

“OF WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS.”

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 11:1-20

Introduction.

School kids are notorious for asking their teachers why do we have to know this stuff? How is this going to help my life? What difference will it make? Sure, we need to know how to read and do basic math, and I suppose a little grammar might be handy, but history? Really? Who cares what happened hundreds or thousands of years ago?

Daniel 11 certainly falls into that danger, just news of wars and more wars, people fighting and dying, nations rising and falling. How can this possibly be relevant and meaningful to our lives here and now?

You might be amused but not surprised to hear one commentator on chapter 11 urges pastors to leave this for Sunday school or Bible class, but don't try to preach on it. To quote him, "We do not see how it could be used for a sermon or for sermons" (Leupold).

Context, background.

Let's remember the context for clues to its significance. Chapter 11 is part of a larger unit, chapters 10-12, the end of Daniel's prophecy in the third year of Cyrus King of Persia who had allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem.

After three years of work rebuilding the walls and temple the work was hindered and slowed by constant opposition. The people's optimism had waned and they were discouraged. In light of this Daniel spent three weeks praying and fasting for his people.

Chapter 11 is God's direct answer to his prayer. It is a message from God through his messenger Gabriel for Daniel and for his discouraged people.

If your life is great and everything is going well, and just keeps getting better and your relationship with God is awesome and growing, then this chapter probably has little for you.

But if there are struggles and failures in your life, if you are trying to walk in God's will, but it isn't easy, sometimes two steps forward and three back, sometime there is opposition or hardship or setbacks, then there may be some wisdom here for you about who God is, and how God is actively and presently working in our world, and even in our own lives.

Prophetic overview of human history.

Daniel 11 is a prophetic overview of human history from the time of Cyrus in the sixth century BC until the end of time. What makes chapter 11 so unique and remarkable is it is written

before the history happens and it gives so much detail. Yes, it's veiled, but the veil is very thin, and there is much agreement among scholars about who is being referred to.

In fact, some of the details are so specific and so accurate liberal scholars especially and even a few conservative ones (Goldingay) argue this has to have been written after the events happened, around 165 or 164 BC.

The God who delivers men from a fiery furnace, the God who shuts up the mouths of lions, the God who gives interpretations of dreams and of handwriting on the wall, is also the God who inspires the prophets, who writes Scripture, who knows and reveals the future.

This is clear evidence of God's sovereign power to know the future and to control the future. When life is, hard or going badly, this is exceedingly important to remember.

Part one, Persia and Greece, vss. 2-4.

Daniel 10:20 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.

There is an intertwining of the spiritual world and the physical world. We are now given details of the conflicts to come, involving Persia and Greece.

If the people of God had hopes of some great utopian vision back in their home land, God would not let them hold such foolish notions long. The times ahead would be hard, but God has ordained it and He is in the midst of it. See has He not told you?

That God is in control doesn't mean it will be easy. There will be wars and rumors of wars, nations rise up against nations, kingdoms will rise and fall, there will be turmoil and trouble everywhere. All creation will groan and there will be no true and lasting peace until the Son of God comes in His final triumphant glory.

Verse two is about Persia from Cyrus to Xerxes, 536-336 DC

After Cyrus, there will be three more Persian kings and then a fourth one, far richer and more powerful, will arise and he will take on Greece. This fourth king is known to be Xerxes I (486-465 BC), the husband of Esther.

Persia reached the pinnacle of greatness under him, but as often happens with people who get too great, too rich (vs. 2), too proud, too full of themselves, they overreach and fall. He invaded Greece and was defeated in the great naval battle of Salamis, considered by many historians to be one of the most significant battles in human history since a Greek lose might have stopped the development of ancient Greece and western civilization.

We see that the battle is not always to the strong or the swift or the most numerous. Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but it is better to trust in God.

Verse three is about Greece.

This is the goat in Chapter 8. The mighty king of verse three is well known, it is Alexander the Great, the warrior king of Greece who established an enormous empire spanning much of the known world. He died suddenly in 323 BC at the age of 33.

It is worth noting that one of the greatest rulers in history who conquered and created one of the greatest and largest empires is dismissed in one verse. Such is man in the scope of God's history. What we make much of, God makes little of. What we think is a big deal, is nothing compared to God and His ways. This story is about God and God's people, not about man and his accomplishments. Alexander's doing as he wills, is nothing in the face of God who does as He wills.

Don't look at history and great leaders and politicians through the eyes of historians or the history books or the reporters and media outlets. Look at them through the lens of Scripture.

You might recall the four little horns in the vision back in Chapter 8 that come out of the big horn. His great kingdom is soon broken into four smaller pieces. Alexander goes down in Scripture as a broken horn (8:22).

Instead of his kingdom being inherited and divided among his two sons it is taken over by four of his generals (see vs. 4).

Part two, the kings of the south and the kings of the north, vss. 5-20.

Out of these four kingdoms two emerge that have special significance for Biblical history. When we hear all this mention of kings of the south and kings of the north, ***south and north of what?*** South and north of God's people, of Jerusalem and Israel.

The center of the compass is Jerusalem and the glorious land (vs. 16) of Israel, God's people. This history is interpreted from the point of view of the covenant people of God, "I will be there God and they will be my people."

The tiny nation of Israel, the size of New Jersey, smaller than Vancouver Island, is in the cross hairs of endless conflict, placed as it is on the crossroads of all travel between Africa, Asia and Europe. This little nation is at the mercy of the changing whims of opposing superpowers.

But then this little nation is also the focus of Gods special interest and love.

What Israel was to God in the OT, the church of Jesus Christ is to Him in the NT and to this day. We are the apple of His eye, the center of His affections and purposes.

The kingdom of the south refers to the Ptolemies, centered in Egypt, and the Seleucids, based in Syria and Babylon (modern Iraq). The kings of the north often used the title Antiochus, from the name of their capital, Antioch.

From the perspective of the people of God, these two kingdoms would dominate and influence their history for centuries to come. So, God has something to say about it and He is telling them about it ahead of time.

What follows in the rest of chapter 11 is a detailed, historically verifiable account of these two kingdoms from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC to 163 BC.

Let me give you just a taste of the detail and accuracy of God's prophecy and why you can trust all the prophecy you read in His Word. In Daniel 11:6-8 God tells Daniel in 536 BC what will happen in 250 BC.

Ptolemy II, king of the south tried to make peace with Antiochus II, king of the north, by sending his daughter Berenice to marry him. Antiochus divorced his first wife, Laodice and disinherited her sons. That same year Ptolemy II died, Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III, took the throne, "someone from her own family." Antiochus II then divorced Berenice and took Laodice back. But Laodice wasn't having it and in return had Antiochus and Berenice and their young son poisoned, so her son could have the throne. So, to avenge Berenice's death her brother invaded Seleucid, captured its capital, Antioch, and had Laodice killed. All of this just as Daniel 11 predicted (Ian Duguid, *Daniel*, p. 197).

Most of these see saw battles take place on Israelite real estate, with Israel being bounced back and forth under the control of one and then the other.

Another romantic diplomacy is tried the other direction. Antiochus III offers his daughter Cleopatra I (vs. 17) to be married to Ptolemy V to help influence Egyptian politics. (This is not the Cleopatra VII of the time of Julius Caesar, 69-30 BC). But she actually loves her husband and joins the other side, becoming pro-Egypt.

Antiochus III, ever the warrior and not knowing when to stop, in his arrogance/insolence (vs.18) takes on the Greeks, which angers the Romans who come after him and drive him all the way back home and then lay such a heavy debt on him he has to start robbing temples to pay it (see verse 19-20) which angers the locals who assassinate him.

His son Seleucus IV (167 BC) kept paying the annual tribute tax, but is later poisoned for attempting to pillage the treasury of the temple in Jerusalem, which fulfills the words of verse 20, "he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle."

Implications and application.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We know this is the Bible, inspired and written by God's Holy Spirit, so in the wisdom of God we assume He has good reason for taking up precious space with these words. But why?

Is that true? All Scripture, even Daniel 11? If so, how?

We are reminded some passages are hard to understand and take extra effort to understand. That we don't understand doesn't mean there is no meaning, just we have to work at finding it. It is the Word of the living God of the universe, one must expect parts of it are above us and we will need the Holy Spirit's extra help.

Remember this is not just mere history, this is prophecy, this is being told long before. Imagine if I gave specific details of what is going to happen next year and I happened exactly just as I said. That would get your attention. This should put us in awe of God.

From Xerxes, I to Seleucus IV we are treated to torrent of wars, political intrigue and confusion, victories and defeats, lies and schemes and conspiracies, domestic turmoil and personal moral failures.

We aren't told all this for its dramatic value. This is not the script for a new cable mini-series. We are told this to be reminded of *the futility of it all*.

The writer of Ecclesiastes summed it all up, all human striving and posturing and politicizing is vanity. For all the effort and loss of life, nothing stays the same.

Isaiah 40:21-24 Do you not know? Do you not hear? ...

22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;

23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

Daniel 11 is a microcosm of human history, wars and rumors of wars.

It's estimated in the last 3,400 years, there have only been 268 years of total peace.

Someone has calculated that in the past 2,000 years there have been 15,000 wars on our planet.

Just since the 1600's there have been over 8,000 peace treaties signed. Few have lasted.

Just since WWII there have been 250 wars.

Since 1776 the US has had 21 years of total peace without some war involvement.

And God's people are not immune. Vs 16 mentions God's beautiful or glorious land, which is over run from both directions countless times. God puts the trials and troubles of the Jews of Daniel's day in perspective. They are facing nothing unique or surprising, in this life you will have trials.

Life in this world is filled with conflict of all kinds at every level. And in it all God has been in control, ruling and over ruling, over it all.

We need not be anxious when powers too great for us to control seem to overwhelm us. Nor do we need to try to take matters into our own hands and use power to accomplish our own purposes.

Some Christians, like the Moral Majority back in the 1980's, think gaining political power could usher in God's kingdom. But as Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." And the battle is not with flesh and blood.

The powers and authorities of this world are merely pawns in the hands of God for His greater and more glorious purposes.

No kingdom, no power, no authority, no terrorist has ever interfered in any way with God's purposes or plans. Even the gates of hell itself cannot hinder or destroy God's kingdom. There is only one permanent power and it isn't the United States or China or Russia or Islam.

All the decisions and actions of even the most godless men and women who might be acting out of the most wicked of purposes are all known ahead of time by God, and are under His sovereign control.

Whether we are in times of political uncertainty or personal uncertainty, God can foretell the future and guide the future and direct the outcome of the future.

Clearly this text speaks much more profoundly to the Christians living at the crossroads of great conflict or in the cross hairs of religious persecution. This worldview is meant to provide massive comfort to all God's people everywhere.

We are not at the mercy of the machines of violence or the gears of corruption or the fists of bullies, even if those bullies have armies and bombs. God hands them all over to futility, He has done it and is doing it far more than we realize.

The Stalin's and Lenin's and Hitler's and Mussolini's and Mao Zedong's and Idi Amin's and Saddam Hussein's and Osama bin Laden's are all dead, their efforts futile, in shambles. Their plans have crumbled and come to nothing.

Teach your children and grandchildren a Christian worldview, a God-centered perspective of history. Constantly point out how God is in control, how God is sovereign, how He works all things for His glory and for His good purposes.

Point out how history is really His story, history is redemptive, it is moving toward a consummation, for His coming glory.

Let us be confident the battle belongs to the Lord and He gives us the victory.