

## History, Prophecy and Perseverance: Hope in God in Daniel 11

- Open - Persecution Stories from SE Asia
  - “United Together to Eradicate Christianity by 2000;” yet remarkable fruitfulness now - even amid pain
  - Disciples have been fruitful, yet some have suffered terribly, even been killed.
  - And yet: tens of thousands have heard the Gospel, hundreds of churches planted, beyond “tenth generation disciples”
- The most remarkable group of students - several Nepali Bhutanese refugees - one of whom started his own denomination
  - Eritrean student who went to jail for his faith
- A key part of the message of Daniel, broadly, is that God is sovereign over the nations, and that, even in the midst of persecution, he will uphold his people, sometimes delivering us from suffering, sometimes strengthening us *through* the suffering.
- Now the first verse of the chapter is really a follow-up from the previous chapter; the angelic figure in Daniel 10 had said “No one supports me against them,” *them* being the demonic princes/principalities of Persia and Greece. 11:1 states that in the first year of Darius the Mede, he took his stand to support him.
- We’ll take the chapter in several pieces:
  - 2-4 - Persia and Greece, touched on in our message on Daniel 8

- 5-20 - the struggle between the Ptolomies (based in Egypt) and the Seleucids (based in Syria) for regional domination, including over Judea
  - 21-32a - Focus on the evil Antiochus Epiphanes IV
  - (32b-35 - the response of the wise, who know their God)
  - 36-45 - The focus on Antiochus seems to segue into something else; quite possibly a focus on a future Antichrist figure.
- In the next section, I'm going to take a few minutes to unpack the historical pieces of this chapter. While there have been some scholars who have decided that these parts of Daniel are written later, looking *backwards*, I take the position of Tremper Longman and others, who see the whole thing as prophecy. It worth adding that Daniel appears in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the OT from about 2 centuries before the birth of Messiah, which makes this simply being a historical "look back" a bit less plausible.
  - It is also *apocalyptic* literature. A way to understand apocalyptic literature is "*Apocalyptic literature uses story to present revelation from an otherworldly being to a human, revealing a world beyond our own and an ultimate salvation.*"
  - While Daniel is presenting these as *prophecy*, looking forward, we see most of this now as *history*.
  - Who here likes *history*? Some people are ready to snooze when they hear the word *history*. Others, say, going into a museum, are like Indiana Jones, collecting pieces in the form of digital photos to display on an Instagram or TikTok video or post. Others still are like Gandalf, poring through the

details; moving slowly through the museum, and reading all of the captions.

- One of the things which we'll notice, too, is some parallels with what we heard from Pastor Raphael on Daniel 8, which covers some (but not all, and in less detail) of the same historical territory. The *repetition* seems to be for *emphasis*, as elsewhere in the Scriptures.
- **V. 2: “Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece.**
  - The list of kings of Persia isn't meant to be exhaustive, but likely includes Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes. The fourth, “richest” king could be Xerxes (d. 465 BC, who was very rich), or, plausibly, Darius III (d. 330 BC), who was not as rich as Xerxes, but was the final Persian king who fell to Alexander and the Greeks.
- **V. 3: Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. 4 After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.**
  - This is obviously Alexander the Great, the king of Macedon, who conquered all the way to the Indian subcontinent, and died. His eventual successors, the four *Diadochoi*, broke the kingdom into four realms. For our purposes here, the important ones are the Ptolomies, who had their power base in Egypt (“kings of

the south”) and the Seleucids, who had their power base in Syria (“kings of the north”).

- Judah (“the beautiful land”) was right in the middle, and frequently served as a battleground between these two empires, rather like a person trying to stay alive while they’re between fighting elephants!
- **Verses 5-20 describe the back-and-forth battles and intrigue between these two kingdoms. One colorful episode is found in v. 6: “After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power”**
  - The Seleucid king marries the daughter of the Ptolemaic king to forge an alliance, divorcing his wife in order to do so. Later, he and his first wife get back together, and the first wife poisons the other wife, her son, and her husband!
  - Worth noting that the relationship between these kingdoms was a tad rocky.
  - Notice, by the way, how very miserable people at the seat of power often are. How often do we want to be rich, famous, and powerful (“If only I had...”), but we don’t realize that many such people are, in fact, disillusioned with what they’ve received or the pinnacle they’ve reached.
  - There is an emphasis on the reign of Seleucid King Antiochus III through v. 19 - it was under his reign that Seleucid control over Judea was solidified at that point. The historicity and specificity are underlined by, for example, that v. 11 (**“Then the king of the South will**

**march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated.”)** describes the battle of Raphia in 217 BC

- **V. 14: In those times many will rise against the king of the South. Those who are violent among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.**
  - We're unsure of what this specifically refers to, other than that there was constant infighting among the Jews in Judea at the time. Longman suggests that, perhaps as a warning of sorts to us, some of the Jews may have noted Daniel's prophecy, and sought to "make it happen" on their own steam!
- **V. 16: The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it.**
  - Emphasis on Antiochus III's rule over Judea
- **V. 17: He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans[c] will not succeed or help him.**
  - Antiochus III gave his daughter, Cleopatra, in alliance with the Ptolomies, but she ended up taking their side, becoming Cleopatra I (the famous one was Cleopatra VII)
- **Vv. 21: "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.**

- This is Antiochus IV, the key figure in the next section, and the central villain of the story of Hanukkah.
- **V. 27: The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.**
  - The king of the south and the king of the north are seeking to outmaneuver one another, but they're *both* evil!
- **V. 31-32a: “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant**
  - Here is where the Seleucid military sought to forcibly Hellenize the Jewish people - abolishing the sacrifice to God, setting up the “abomination,” likely a “meteorite representing Ba’al Shamem,” the Syrian version of Zeus (Longman, p. 279) and sacrificing pigs upon the altar (according to 1 Maccabees 1:44-47 and Josephus).
  - There were then, and will be now, those who are willing to violate the covenant, and who will be susceptible to flattery and manipulation.
- We will come back to vv. 32b-35, because that is where we want to land up in this.
- Vv. 36-45 describe a king who seems to be a kind of “extension” of Antiochus IV, but is different. Antiochus is thus a *model* for what the Antichrist will be like. We see a possibly similar element in Revelation, where some scholars have

seen a pointer to the evil Roman Emperor Nero in the cryptic number 666 - note that Nero is literally the coming “Beast,” but that the character of the Antichrist would be similar to that of Nero, of Antiochus, of even modern figures such as Hitler, Stalin, or Mao as “trial runs” - since the Devil doesn’t know the “day or the hour” (Matt. 24:36) of the return of Jesus.

- These verses then speak to violent end times, but again, the need to be faithful, even amid such times.
- Some people are afraid of the coming of the Antichrist, of the possibility of suffering.
- Daniel 11:32b-35: **...but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. “Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.**
  - We are called to faithfulness, regardless of whatever tribulation we may face, even as we see with those whose stories I told at the beginning of this message. I have interacted with people whose whole theology of the Return of Jesus is wrapped around the idea that God will not let his people suffer. This is not biblical, nor historical, nor even a proper perspective of the modern community of Jesus-followers across the world.

- This could be a double-meaning passage, prophetically about the Maccabees, but also, in a way, about what it means to be faithful.
- Faithfulness can sometimes mean suffering silently and willingly. I think of the 21 Egyptians (and one man from Ghana) who were filmed being executed on the beach in Libya for their faith - and whose faithful death sent ripples across the Middle East, as many have been coming to faith in Jesus.
- Faithfulness can also mean working practically and even politically for freedom and the maintenance of rights - think of figures such as Harriet Tubman, guided by the Holy Spirit in bringing enslaved people to freedom, or William Carey, preaching the Gospel and translating the Bible, but also working against the practice of the burning of widows in Indian society in earlier times.
- Daniel 11 gives us a picture not only of prophetically foreseen events that took place (and will take place) in history, but more importantly, of the God who has a hand in history, and who we can trust. I'll cheat for a second and dip a finger into next week's text in Daniel 12, too, since the final hope offered to us by God - the hope of deliverance, eternal salvation, and resurrection. Daniel 11:32-35 describes the "wise," who will resist falsehood and instruct many, even amid suffering, hardship, and dealing with insincere people in their midst. But Dan. 12:3 also says the wise will **shine like the brightness of the heavens, and ... lead many to righteousness.**



- How, then, will we respond to the times in which we live? Will we trust God, whether events take the turn for which we hope or not, among the **wise**? Will we be like Daniel's **wise** friends, who told the king that they would be faithful to God, even if facing death? A choice is set before us, and indeed, we will choose.