

Daniel 10:20–11:35

Introduction

Last week, we came to the beginning of the end of Daniel. The last of the four visions in the second half of Daniel covers the last three chapters (10-12; after the Four Beasts that came up out of the sea [7], the Ram and the Goat [8], and the seventy sevens [9]). Daniel had been mourning and fasting and praying for three weeks because of the news that the work of rebuilding was already meeting powerful opposition. The people were discouraged, and the work had come to a halt. This is the news that's caused Daniel such distress and anguish. This combined with the fact that Daniel knows that even when Jerusalem is rebuilt, there will still be 62 more sevens of "troubled times" and then final, eschatological judgment poured out on the earthly city and temple. The more Daniel understands, the more Daniel realizes he doesn't understand. So he prays, crying out for understanding of what the future holds for his people (cf. 10:12, 14). It's in answer to these prayers that a word was revealed to Daniel in a vision, and the word was true, and it was about a "great conflict" – it was a message of battle and war (10:1), of a "troubled time" for God's people. This "great conflict" that will engulf God's people will be the visible manifestation of a spiritual conflict that rages in the heavenly places. So last week we heard the angelic messenger say to Daniel:

- Daniel 10:13 — The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia.

And now, this morning, we pick up with these verses:

I. Daniel 10:20–11:1 — Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth. There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince. And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede [three years earlier in the year that Cyrus issued the decree allowing the Jews to return home], I stood up to confirm and strengthen him [Michael]."

Here is just a small window into the realities of the spiritual realm. We have to exercise great caution and restraint here. What does it look like for spiritual powers and spirit beings to fight against one another? We're not told. What exactly is the nature of the interplay between the spiritual conflict in the heavenly places and the religious and political and military conflicts on earth? We're not told. Are there really angels and demons "behind every bush"? We're not told. These are things shrouded in mystery because for the most part, the spirit world has always remained invisible to us. It's this invisibility that ought to be a caution to us. The point of this invisibility is that we are meant to know *only* the things revealed to us in God's Word, and no more. That's all we need to know.

When the veil is pulled back for just a moment on this conflict between the spiritual powers of light and darkness (between this angelic being and Michael and the prince of Persia and then the prince of Greece), what we're meant to see is that the whole history of the world is revolving

around the history of God’s saving, redeeming purposes for His people. Only rarely can we see how this is, but this we can always know and understand by faith: If the whole history of the world is revolving around God’s redeeming purposes for His people—for us, then there’s nothing in the whole history of the world that could ever happen by chance or that could ever fall outside of the sovereign decree of God.

The angel says that he will tell Daniel things already “inscribed in the book of truth.” And what we’re about to see in the most amazing fashion is that this “book of truth” encompasses everything in all parts of God’s creation past, present, and future. In other words, there’s nothing that will ever happen that’s not already been written down and inscribed—even before the world began—in this book of truth. The angel doesn’t say: I will tell you what God has foreseen will happen. He says, “I will tell you what is inscribed [or we could say, “what is decreed and determined”] in the book of truth.” Saying that God has written down ahead of time what He has foreseen *will* happen does nothing to answer the questions and difficulties that we all have as finite creatures (this is why people resort to Open Theism). Instead, it robs us of the one “answer” that the Bible does give us – and that answer is simply *God*, and *who* God is. The “book of truth” is not the record of what God has infallibly predicted in His foresight (that would be fatalism), but rather the record of what God in the impenetrable mystery of His sovereignty has infallibly decreed for the history of the world – a history, we remember now, that revolves always around God’s redeeming purposes for His people. This should be an immense and an unceasing comfort to us in these days and always; this should be an awesome incentive to faithfulness and obedience; and this should cause us all to worship God in true humility – with reverence and awe.

The Book of Truth doesn’t lead us to fatalism. “Even though” this angel has had a part of this book already revealed to him (the part concerning Persia and Greece, and finally Rome), he still goes forth to fight and contend against the powers of darkness – against the princes of Persia and Greece, and finally Rome. He still goes forth to fight in the conflict; and therefore, as we’re about to see, so do we – even unto death. Though we have not seen all that is written in the book of truth, the very fact that it exists—and that God has written it—is a glorious incentive to faithfulness and obedience. So now let’s come to see just one specific part of what was inscribed in this book of truth:

Persia (11:2)

II. Daniel 11:2 — And now I will show you the truth (cf. 10:1). 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.

When Daniel hears that three more kings will arise in Persia, what he’s really hearing is that this is time that still has to pass before Messiah’s kingdom – before the salvation of God’s people. This is the time that God’s people will remain a small and vulnerable remnant, surrounded by the mighty, warring nations and empires of the world. And yet he remembers, too, that this is what has been inscribed and decreed in the book of truth – the book that God has written, not man, and certainly not any of the kings of Persia.

“Three more kings shall arise in Persia”—Cambyses (530-522 BC), Gaumata (522 BC), and Darius I (522-486 BC)—followed by a fourth king who will be far richer than the previous three and who will stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. This fourth king is Xerxes, or as he’s known in the book of Esther, Ahasuerus (486-465 BC). You can read a description of Xerxes’ riches in Esther chapter one where he hosts a banquet probably in preparation for the military campaign he was planning at that very time against Greece. Daniel doesn’t know this, but these four Persian kings take him about 55 years into the future.

There were six more Persian kings after Xerxes but the angel skips over these in complete silence. This is probably because on the one hand, the Persian empire reached its zenith under Xerxes, while on the other hand it was Xerxes invasion of Greece that began the chain of events ultimately leading to Persia’s fall to Greece. When the angel continues in verse three with the kingdom of Greece, completely unbeknownst to Daniel he’s just skipped over 135 years of Persian history. This should be a warning to us. The point of this vision, as detailed as it is, was not to enable God’s people to read the “signs of the times.” God could also have included for Daniel all the names of the kings and the dates of their reigns because these things were also inscribed in the book of truth, but He doesn’t include them – and there’s a reason He doesn’t. The point was not to enable God’s people to write their own school history books ahead of time. An unannounced 135 year “hole” in the history that skips six kings would have thrown a huge wrench in those plans. Even more importantly, the main point of this vision, as detailed as it is, was not to give *us* the chance of putting everything together after the fact and then being amazed at the precision of this prophecy (though we certainly can be amazed). The point of revealing this tiny excerpt from the book of truth was to call God’s people to persevere in faithfulness and obedience in the midst of a “great conflict” all the way until the end – until the God who has inscribed and decreed all things in the book of truth has fulfilled His saving promises. So now we go on to read in verses 3-4:

Greece (11:3-4)

III. Daniel 11:3-4 — Then [after 135 more years of Persian rule] a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. 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 back today, we know that this “mighty king” was Alexander the Great (334-323 BC) who conquered the Persian empire and established the dominance and power of the Greeks. We can also see, looking back, that Alexander died in his prime (at the age of 32) and at the height of his power, and that his kingdom was divided up not among his children but between four of his generals (Greece and Macedon ruled by Antigonus and then Cassander; Thrace and Asia Minor ruled by Lysimachus; Syria and Mesopotamia ruled by Seleucus I; Egypt and Palestine ruled by Ptolemy I; see map on p. 8).

Why does all this matter to Daniel? Because it’s in these times, in the midst of all these great rulers and empires and powers, that God’s people will be living, sometimes just fighting for their survival as a people in the world – waiting for their Messiah and for Messiah’s kingdom. That’s

why these things matter to Daniel. We can't rightly read these verses unless we put ourselves in Daniel's shoes – and have Daniel's heart. All of these great events in history ultimately only matter in so far as they're revolving around God's saving, redeeming purposes for His people.

Of the four kingdoms that emerged from Alexander's empire, the angel focuses only on two – the “king of the south” and the “king of the north.”

The Kings of the South and the Kings of the North (11:5-20)

IV. Daniel 11:5–6 — Then the king of the south [**Ptolemy I; 323-285 BC**] shall be strong, but one of his princes [**Seleucus I; 311-280 BC**] shall be stronger than he and shall rule [**in the north**], and his authority shall be a great authority. After some years **THEY** shall make an alliance [**ca. 250 BC**], and the daughter [**Berenice**] of the king of the south [**Ptolemy II; 285-246 BC**] shall come to the king of the north [**Antiochus II; 261-246 BC**] to make an agreement [**in marriage**]. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm [**Antiochus would return to his former wife, Laodice, who would then poison Berenice and her son**], and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her [**Ptolemy II**], and he who supported her [**Antiochus II**] in those times.

The king of the south is to the south of Palestine and the king of the north is to the north of Palestine, and of course Palestine itself is located on the narrow land-bridge between the sea and the desert that connects the south and the north. So as Daniel hears these things about the kings of the south and of the north he thinks of the small and insignificant people of God caught in the middle. But he also reminds himself that these are all things inscribed in God's book of truth and that they all revolve, ultimately, around God's redeeming purposes for His people. Behind this earthly conflict is always the spiritual conflict in the heavenly places.

Notice how the angel moves from one king to another without telling Daniel there's been any change at all. One minute the “king of the south” is Ptolemy I and the next minute he's Ptolemy II (something we can only know with the benefit of hindsight). Just based on what the angel says, Daniel could naturally have assumed that it would be Ptolemy I and Seleucus I who would make an alliance (without knowing their names ahead of time), when in fact it would be Ptolemy II and Antiochus II, their successors (Antiochus I [280-261 BC] is skipped entirely). We see again that the real point of these verses is not understanding all the details of their fulfillment, but rather understanding that all of history has been decreed ahead of time by the God who has committed Himself to saving and redeeming His people. So we go on, now, to read from the book of truth.

V. Daniel 11:7–12 — And from a branch from her roots [**her father**] one shall arise in his [**Ptolemy II's**] place [**Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III, 246-221 BC**]. He [**Ptolemy III**] shall come against the army [**to avenge the poisoning of his sister**] and enter the fortress of the king of the north [**Seleucus II; 246-226 BC**], and he shall deal with them and shall prevail [**Laodice was captured and executed**]. He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold [**Ptolemy III returned to Egypt the gods that had been carried to Persia by Cambyses in 525 BC (almost 300 years earlier)**]. For this, the Egyptians called Ptolemy III their “benefactor”], and for some years he shall refrain from

attacking the king of the north [**Ptolemy had to deal with rebellion in Egypt**]. Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land [**Seleucus II attempted an unsuccessful invasion of Egypt in 242 BC**].

His [**Seleucus II**] sons [**Seleucus III (226-223 BC) was murdered and succeeded by his brother Antiochus III (223-187 BC)**] shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, and he [**Antiochus III / Antiochus the Great**] shall keep coming and overflow and pass through [**regaining territory in Syria and campaigning in Palestine**], and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress [**now, without explanation, Ptolemy IV; 221-204 BC**].

Then the king of the south [**Ptolemy IV**], moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north [**Antiochus III**]. And he [**Antiochus**] shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his [**Ptolemy's**] hand [**in 217 BC at the battle of Raphia in Palestine**]. And when the multitude is taken away, his [**Ptolemy's**] heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands [**suppressing revolts in Egypt? Killing many at Raphia?**], but he shall not prevail [**Ptolemy IV was given to a dissolute life of ease and did not capitalize on his victories in battle**].

Notice the constant “his’s” and “he’s.” One reason we can find this passage so confusing is because without the benefit of knowing history from other sources, it’s very often impossible for us to know who the “he” or the “his” refers to. It certainly would have been impossible for Daniel to know. But don’t let the “he’s” and the “his’s” discourage you. Knowing who they are is not the point. Knowing that God knows and has inscribed all these things in the book of truth before the world ever existed is the point. In other words, you don’t have to read Daniel 11 side by side with a history book in order to be edified and established in faith. You will not have to remember this slide in order to read Daniel 11 and gain true insight and understanding. The point, here, is not apologetics after the fact, but rather faith before the fact.

VI. Daniel 11:13–20 — And the king of the north [**Antiochus III**] shall again raise a multitude, greater than the first. And after some years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies. In those times many shall rise against the king of the south [**now, without explanation, Ptolemy V; 204-181 BC**], and the violent among your own people [**the pro-Ptolemaic or pro-Seleucid parties of the Jews who are always caught in the middle**] shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision [**in order to fulfill these words and what has been decreed?**], but they shall fail.

Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siegeworks and take a well-fortified city [**Sidon in 198 BC?**]. And the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand [**the troops under siege in Sidon were weakened by famine**]. 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 [**Palestine now came permanently under the control of the Seleucids**], with destruction in his hand.

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 [**Antiochus III**] shall give him [**Ptolemy V**] the daughter of women [**his own daughter Cleopatra**] to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage [**Cleopatra would be loyal to Ptolemy, her husband, rather than undermining his kingdom for the profit of her father**]. Afterward he [**Antiochus III**] shall turn his face to the coastlands and shall capture many of them [**even invading Greece**], but a commander [**the**

Roman commander Lucius Cornelius Scipio] shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him [**Antiochus became a Roman vassal and sent twenty hostages, including his son Aniochus IV, to Rome**]. 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 [**Antiochus III was killed attempting to rob a temple in order to pay the tribute required by Rome**].

Then shall arise in his place one [**Seleucus IV; 187-175 BC**] who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom [**Seleucus IV sent his finance minister, Heliodorus, to Jerusalem to raid the temple treasury in order to pay Rome**]. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle [**Seleucus IV was poisoned by Heliodorus**].

Antiochus IV (Epiphanes; 11:21-35)

VII. Daniel 11:21–24 — 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 [**Antiochus IV / Epiphanes (175-164 BC) was released from Rome in a hostage exchange and usurped his nephew’s throne by intrigue**]. Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant [**the Jewish high priest?**]. And from the time that an alliance is made with him [**by one of the two Jewish high priests who bribed him for the position?**] he shall act deceitfully [**deposing Onias, the rightful high priest and then also Jason, the high priest he had set up in Onias’ place**], and he shall become strong with a small people [**the Jews who supported Antiochus? The small Syrian nation?**]. Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers’ fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time [the time appointed in the book of truth].

Notice all the question marks. There are some aspects of the fulfillment of this prophecy that aren’t clear – either because we don’t know enough of the history of that time or because we can’t be sure of exactly what is meant in Daniel. But rather than frustrate us, this should just be another reminder of what the main point of these verses really is. The main point is not filling in the blanks afterwards. The main point is understanding by faith, with Daniel, that the future is simply the unfolding in time and history of what God has inscribed in the book of truth even before the world began.

VIII. Daniel 11:25–32 — And he [**Antiochus IV**] shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south [**now, without explanation, Ptolemy VI, 181-146 BC**] with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. Even those who eat his food shall break him [**the two advisors of Ptolemy VI gave him bad counsel, encouraging him to retake Palestine**]. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain.

And as for the two kings [**Ptolemy VI and Antiochus IV**], their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table [**pretending to work together against Ptolemy VII**], but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed [**by God in the book of truth**]. And he [**Antiochus IV**] shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. And he shall work his will and return to his own land [**Antiochus returned to his land from Egypt and raided the temple in Jerusalem on the way, shedding much blood; cf. 1 Macc. 1:20-24**].

At the time appointed [**the time appointed by God in the book of truth; 168 BC**] he [**Antiochus IV**] shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before. For ships of Kittim [**Roman ships under the command of Gaius Popilius Laenas**] shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged [**Antiochus was publicly humiliated by the Romans**] and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate [**an idol of Zeus was set up and sacrifices offered to it on the altar**]. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant [**Menelaus, the high priest, and his followers**] but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action [**Mattathias, the priest, and his followers; the Maccabean revolt; 1 Macc. 1:62-63**].

The bloodshed and slaughter and the suffering of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes is well-known. It was in his days that simply to be a faithful Jew living in obedience to God's law was made a capital offense. "Circumcision [the covenant sign], possession of the Scriptures, sacrifices, feast days, and other practices were forbidden on penalty of death" (Steinmann; 1 Macc. 1:29-35; 41-51, 56-57). It was in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes that an abomination of desolation was set up in the temple – the very temple that Daniel, some 370 years earlier, is still longing to see rebuilt. We go on to read in verses 33-35:

IX. Daniel 11:33–35 — 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 [**from who/where?**]. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery [**insincerely, only when it's convenient**], 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 [**the time appointed by God in the book of truth**].

It might seem to Daniel—and to us!—that this should already be the end. How much more can God's people endure before their Messiah finally comes? But this still isn't the end. As we'll see next week, there's still more and even greater suffering to come.

Conclusion

Is there really any meaning in all of this? Someone once described history as "a trash bag of random coincidences torn open in a wind" (Joseph Heller; quoted in Duguid). After reading a passage like Daniel 11, maybe we can understand why. Politics, plotting and intrigue, assassinations, marriage alliances, stratagems, battles and war, rebellions, cruelty and oppression, suffering and bloodshed, and God's people caught in the middle of it all. It can all seem to us so terribly haphazard and random and out of control – meaningless and pointless. But what we learn from this chapter is that all of these things were inscribed long before they ever happened—even before the world began—in God's book of truth. All of these things are therefore in some way revolving around and subservient to God's redeeming purposes for His chosen, covenant people – for us. And so we can face the future as well as the present—with all of its seeming "random coincidences"—with an unshakable confidence that there's nothing in the whole history of the world that ever happens by chance. There's nothing that ever happens in the whole history of the

world that is not ultimately the unfolding of what has already been written down and inscribed in God’s book of truth.

This doesn’t lead us to fatalism. The very fact that such a book “exists”—and that God has “written” it—is a glorious incentive to live faithfully and obediently even in the midst of suffering and persecution – to fight the good fight of faith and take hold of that eternal life to which we have been called (1 Tim. 6:12). In fact, it’s the suffering that God decrees for His people that “refines” them and “purifies” them and “makes them white,” preparing them for an “eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Notice how the angel describes God’s faithful people. They are “the wise” who have “understanding” (who “make many understand”). Do we have this wisdom and this understanding that enables us to be faithful even unto death?

