

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker
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Daniel 11:1-35 (read vv.2-5, 21-35) “The Reign of Rebellion”

Intro. We are living in an age of rebellion against God. This is nothing new. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and mankind has done so ever since. The 11th chapter of Daniel gives an account of man’s rebellion, both politically and spiritually, from the time of Daniel, all the way until the time that Jesus comes again. This prophecy describes a series of political leaders who are self-willed and rebellious against the righteous law of God. They also have a lust for political power and riches.

Now as I share about these leaders, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that Jesus is coming again, and He will put an end to man’s rebellion and the suffering that man’s rebellion has caused. The bad news is that man’s rebellion will continue for at least 7 more years, probably longer.

Recently in our study of Daniel, we have learned about Israel’s rebellion, and how they suffered for it with the Babylonian captivity. But the chastening of the captivity did not change most of the Jews. Many continued to rebel. Most did not want to go back to their homeland and rebuild. So the Babylonian captivity was not the end of their chastening, for God warned Daniel in this chapter that there was much more suffering to come for His people the Jews. In fact, I believe that v.35 indicates that the Jewish nation would suffer on and off right on up to the end time. That is exactly what has happened. More recently millions suffered and died under Hitler, and some Jews continue to suffer from their enemies to this day. Antisemitism even takes place in our country. Their only hope for an end of their suffering and lasting peace is to believe in the Messiah. When the nation of Israel turns to Jesus Christ, the Messianic kingdom of peace and justice will soon follow (Acts 3:19-20).

The eleventh chapter of Daniel is a very lengthy, detailed, and complicated chapter. There are matters there if we took the time to really go into them verse by verse, it would be of little interest to most of you. After all, what Daniel wrote in this chapter for the most part has already been fulfilled in history from the fourth to the second centuries B.C. So I am going to just give an overview of the first part of this chapter, along with some of the main lessons. However, I must add that what he wrote here *was* still future for Israel, and considering the fact that prophecy was about to end for about 400 years, it was very important that Daniel give this prophecy to his people. They needed to know what they would face.

Now this vision that Daniel has is divided into three parts. The first part, verses 1-20 is a presentation of the Persian and Greek world, especially of the wars between Egypt and Syria. God warned that the nation of Israel would be caught in between. The 2nd part, verse 21-35, is a delineation of Antiochus Epiphanies, a prototype of the ultimate, final dictator of the world, the antichrist. As the prophecy continues it fades from the picture of Antiochus Epiphanies into the portrayal of that Antichrist, which is the 3rd part of this chapter, from verses 36 to the end of the chapter. As it turns out, I will share that text next Sunday evening.

Now let’s begin by considering together:

I. AN OVERVIEW OF ISRAEL'S SUFFERING FROM GENTILE RULERS

The details of the prophecy of vv.2-35 are so accurate from history that unbelievers dismiss this as prophecy. They say it must have been written in the 2nd century B.C. by someone posing as Daniel. But I have no trouble believing in a God who knows the end from the beginning! (Isa. 46:10). In the book of Matthew, the Lord Jesus makes reference to Daniel the prophet and the Lord Jesus specifically refers to verses in this chapter of Daniel! I'll take the word of the Lord Jesus anytime over the word of the critics.

Now these verses tell of several rulers that Israel would suffer under:

A. Ahasuerus – In v.2 we read, “Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece.” Although there were more than 4 kings in Persia, the angel identified 3 who ruled before a fourth, who was the most significant. This fourth king was probably Xerxes, also known in the book of Esther as Ahasuerus. He had enormous wealth, and he commanded one of the largest armies of the ancient world. It numbered up to two million men. He attacked Greece as the prophecy indicates but suffered loss. It was under his reign that the Jews came close to being exterminated. For the next 150 years several others reigned in Persia, but then arose a mighty king in Greece named:

B. Alexander the Great - The people of Greece hated Persia, and Alexander helped them avenge against Persia, defeating the last Persian monarch, Darius III, in 330 B.C. As a result, notice what the prophecy says about:

1. The Dominion of His Empire – In v.3 we read, “Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion...” Truly he had great dominion, for he stands out in history as one of history's most remarkable military leaders. By the age of 33 he had conquered the known world. It is said that he wept because there were no other kingdoms that he could conquer. He knew little about the kingdoms of the far east beyond the Himalayas. He became an absolute monarch as a result of the power of his personality, leadership, and military might. With such power he was able to do “according to his will,” as stated in the last of v.3. He is a type of the power of the coming antichrist.

2. The Division of His Empire – In v.4 we read, “And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these.” Daniel says that his kingdom would be divided, “but not among his posterity.” Alexander had a half-brother who was mentally disabled, an illegitimate son, and a baby born after he had died, Alexander IV. All were murdered to prevent his posterity from having a claim to the throne, which fulfilled this prophecy. As a result, his kingdom was divided between 4 generals.

With political power divided, it wasn't long before the next prophecy was fulfilled. Here we read about:

3. The Duel within the Empire (vv.5-8) - Two of those four kingdoms, Syria to the north of Israel, and Egypt to the south, are the focus of vv.5-20. The northern leaders formed the Seleucid dynasty, which the Ptolemies ruled the south. The details of this prophecy were fulfilled accurately. Israel was between those two kingdoms geographically and would be affected most by

these kingdoms. Both the Seleucids and the Ptolemies claimed the territory of Israel. That set the stage of military conflict.

Next we read about a powerful leader in the Seleucid Kingdom to the north, and that was:

C. Antiochus the Great – Now let's see how he rises to power. Beginning in v.9 we read about:

1. The Revenge of the North (vv.9-10) - Understanding that v.9 accurately refers to the king of the north, it is clear that the two sons mentioned in v.10 were those of [Seleucus II] Callin'icus. One died, leaving Antiochus the Great to avenge his father's death. Next we read about:

2. The Retaliation of the South (vv.11-12) - Ptolemy IV Philo'pator mustered 70,000 soldiers, 5,000 cavalry, and 73 elephants and won a victory against Antiochus at Raphia in the most southern part of Palestine. But that victory didn't strengthen the king of the south, who was content to return to Egypt, and Antiochus retreated to Antioch. Then we read about:

3. The Return of the North (vv.13-20) - 13 years later, Antiochus returned to fight Egypt with a great army to get his revenge. After all, Ptolemy IV and his queen had died. V.13 says, "For the king of the North will return and muster a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come at the end of some years with a great army and much equipment." Then v.14 shows that certain Jews who were revolutionaries joined the cause of the king of the north to aid him in his attack on Egypt. Antiochus the Great entered into "the glorious land" (v.16) of Israel to fight the armies of the south. So because some Jews had assisted him, he treated them with favor, even though he maintained authority over them. Antiochus restored much of the territory of the Seleucid Empire. So during his reign Palestine shifted from Egyptian control to Seleucid control.

Then, v.17 shows that he tried to strengthen his kingdom by establishing an alliance with Egypt by giving his lovely daughter Cleopatra in marriage to the Egyptian King. He hoped his daughter would serve as a spy, and make Egypt let down their guard. But his plan did not work, for she was more loyal to her new husband than to her father!

Later, Antiochus faced the threat of the Romans, who were becoming stronger, and didn't want to see the powers of Syria and Egypt unite. They deterred his aggression, as we see in v.18. After Rome had humiliated Antiochus with defeat, he was forced to return to the fortresses of his own land. He tried to plunder the temple of Jupiter in his own land but was murdered in the process in 187 B.C. Antiochus had restored much of the territory of the Seleucid Empire. Then, Rome forced the son and successor of Antiochus (Seleucus IV Philopator) to pay 1000 talents annually to reimburse Rome for their losses and to keep Rome off his back. Therefore, he had to raise taxes as we read in v.20. He didn't reign long, for he was evidently assassinated in 176 B.C. People aren't going to pay high taxes for long!

What is the lesson here? God is simply warning His people of the suffering that they would face. They would face armies traveling back and forth through their land. They would face oppression and heavy taxes. God did not want His people taken by surprise regarding these events. They should trust Him to help them through those difficult times. But the worst was yet to come, as we see beginning in v.21. There were read of:

II. ISRAEL'S SUFFERING UNDER ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES

Even though in the course of Gentile history the man Antiochus Epiphanes was a relatively small and diminutive ruler, he is given much space in this prophecy because he does so much harm to God's people, the Jews. Notice we read in this prophecy of:

A. His Accession to Power (vv.21-24) - Antiochus Epiphanies, the youngest son of Antiochus the Great, had no right to reign. His elder brother (Seleucus IV Philopator) reigned upon the death of their father, and his brother's son, Demetrius, would have been the successor. However, the younger Antiochus (A.K.A. Mithridates) was able to accede to the throne in 175 B.C. after he had been released as a hostage in Rome. Indeed, the last of v.21 says, "he shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue." He gained the throne by flattery and bribery. He was a master politician. Then notice in the middle of v.23 that "he shall act deceitfully...." Imagine a politician using deception!

Now notice in v.24 how he gained more political power, "He shall enter peaceably, even into the richest places of the province; and he shall do what his fathers have not done, nor his forefathers: he shall disperse among them the plunder, spoil, and riches; and he shall devise his plans against the strongholds, but only for a time." When he saw that there were crops or money to be gained, he confiscated them from the rich and distributed them to the poor to gain greater acceptance of the masses—he was a self-styled Robin Hood. He also plotted the destruction of strong communities ("strongholds") in his kingdom to weaken them so he could effectively exercise his growing power. Once again we see a ruler's lust for power and riches.

Next, notice from this prophecy:

B. His Aggression – This was the common way to expand power and riches, as we see in vv.25-35. First we see his aggression:

1. Against Egypt – It's the same story repeated yet again. V.25 says, "He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the South with a great army. And the king of the South shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand, for they shall devise plans against him." We know from v.26 and history that the young Ptolemy's own trusted counselors, who had shared meals with him, plotted against him. In v.27 we read, "Both these kings' hearts shall be bent on evil, and they shall speak lies at the same table...." They shall engage in political deliberations, characterized by making promises not meant to be kept. Sounds like modern times!

After gaining some success in Egypt, he next turns:

2. Against Israel - Beginning in v.28 we read how the Jews suffered under him. Because of Roman intervention, Antiochus failed to gain full control of Egypt. As he returned home, he passed through Jerusalem and plundered it, including the temple. By cruelly slaughtering the Jews there, he brought about horrible suffering. Two years later he tried to fight Egypt again, as stated in v.29, but "ships from Cyprus" intervened. Actually, they were from "Kittim," a general term for the island people of the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans were behind this action. And once again, Antiochus vented his anger against the Jews and the Temple of "the holy covenant" in Jerusalem, as we see in the last of v.30. On the Sabbath, he sent his soldiers through the city to slaughter all the women and children they could find. He sold off many Jews as slaves. Then he made heathen idolatry mandatory. He allowed the nakedness of athletes to be flaunted in full view of the Temple grounds. V.31 says, "And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation." Once in Jerusalem, he put guards around the Temple to prevent anyone from worshipping and making sacrifices. Not only did he stop the Jewish sacrifices to their God, but he even erected a statue of Zeus¹ on the bronze altar in the temple and sacrificed swine in the temple

¹ The Syrian version of Zeus was Baal Shamem.

and made the priests eat pork (1 Macc. 1:44-47; Ant. XII 253). His abomination brought a desolate condition to the Temple. Jesus referred to the “abomination of desolation” in Mt. 24:15. So the Jews endured incredible suffering during the reign of Antiochus, especially the Jews who sought to remain faithful to their God.

Now I want to move from the details of fulfilled prophecy to:

C. The Lessons:

1. God Has a Purpose in Allowing His People to Suffer. In fact, He would even allow *great* suffering. In v.35 we see God’s purpose for all this, “And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end...” The ultimate purpose was “to refine them” and “purify them.” Nothing is as effective in driving people to God as suffering. Suffering from God’s chastening hand is for this purpose. Many in Israel suffered for this reason. But even the godly may suffer, not because God is chastening them, but He allows it to make us even more pure. In times of suffering, we become less self-reliant and instead we rely more on God. We experience spiritual growth through times of suffering. Romans 5:3-4 says, “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

God also warns New Testament Christians that He may allow us to suffer. Another purpose of suffering is to test the genuineness or depth of our faith. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:7, “that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” What would you do if you had to choose between being faithful to Christ and suffering persecution? What are we going to do if the government command us to stop gathering for worship due to a new lockdown order? Christian teachers are being forced to call a boy who claims to be a girl by the pronoun “she” or lose their job. There are many in our world, even today, who are suffering for their faith. It has been estimated that the number of martyrs of the Christian faith in a recent 10-year period was 900,000! So don’t expect to be exempt from suffering.

2. Don’t Give in to the Pressure – There is a contrast here in vv.30 & 32. In v.30 he mentions “those who forsake the holy covenant.” Some Jews, under government pressure, were willing to forsake their religious heritage and accept not only Greek culture, but even Greek religion. Don’t be like them. Don’t give in to the pressure. By the way, it was easier for a Jew to accept Greek religion after he had accepted Greek culture. I am concerned by the way so many Christians have accepted worldly culture. When some church members are with the ungodly crowd at school or at work, they act and talk just like them.

3. Remain Faithful to God - In the last of v.32 he says, “but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.” In spite of the horrible persecution of the Jews by Antiochus, there arose a group of Jews who upheld God’s Law, and remained faithful to worship God exclusively. Not only that, but v.33 says, “And those of the people who understand shall instruct many...” They would instruct others to keep God’s covenant. They would instruct others regarding what was happening based on Daniel’s prophecy.

One of the leaders of the faithful few was Judas Maccabeus, who led a revolt against Syrian oppression, known as the Maccabean Revolt (168-165 B.C.). He was able to successfully resist the Syrians, providing temporary relief for the Jews from persecution.

When times get tough for the people of God, which verse will describe you? Will you take a stand for God when most turn away from the truth faith? Folks, our faith is going to be tested in the coming days. I see it coming.

So when it seems that our whole world is falling apart around, let us remember another major lesson of this 11th chapter of Daniel:

4. God Is Controlling Everything – Notice in the last of v.35 it says, “it is still for the appointed time.” Six times in this 11th chapter of the Book of Daniel the prophet said that these things are “appointed.” Chapter 11 describes a series of powerful political leaders who gained control for a season. Yet these developments are under the sovereign hand and will of God, including the rise of Antiochus Epiphanies, who was a precursor of the Antichrist. He caused much suffering for the people of God. Yet this chapter shows who is ultimately in control. Antiochus died shortly after the Maccabean revolt, which secured Israel’s independence for about a century!

And as you read these things and look at the world today, your heart may be filled with fear as political leaders become more powerful. God in heaven, what lies ahead for Your people? What lies ahead for the nations of the earth? According to prophecy, dire conditions will lead to some form of a world government headed by the antichrist. As one political leader said, “Never let a crisis go to waste.” They may even create or magnify the crisis to justify their power grab. Then history will end in a catastrophe, in a blood-bath, in destruction. Why do you think the nations are stockpiling weapons? The world is moving toward that great and final battle of Armageddon, the Day of the Lord, according to biblical prophecy.

The prophecy is given lest we fall into despair and into discouragement, as though God had forgotten us, and as if God had lost control of the universe. Through prophecy we are reminded that these things are under the sovereign and mighty hand of the Lord. In due time He will deliver His people. All of it is in His hand, and there is no need to worry about the future. That is why we should be filled with assurance and with triumph from the words of Jesus in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world....”

Finally, there is lesson that:

5. Prophecy *Will* Be Fulfilled - Here we see the remarkable power of God in predicting the future accurately. Someone had pointed out that in the first thirty-four verses of this chapter, there are 137 prophesies, all of which were fulfilled just *exactly* as God said they would. So one of the main lessons that we should draw from Daniel 11 is that since the first 35 verses have been so accurately fulfilled, then what is still yet to be fulfilled starting in v.36 should be taken very seriously. In fact, v.2 begins with the words, “And now I will tell you the truth....”

Conclusion: God warned His people Israel of terrible suffering to come. Jesus warned His disciples, “In the world you shall have tribulation....” I personally hope that there is a pre-tribulation rapture for Christian believers of this age. Yet even assuming that will come to pass, we have no promise from God that we will be exempt from great suffering. How can you claim otherwise? The early church went through over 250 years of great suffering. The way our government is going, we could have a great economic collapse, and many other problems which could set the stage for the rise of antichrist. In the meantime, we could experience economic hardships, political oppression, the ravages of war, disease, and persecution. But remember what Jesus said in Luke 21:28, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” Beyond any suffering we may endure, and beyond death itself, there is the hope and promise of victory in Christ. Christ will finally triumph over all! (see Rev. 19:11-13, 15-16).

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976); Tremper Longman III, *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), mainly pp.271-280; John MacArthur, Jr., *The Future of Israel: Daniel 9:20-12:13* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (from

www.rr-mrc.com). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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