

## **“OF WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS, II.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Daniel 11:21-35**

### **Introduction.**

The first twenty verses of Chapter eleven cover 355 years of history from the end of Daniel's life in Persia up to 175 BC. Last week we looked at verses 5-20 which included the reigns of five Ptolemy kings and seven Seleucid kings over 150 years. Remember the south is Egypt ruled by the Ptolemy's and the north is Syria ruled by the Seleucid's.

So now we come to the central part of this great vision of history given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel. Verses 21-35 focus on the reign of only one Seleucid king, Antiochus IV. We were first introduced to him back in Chapter 8, in Daniel's vision of the goat with the big horn that was broken and out came four horns and then out of one of them a little horn that grew exceedingly great, a king of great cunning and deceit.

So we have fifteen more verses that cover only twelve years of history, 175 to 163 BC. Why does Antiochus IV get as much space in Scripture as the previous dozen or more rulers over 355 years? How does he rate, what is so important about him?

Let's walk through the details and see if we find the answer at the end.

### **Despicable me, Antiochus IV.**

Antiochus IV was not next in line, but seized the throne through intrigue, he was not of royal majesty (11:21). He started weak but grew very strong by making alliances, keeping them only as long as it served his purposes (11:23).

Antiochus is called a contemptible person (despicable, vile, deceitful, despised). He was a mixture of intellect, charm and insanity, an able administrator and general, but also quirky and bizarre, capable of being erratic. There is plenty of proof that leaders can be both stupid and powerful. He was capable of insane intensity, a scary combination.

## **The South shall try to rise again, vss. 25-30.**

### ***First war against the south, victory, vss. 25-28.***

During this time there were yet more wars between the north and south, between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. Ptolemy the IV started the first one on the bad advice of some of his advisors (11:26) but was soundly defeated by Antiochus IV and captured (11:25-28).

### ***Second war against the south, defeat, vss. 29-30.***

A few years later in 168 BC Antiochus came south to attack again (11:29-35). But this time the Romans got involved with their ships from Kittim (Cyprus, the western coastlands, 11:30).

The famous story of humiliation is that the Roman general, Gaius, drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus demanding he agree to withdraw from Egypt before stepping outside of the circle.

When a bully is humiliated and frustrated he takes his anger out on someone else. The rage he was kept from venting on Egypt, he turns on the covenant people of God.

## **The great Maccabean uprising, 168 BC, vss. 31-35.**

Fake news got back to Jerusalem that Antiochus was killed, so this seemed like a perfect time for the Jews to throw off the yoke of the Seleucids.

When Antiochus got wind of this, things turned ugly for the Jews. Antiochus stormed Jerusalem on a Sabbath day with an army of 20,000.

This history is recorded in two of the books of the Apocrypha, I and II Maccabees.

“When these happenings were reported to the king, he thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, ***eighty thousand*** were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery” (II Maccabees 5:11–14).

He went on a religious rampage against God’s covenant people. Hate speech and hate crimes are not new, they have been around for a long time. He stripped them of

everything dear to their faith. One commentator summed it up with four “s” (Davis, Message of Daniel, p. 154):

They were denied their sacrament of circumcision, under threat of the death penalty. They were denied their sacrifices, the only sacrifices allowed were offerings to Zeus. They were denied their Sabbath, again under threat of the death penalty. They were denied their Scripture, possession of a Torah scroll meant death.

He desecrated the temple by offering pig on the altar and dedicating the temple to the worship of Zeus, “they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate” (11:31; cf. 9:27).

He was out to Hellenize the Jewish culture, to make it Greek. Or to put it in more familiar terms, he was out to liberalize Israel, to change her religion into secular humanism. He sought to throw out God’s law and introduce man’s laws. He wanted to overthrow their moral code.

The Jewish people had two choices, “be a live pagan or a dead Israelite” (Davis, p. 154). Anyone who resisted was killed with the sword or burned (11:33).

Here is the clue to why so much space is given to this small slice of history. God was warning His people that a terrible time of persecution was ahead, short but severe. He was preparing His people to be not caught off guard.

God’s people must be prepared for hate crimes, for fierce opposition against anyone who puts God’s Word and ways above the prevailing will of the culture. Those who can’t compromise or be made to capitulate will face the consequences.

Attempts to obliterate every trace of religion have happened just in the last century. Albania was declared an atheistic country from around 1950 to 1990. Islam, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy were all destroyed.

North Korea is now an atheistic state. What little religion is left is under tight government control. Christians have been killed and churches destroyed in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and efforts to that end are on-going in Egypt. Arab Christians have no home, no place to go. There is nothing to promise that can’t happen to us.

But there is a hint of hope as well. It is only for a time, an appointed time that has a definite end. God’s sovereign purposes included walking through deep and dark valleys of death, but He appoints the beginning and the end. Antiochus is not in control, he is not free to do whatever he pleases for as long as he pleases, his times and activities are appointed.

Fourteen times in this chapter the word “but” is used. It is that word that constantly reminds us that God is God and that He is the God who intervenes and controls and rules and overrules.

11:20 but within a few days he shall be broken.

11:24 but only for a time.

11:25 but he shall not stand.

11:27 but to no avail.

11:27 at the time appointed.

11:29 but it shall not be this time as it was before.

11:35 it still awaits the appointed time.

Think about what this means. Antiochus is a wicked man in utter rebellion against God, but what is he doing? He is doing the will of God, he is doing exactly what God planned for him to do and prophesied he would do three hundred years before he did it.

Man makes his plans, but God decides. God said this far, this much and no more.

The end would come when the Jews receive a little help (11:34). This comes in the form of the revolt led by Judas Maccabaeus which led to the restoration of the temple on December 25, 164 BC (Jewish calendar, or December 14 on Roman calendar).

This is remembered to this day on Hanukkah, the celebration of Jewish liberation, commemoration of the rededication of the temple when the sanctuary was cleansed and Jewish sacrifices were restored. This successful revolt eventually led to Israel's independence.

### **Implications and Application.**

We hear talk these days of being on *the right side of history* and the wrong side of history. This is a reference to the moving tide of the times, to the changing winds of culture.

You are on the wrong side of history if you are opposed to abortion, you are on the wrong side of history if you are opposed to same-sex unions. You are on the wrong side of history if you think transsexuals are just confused people. You are on the wrong side of history if you think assisted suicide is taking a human life.

There was a time not long ago being a Jew was being on the wrong side of history. There could be a time soon when being a Christian is being on the wrong side of history.

Those who think this way don't believe there is a God, they don't realize that history is His Story, that God is the Lord of all history and that God is using history to His glory and to accomplish his redemptive purposes.

They don't realize that the right side of history is to be on God's side and the wrong side of history is to not believe in God or to oppose God's purposes.

**Daniel 11:32-33** ...but *the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action*. 33 And *the wise among the people shall make many understand*,

*The right side of history requires four things to live faithfully and fruitfully in all ages.*

**Believe. People who know their God.** People who know they are created in the image of their creator and are created to know Him and love Him and serve Him.

To persevere in the turmoil of human history takes great faith in a great God, a God who is sovereign and Lord over all, a God who sustains all things, a God who directs all things according to His good and perfect will.

People who believe in their God know that history is not at the whim of fate or chance, nor at the whim of wicked and godless people. History is the hand of God accomplishing His sovereign purposes in the lives of men and women in every age.

Believe.

**Resist. Stand firm and take action.** People who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

This brings to mind Edmund Burke's famous line, "The only thing necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing."

Those who believe in God may be called on to resist evil, even to the point of death.

Some Jews bravely resisted evil and died for it. Those who love God and His truth will fight against the seductions of power and corruption, of following the crowd and going along with whatever is politically correct.

**Daniel 11:32, 34-35** He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, ... 34 ... And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, 35 and some of the wise shall stumble.

For some this will mean a lifetime of obedience in a land hostile to their faith. For some this will mean underground churches, not being able to get a good job, being ostracized, intimidated.

This is the story of Daniel.

Remember Daniel 1, resisting the king's diet.

Daniel 3, refusing to bow down the foreign image and being thrown into the fiery furnace.

Daniel 6, refusing to comply with the policy against praying to the true God.

Some of Antiochus' success in Jerusalem came because of infiltration with those willing to compromise, those willing to cooperate with evil. For evil to prevail it must have advocates and allies.

Compromise with evil comes into the church on three levels, doctrinal, moral and spiritual. Where there is compromise there will be weakness and failure. The church will be anemic, lukewarm.

**Daniel 11:35** 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.

**Matthew 10:28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Our view of history impacts how we live. If history is random and senseless and leading nowhere then faith and suffering are a joke. If this life is all there is and there is no more then by all means, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die.

If this life is all there is then it is utter folly to sacrifice or suffer or to be persecuted.

But if there is a heaven with eternal life to come and a God who is judge and rewarder of faithfulness, then it matters what you believe and what you stand for and what you resist.

There are a number of lawsuits going on around the country of Christians defending their religious freedoms and their right to hold to their own conscience and not violate their beliefs.

Evil never has the last word.

***Teach. The wise among the people shall make many understand.***

Those who believe are wise. They must teach others, especially the coming generations, the fear of the Lord and that history belongs to Him.

Our mission as a church is “from generation to generation for the glory of God.”

**Ps. 78:1-8** Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,

3 things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.

4 We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

5 He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,

6 that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

8 and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Who will tell the glorious deeds of the Lord and His might and the wonders He has done?

Who will teach others so they will set their hope in God?

Who will teach the next generation so they don't rebel and become stubborn and unfaithful?

Who is wise and will pass on wisdom to children and grandchildren and generations to come?

How much of our conversations are salted and seasoned with wisdom?

***Pray.***

Prayer and worship are the ultimate revolutionary activities. They are open deviance to the powers of this age and the powers of earth. They are the acts of allegiance to the ultimate authorities.

Prayer is great power in the hands of those who in the world's eye are weak and foolish.

Remember the immortal words of bloody Mary, Queen of Scotland, "I fear the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men."

In prayer mere mortal humans take their stand and do battle with cosmic forces of evil. In prayer mere mortal humans move heaven and earth by the will of God. By prayer the faithful usher in the kingdom of God. By prayer the faithful believe and stand firm and pass on the truth to the next generation that they might do the same.