses, Smerdis (522 B.C.) and then Darius Hystaspes. However, Smerdis only reigned for six months before being deposed by Darius Hystaspes and thus it seems unlikely that such an insignificant reign would be counted as legitimate. It seems best to see Cyrus as included in the three kings mentioned in Daniel 11:2. This suggestion is not out of place since there were other Persian kings after Xerxes (who provoked the anger of Alexander the Great) but they are not listed by this angelic messenger as being of any significance to the prophecy.

The first three kings (Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius Hystaspes) are the ones God’s angelic messenger refer to in verse 2. The Lord does not communicate anything of significance about the reign of these kings—merely that they will reign. The fourth king, however, prominently figures into the transition of the Persian period to the Grecian period.

“and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia”

The Lord reveals to Daniel that after the third Persian king there will arise a king who will be “far richer than them all” (v. 2). This was true of Xerxes (486–465 B.C.). His wealth was mainly passed down to him by the successful campaigns of his father, Darius Hystaspes. Xerxes (or as he is sometimes known, Ahasuerus) indulged himself on many occasions by throwing wild and exorbitant parties, the book of Esther containing an example (Esther 1:1ff).⁴ The Lord further reveals to Daniel that Xerxes would “stir up all against the realm of of Greece” (v. 2). Xerxes led a campaign against the kingdom of Greece, severely provoking one of the greatest military minds of all history who would come later: Alexander the Great.

Alexander the Great from Greece (vv. 3–4)

Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.) was one of the greatest military rulers in all of history, conquering all of the known world in swift fashion. His particular bitterness was directed toward Persia who had over a century before attacked and plundered his people. He waged war against the Persian empire in 334 B.C. and it was all but over by 331 B.C. Alexander had roused the people to attack the Persians who had once embarrassed them.

The historical record concerning Alexander was prophesied by Daniel through God’s angelic messenger in Daniel 11. The king who would overthrow the Medo-Persian empire would be “mighty” and “arise” with great prestige and power. He would “rule with great authority” (NASB) and “do as he pleases” (NASB). Indeed, Alexander did do as he pleased for he was the greatest ruling leader of the known world in his 20s.

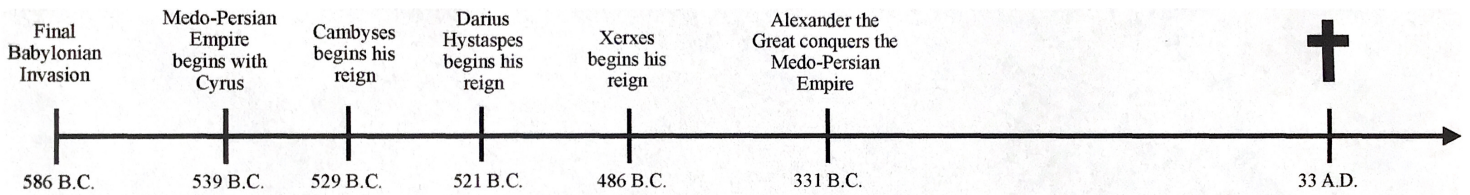
Unlike the divine King, every human king has fallen and the “great” Alexander was no different. He died at the age of 32 of a fever. His military achievements did nothing for him when he stood before the divine throne of the one and only true Sovereign. The angel told Daniel that this mighty king’s rise to power and fame would be short lived, for “his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those” (v. 4). Because he died at such a young age Alexander did not have a son old enough to rule in his stead. As a result, history records that his kingdom was divided into four portions amongst his military leaders:

- Lysimachus — Thrace and Bithynia (and much of Asia Minor)

⁴Like so much of Daniel 11–12 there is debate as to whether or not this Xerxes is the same person as Ahasuerus mention in the book of Esther. Good men disagree, but I am inclined to see the “fourth king” of Daniel 11:2 as the same king who figures prominently in the book of Esther.

- Cassander — Macedonia and Greece
- Seleucus I — Syria, Babylonia, and the lands to the east
- Ptolemy I — Egypt, Israel, and Arabia Petrea⁵

None of Alexander’s progeny would receive his throne. Just as fast as his military might and power arose, so too did it quickly fade away for none of his successors “came close to having the authority he exercised.”⁶ Such was what the angel told Daniel, for he said those who succeeded Alexander would not rule “according to his authority which he wielded” (NASB).



Principles and Applications

So what is the point of this all? Daniel receives a vision in which the angelic messenger shares with him a prophetic word concerning the very nation he was serving in that moment. Why? In order to answer this question we must first remember what Daniel’s point is in writing his book:

Daniel 4:32b ...until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

So we establish this point: *God has the sovereign right and authority to assign to nations the rulers He ordains because He is the ultimate King*. The Lord reigns over history for He is the Author of it. And the ultimate goal of His Story is to exalt His name amongst the nations.

Consider the following verses:

1 Chronicles 20:6 And said, O Lord God of our fathers, *art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand *is there not* power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?*

Psalms 59:13 Consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*, that they *may not be*: And let them know that God ruleth in Jacob Unto the ends of the earth. Selah.

Psalms 66:7 He ruleth by his power for ever; His eyes behold the nations: Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

Psalms 103:19 The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; And his kingdom ruleth over all.

Revelation 19:11–16 ¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

⁵As found in J. Paul Tanner’s Commentary *Daniel* from the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary Series (Lexham Press, 2020), p. 649.

⁶Ibid.

¹² His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³ And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

There is no question that God rules in His divine kingdom. It is this divine kingdom and Ruler all people are called to submit. Anything short of submission is outright rebellion.

Second, *we can further establish that God in His infinite wisdom permits the wicked to reign for a short while*. After all, did not our God permit Adam and Eve to sin? Did not the Lord of the universe spare for a time the physical lives of two rebels in the Garden of Eden rather than incinerating them with His righteous judgment the moment they rebelled? The fact that sinful people receive their next breath is the merciful act of indescribable patience by a holy God. These rebellious kings never once acknowledged the one true God. Their actions were done for self-serving purposes. No ancient historian records a single one of these pagan kings submitting to the rule of Almighty God, nor do any students of history find that these ancient kings recognized that their authority was granted to them by God (cf. Rom. 13:1).

A third truth we can keep in mind is *God orchestrated the events of this ancient history to prepare the way for the coming of the Promised One*. The driving motivation behind the Old Testament narrative is not only God's proper desire for glorification in the eyes of humanity, but also His plan of redemption for those sinful people. From the prophetic word by God in Genesis 3:15 to the promise of a coming Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, the Lord has been orchestrating the events of history to accomplish that purpose (for which reason we cry, *Hallelujah!*). Jesus the Christ came to earth with the goal of living the righteous, actively obedient life we cannot live so as to provide for us imputed righteousness. He further came to die a substitutionary death which atones for our sins. All of the sordid acts done by these rebellious men were stepping stones to the One who would redeem His church with His blood (Eph. 5:25–27).

To the Praise of His Glorious Grace

D. A. Carson

What astonishing mercy and power:
In accord with his pleasure and will
He created each planet, each flower,
Every galaxy, microbe, and hill.
He suspended the planet in space
To the praise of his glorious grace.

Provisionally ruling all things
To conform to the end he designed,
He mysteriously governs, and brings
His eternal wise plans into time.
He works out every step, every trace,
To the praise of his glorious grace.

We were blessed in the heavenly realms
Long before being included in Christ.
Since we heard the good news, overwhelmed,
We reach forward to seize Paradise.
We shall see him ourselves, face to face,
To the praise of his glorious grace.