

## **“A Preview of Coming Atrocities”**

Daniel 11:1-35

Turn with me in your Bible to Daniel 11. The fact that you have a copy of the Word of God in your hand this morning is nothing short of miraculous. Your heart should be full of gratitude to God whenever you stop to consider all that has gone into the work of inspiration, preservation, and translation. The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different human authors who came from a variety of backgrounds—prophets, shepherds, and kings. Peter says of this:

**2 Peter 1:20-21 — “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”**

The Bible is inspired in its authorship, without error, and is completely trustworthy and authoritative. You and I are the beneficiaries of scholarship over the centuries that has put in the long, countless hours of translation. And in addition to translation, tools have been developed to help us access the contents of this Book. Stephen Langton was one such scholar, who lived in the 1200’s and was the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was Langton who organized the chapter divisions of the Bible. A couple of centuries after him, there was another fellow named Robert Estienne who organized those chapters into verse divisions. He did much of his work while traveling on horseback. It is important to keep in mind that chapter and verse divisions of the Bible are numerical tools that help us organize and quickly access the inspired content.

Why am I telling you this? Because every now and then, an idea that is introduced at the end of one chapter is carried over into the next. We can miss this if we are not careful. That’s what often happens here in Daniel 11. You will

notice that verse 1 begins this way, “As for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him.” Daniel is not the one who is speaking in verse 1. Rather, it is the angelic messenger who speaks to him in chapter 10 who now continues his message on into chapter 11. (Read)

Sinclair Ferguson points out that there are two significant features of the prophecies recorded in Daniel. The first is the way in which Daniel is given a broad vision of future events. Then, attention falls on one specific time period. It makes it possible for the same ground to be covered again, but with increasing insight and detail. For instance:

- Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2 as it dealt with succeeding empires (gold, silver, bronze, iron)
- Daniel’s dream of four beasts in chapter 7 and the Son of Man figure who receives an everlasting kingdom
- The vision of the ram, the goat, and the ‘little horn’ in chapter 8; greater detail is given in the vision of how the goat conquers the ram, and a ‘little horn’ then arises
- The prophecy of the 70 weeks in chapter 9 gives us a glimpse into Israel’s future

The second feature that we’ve seen is how the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are often in a constant state of conflict that boils over into open hostility. **Man’s kingdoms are destined to come crashing down, and only the kingdom of Christ will last.** Now let me tell you, both of these features are found here in this last section of Daniel 10-12. It traces in greater detail the flow of the future already outlined in chapters 2 and 8. Ultimately, it

shows us how it will one day culminate in the defeat of the enemies of God's people and the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Chapters 10-12 form a unity and are to be taken together. Chapter 10 provides us with the context of the vision and serves as an introduction. Daniel is given a glimpse of the spiritual reality behind history and its happenings. Unseen conflict in the spiritual dimension influences the things that happen on the stage of history. Understanding this context is important as we take up this next chapter. Chapter 11 gives us the content, while chapter 12 will provide the conclusion to the vision. Daniel is given a prophecy of future history, and the purpose is to prepare God's people for what would happen in the days ahead, days that will involve conflict and struggle. What could they expect?

### **1—Political TRANSITIONS (11:1-4)**

*“And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him. And now I will show you the truth. 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. Then 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 others besides these.”*

In the first few verses, the angel tells Daniel that the next several decades would be marked by political transitions until the Persian kingdom would fall to the Greeks. Verse 1 takes us from the time of Cyrus all the way to the death of Alexander in verse 4, which is approximately 215 years of history. Again, keep in

mind the fact that there is a spiritual dimension that has already been revealed. The angel had been in battle against the prince of Persia, and would soon be engaged in spiritual combat with the prince of Greece. It is a reminder to us that the political conflicts we see and experience on the ground are influenced by these spiritual powers that be, or fallen angelic principalities. (see Eph. 6)

The prophecy begins by mentioning three more kings of Persia, followed by a fourth king who will surpass them all in wealth. The fourth king is Xerxes, who reigned over the Persian kingdom from 485 to 464 BC. The significant thing about Xerxes is that he made an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Europe and was defeated by the Greeks. Persia had tried to conquer Greece earlier, but was defeated at the Battle of Marathon. In a second invasion under Xerxes, the Persian navy was defeated at Salamis. Over the next century, Greece would ascend to become the dominant world power led by Alexander. In verse 3, he is referred to as 'a mighty king' who will arise, who will rule with great dominion and do as he wills.

I read where one biographer of Alexander the Great said that 'he seemed to the nations to do whatever pleased him.' Now that might have been true on the surface, but above it all there was a sovereign hand at work. No matter how great or important or powerful a person or leader is in life, that leader is always subject to God. Verse 4 says:

*"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."*

Think of the irony of this. The world's leading men have all spent countless hours studying the life of Alexander. Entire volumes have been written by secular historians on his life and empire. But all Scripture has to say is contained in two very brief verses. He lived, he conquered, he died. From a worldly point of view, he was Alexander the Great. From a heavenly point of view, he was Alexander the Instrument, a man who unknowingly served God's sovereign purpose in his time. No sooner than he had conquered the world, he died and left no heir. His empire was parceled out among his four generals, just as the angel said in verse 4.

Let me tell you, there is a powerful lesson here for us. We may be tempted to think that greatness is determined by what a man accomplishes, or by what he possesses, or by what others say about him. On one occasion, the disciples were arguing back and forth among themselves about who was the greatest. In response, Jesus said:

**Mark 1:35—“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”**

The number one reason why there is so much conflict in the world today is because everyone wants to be first. We all by default look out for 'numero uno.' Every single one of the kings mentioned in this chapter lived that way, and it is the reason why conflict, war, and bloodshed fills the annals of history. A life that is viewed through the lens of Scripture looks differently than one seen through the eyes of man's media. Our world looks for all the wrong things in the men and women it sets up as its heroes.

And so Daniel is told that the decades to come would be marked by one political transition after another which would then lead to:

## **2—Perpetual TURMOIL (11:5-20)**

*“Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority...He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north...”*

Verses 2-20 cover a time period of 355 years. And it is all history now, but to Daniel it was all prophecy concerning the future. Remarkably, the first 35 verses of chapter 11 contain some 135 prophetic statements that have all now been fulfilled. The details are mind boggling. This chapter has been fulfilled so specifically that a lot of liberal critics say that it had to have been written well after the fact. But Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. The rise of the Greek empire didn't happen until more than two centuries later.

**David Jeremiah**—*“A professor at a liberal theological seminary was teaching from the book of Daniel. His class consisted of young men and women, many of them future church leaders. At the beginning of his lecture, he said, ‘Now I want you to understand that Daniel was written in the second century BC, not by the historic Daniel who lived in the sixth century BC. The facts were written, as all history is, after the events took place.’ One young man raised his hand and asked, ‘How can that be, sir, when Jesus Himself said in Matthew 24:16 that it was written by Daniel?’ The professor paused a moment, looked the student in the eyes and said, ‘Young man, I know more about the book of Daniel than Jesus did.”*

The skeptics who reject the truth of prophecy don't know what to do with something so specific like we find here in Daniel 11. It all boils down to whether or not you believe in a God who is sovereign over history, so much so that He can tell us the events of history before they take place.

**John Walvoord**—*“The issue is a clear-cut question as to whether God is omniscient about the future. If He is, revelation may be just as detailed as God elects it to be, and detailed prophecy is no more difficult nor incredible for God than broad predictions.”*

In the wake of Alexander’s death, his empire was divided up among his four generals. Two of those generals—Ptolemy and Seleucus—became most prominent and established their own kingdoms. Ptolemy ruled in the south over Egypt, while Seleucus ruled in the north over Syria and parts east. For the next two centuries, the two dynasties battled each other for regional control. The ‘king of the south’ is reference to the Ptolemaic kingdom, while the ‘king of the north’ refers to the Seleucid kingdom. So there is roughly 130 years of history being covered from verse 5 through verse 20. Now, I’m not going to get into the details of the history of all that. What we need to keep in mind is that all of it is important because of how it impacted the Jews who were back in the land. Verse 27 could very well serve as a summary:

*“And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil.”*

The land of Israel became the battleground for these rival kings. A faithful remnant of God’s people were caught in the middle of it all. The people who were living in the land were caught in the middle of these two empires that vied for power and control. It meant that their lives consisted of one unwanted conflict after the other.

That is the way it always is with fallen humanity. Lust for power and control, greed and materialism. Covetousness and idolatry and murder characterizes man’s splintered kingdoms. A man wants something, and he isn’t content until he gets it. No one says it better than James:

**James 4:1-2—“What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.”**

In that passage, James goes on to mention at least three ways we are at war as sinful human beings:

- at war with others (v. 1a)
- at war with ourselves (v. 1b-3)
- at war with omnipotence (v. 4-10)

As long as ‘self’ is on the throne in my life, conflict and war and strife will be the inevitable rotten fruit.

### **3—Prophetic TYPE (11:21-35)**

*“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...”*

Verses 2-20 covers a time period of 355 years. But from verse 21 through verse 35, the time period is 12 years. It is like a zoomed in camera shot as opposed to a wide angle view. I’m sure you’ve seen those camera shots from some sporting event that are from high above the stadium. The Goodyear Blimp flies overhead and gives you a complete view of the field, or the race track. But then the camera is from a closer position, like turn 4 or something. That is the way it is once we get to verse 21.

The prophecy zooms in on one of those northern kings who is described as being a contemptible person. How would you like to have that on your resume as far

as how history remembers you? So and so is a contemptible person, or a vile and despicable person. That is who steps onto the scene here. Verse 21 refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, a man who was the eighth ruler of the Seleucid dynasty that ruled over Syria and the middle east from 175 to 163 BC. He was a megalomaniac and one of the most wicked men in history. The vision from chapter 8 referred to him as the 'little horn.' The prophecy given here records the details for us, and subsequent history shows how it was all fulfilled.

#### The details of his rise to power

When Alexander the Great died at the age of 33, he had no successor. And so his vast empire was divided up among his generals who then fought each other for dominance. In time, two of those men became the strongest—Ptolemy in the south and Seleucus in the east. Over the next century, the Ptolemaic kings would fight their rivaling Seleucid kings for control of the middle east. In 175 BC, Antiochus came to power over the Seleucid dynasty in Syria.

The apocryphal books of 1-2 Maccabees provide summary of the history as it related to the Jewish people who were back in their native homeland. 1 Maccabees says:

*“When Antiochus had firmly established himself as king, he decided to conquer Egypt...Antiochus was able to capture the fortified cities of Egypt and plunder the whole land. In 169 BC, after the conquest of Egypt, Antiochus marched with a great army against the land of Israel and Jerusalem.”*

#### The damage he inflicted on the Jews

With aspirations of conquest like Alexander before him, Antiochus was determined to subjugate the east. Many historians agree that he even became

the first person in history to persecute a people exclusively for their religious faith. He did everything in his power to eradicate Judaism and sought to force the Jews into worshipping Greek gods. Again, 1 Maccabees tells us how it all went down:

*“He sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses.”*

History records that as he prepared his final assault against Egypt in 169 BC, he received an order from the Romans by way of Cyprus where the Roman fleet was anchored. He was told to not make war against the Ptolemies. It was a very humiliating thing for him, but he reluctantly withdrew from Egypt. On his way back to Syria, he decided to vent his frustration against the Jews. He entered Jerusalem under the guise of peace. He then waited until the Sabbath and ordered his army of 25,000 to carry out a wholesale slaughter against the city. It was only the beginning of his reign of tyranny.

The disregard he had for the truth

Verse 30 says that he will be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He will pay attention to those who forsake the covenant. Notice what Daniel is told in the prophecy in verse 31:

*“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.”*

Back in 8:12, remember that Daniel saw how God’s people would be given over to the little horn “together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.” In verse 24, it says he will cause fearful destruction and will succeed in what he does. In other words, the little horn is successful in his agenda to prevent worship in the temple and do away with the Scriptures. Antiochus made the Law of Moses illegal in Jerusalem. For instance, we’re told in 1 Maccabees:

*“Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, and anyone who was caught with a copy of sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king.”*

#### The desecration he committed in the temple

Daniel sees how the zenith of his blasphemy comes as he overthrows the sanctuary in an act that he describes here as ‘the abomination that makes desolate.’ In chapter 9:27, it is referred to it as ‘the abominations of one who makes desolate.’

Unlike the Babylonians before him, and unlike the Romans who would come later, Antiochus didn’t destroy the temple of God—he defiled it. How did he do it? To prove a point, he brought a pig into the temple, slaughtered it on the altar, and spattered its blood in the holy of holies and made the priests eat it. To the horror of those present, he then set up an image of Zeus in the holy of holies and demanded that everyone worship it. It is this very thing that Jesus refers to in Matthew 24 as He told His disciples of something similar that would happen in

the future. So in this way, Antiochus becomes a prototype of every world leader who would persecute God's people in the future, leading all the way up to a final Antichrist figure who will be referred to in verse 36 and the verses that follow.

Now, before I close, let me bring all of this home and give you some personal application:

- Times and circumstances are in the hands of a **sovereign** and omnipotent God

Go back through the chapter and pay close attention to the number of times you find the phrase 'the appointed time' or 'time of the end.' In other words, no matter how bad things may get, and no matter how bad things may seem to be from our perspective, it will only be for a time. God, in His infinite wisdom and by means of His omnipotence, has said that it will all be for a time—then comes the end! The times and seasons have all been appointed by God, and that is true for nations and kingdoms just as much as it is for your life individually. (see Acts 17)

- God's people are not exempt from **suffering** and hardship

We tend to overlook the fact that Jesus said His followers will experience pain, hardship, and tribulation in the world. A passage like Daniel 11 helps remind us of that fact. The world fights and goes to war over its lusts. Dark and evil forces behind the political powers of this world are united in rebellion against God, and that rebellion plays itself out every day. Those who love God and His gospel are in the enemy's crosshairs.

**Psalm 34:7—“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.”**

- Knowing God personally is your **strength** when it comes to facing the future

I believe it was Corrie ten Boom who said we should never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. He is the One who is in control of the future. That's why Daniel is told in verse 32, "The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action." Psalm 20:7 says that some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. That's why we can shout for joy over His salvation, and in His name we set up our banners! There is a cross and an empty grave that serves as proof to the world that Jesus Christ has won the battle.

A couple of weekends back, Anita and I stole away for a few days by ourselves. We went on a roadtrip up through Pennsylvania and parts of upstate New York. On the way, we spent an afternoon at Gettysburg National Battlefield. I stood there on Big Round Top, which was the strategic high ground that was held by the Union army. After three days of combat and more than 50,000 casualties, the Confederates were defeated and it became the decisive moment that led to the perseverance of the Union. Well, just a couple years before that, there was a doctor and his wife who made a visit to the camp of the Union army that was just outside of Washington, DC. The doctor was Samuel Howe, and his wife was Julia Howe. She happened to overhear a group of soldiers singing a tune that stuck in her mind. She felt the tune needed some better lyrics. So the next morning, she got up extra early, and said to herself, "I'll lose this if I don't write it down immediately." Here's what she wrote:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,  
His truth is marching on.*

*I have seen Him in the watchfire of a hundred circling camps;  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;*

*I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps,  
His day is marching on.*

*I have read His fiery gospel writ in rows of burnished steel;  
As ye deal with My condemners, so with you My grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with His heel,  
Since God is marching on.*

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;  
O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,  
Our God is marching on.*

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.*

We occupy the high ground, church. The battle has been won, and the field has already been taken. And it won't be long until the King returns and His flag will fly high above all castles, thrones, and dominions.

**2 Corinthians 2:14—“But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.”**