

The Prophecy of the Kings

Daniel 11:1-45

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

March 22, 1998

If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Daniel, the 11th chapter. We have observed a number of times now that Daniel 1 through 6 contains a sort of spiritual biography of Daniel, showing God's sovereignty in his life. But as we move from the first six chapters of Daniel, to the 7th through the 12th chapters of Daniel, we move behind Daniel's own life, his biography, to the spiritual realities which were behind that public ministry. We've said all along that this book is about the blessing of knowing God and that Daniel is one of the best biblical models of what it looks like to know God in life. Here's a man of tremendous importance in public service. A busy man. He was just as busy as any late 20th century modern ever thought of being busy, and yet he was a man who was wrapped up in his fellowship and relationship with God.

Last week we began our study of the last section of the book, chapters 10 through 12. These chapters form a unity. Chapter 10 is a heavenly vision, one of many in the book of Daniel, but it's a vision which gives us vital insights into the nature of reality. It emphasizes that human causes and effects are not the only forces or influences operative in the history of the world. So the messenger comes to Daniel from God, in Daniel chapter 10, in order to give him strength and courage and confidence to face the future. Daniel 10 provides us the context for the rest of the vision in Daniel 11 and 12. And we saw last week that in Daniel 10, Daniel was helped to understand the moral and spiritual character of history as the vision unfolded.

Now in some ways, the chapter we're going to read tonight, is the most remarkable of the visions in the book of Daniel. It stretches Daniel's prayer concerns beyond simply the return of the children of Israel, who are currently in Babylon, to Israel, and it asks Daniel to look beyond to the persecutions that the children of Israel are going to face long after they have returned to their own land. In fact, it asks Daniel to look far into the future to the persecutions that the people of God will face until the time of the end.

Now, let me say one thing before we read this long passage. Liberals who have interpreted the book of Daniel, particularly enjoy Daniel chapter 11, because its prophecies are so detailed. They say, "Well, no one could have predicted this. Whoever wrote this had to write this after the events happened. No one could

have recorded in this kind of detail the succession of kings in Egypt and in Syria hundreds of years after the time that the prophecy was supposedly given.” And so they say, “You see, this shows us that Daniel was actually written in about 164 or 165 A.D. It was sort of a tract for the times, it was written in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, and it was given the name *Daniel*. It was deliberately falsified in order to give the people of God some sort of comfort in the midst of their persecution.” But, that kind of a view of the book of Daniel may in fact mask a practical atheism which says that, “God is not the Lord of history, He cannot share with His prophets the future of history, and a god who is not the lord of history and who cannot share with his prophets the future events of history may well be a god who cannot raise his own son from the grave and may well be a god not worshipping.” As Sinclair Ferguson says, “The issue is, ‘Does our God so rule history and can He so communicate with us that His future purposes may be disclosed to us before the events?’ Our answer as evangelical Christians is a resounding yes.” Our God is Lord of history. And, in fact, this passage simply shows how much in control He is of even the events of nations and realms.

Let us then hear God's holy word in Daniel, chapter 11:

Daniel 11

Our Father, we ask that You would help us to understand the truth of this passage intended for our instruction, for our correction, for our encouragement. We pray, Heavenly Father, that by the Spirit You would open our eyes to behold wonderful things from Your word through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray it, Amen.

Daniel, chapter 11, is a difficult passage to expound. The great Lutheran commentator, H. C. Leuphold, after he had written pages and pages of commentary on this chapter says this: “How could someone ever preach from this chapter?” Maybe you’re wondering that, after reading with me in Daniel chapter 11. It is a passage which gives us so much intricate history, we immediately wonder, “How does this apply then, what lessons do we learn, even if we learn what these historical events refer to, how can this possibly edify?” I think that will become apparent to you as we sketch the important outline of the passage. Remember, as we approach this prophesy, the patterns that have already been set in Daniel. He often times begins by painting a broad picture and then by focusing on specific historical events. And, of course, another theme that runs throughout his book is the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. That is a permanent fixture according to Daniel. And we see it again in this passage.

I. Christians must pray in light of God's interpretation of history.

Let me outline the passage for you in three parts. The first part of the passage

you'll see in verses 2 through 4, which really set for us the stage for this vision. And we learn in this passage that Christians must pray in light of God's interpretation of history. Let me just say that you will miss the point of this passage, of this chapter, unless you realize that the whole reason God revealed this to Daniel was to move him to pray more effectively for the people of God. Just remember that Daniel had been praying fervently for decades, praying for the return of the children of Israel out of captivity into the land of Israel, which he refers to, by the way, in this passage as *the glorious land* or *the beautiful land*. Daniel's focus had not just been on concerns for himself, or petitions for himself, but for the return of the people of God from exile. That had been, as it were, the goal of his prayer.

Throughout the second half of the book of Daniel, we have seen God expanding Daniel's horizons and basically saying, 'Daniel, the picture is far bigger than even you ever dreamt of. As big as your prayers have been for My glory and for My people, I want your prayers to be bigger yet. I want you to see a bigger thing than I am doing in the life of My people and in the history of redemption, than just bringing them out of Babylon and back to Israel. In fact, there is much more to pray about Daniel.' And so in this passage, God is really showing Daniel what is going to happen to Israel after she gets back into the land. The focus of that whole center section, from verse 5 all the way to verse 35, is basically recording the story of the conflicts between Syria, that's the king of the north that keeps being referred to, and Egypt, that's the king of the south that keeps being referred to, and what happens with regard to the people of God in their conflict. So the point of the whole passage is to move us to prayer, and in these first three verses, verses 2 through 4, we see that Christians must pray in light of God's interpretation of history.

Remember, as we look at these verses, that prophecy is not merely telling history beforehand. Prophecy is God's interpretation of that history. It's not just a mere recounting of events ahead of time. It's God telling you how He wants you to think about those events. If you are a person who just can't wait to get hold of a copy of the *Cambridge History of the Classical World* and break open the section on the Seleucids and Ptolemies of Egypt, and find out what happened between the fourth century B.C. and the first century B.C., well, this is the passage for you.

But notice, that if you look at the *Cambridge History of the Classical World*, the things that are important in the eyes of the historian in the *Cambridge History of the Classical World* are not going to be the things that God necessarily points to. For instance, notice that Alexander the Great is described in verses 3 and 4, and the rest of the chapter focuses on the Seleucid kings in Syria and the Ptolemaic kings in Egypt. Now, you don't have to be a great historian to know that, comparatively, Alexander was a much bigger cheese than those guys, and yet God focuses our attention for the bulk of this chapter on them. Why? Is God not aware of the fact that Alexander had a greater impact on the secular history of

the Mediterranean world, and perhaps on western history, than did these particular monarchs? Of course God is aware of that. But He's pointing your attention to these other things, first of all, to remind you that He's in charge. Alexander may be very important for the history of western civilization and culture, but he's not very important in comparison to these men, with regard to the people of God, and the plan of God in redemption. So Alexander, though he thought himself great, is small in the eyes of God. And it's stressed, by the way, that his sovereignty passed away. Look at what is said in verse 4: "As soon as he is arisen, his kingdom will be broken and parceled out to the four points of the compass, though not to his own descendants nor according to his own authority which he wielded, for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them." The great Alexander will not even be able to place his own descendants on his throne. So he may be great in the eyes of the world, but the Lord takes him up and disburses his empire.

What we have in this passage is a picture of Alexander from God's perspective. It's God's interpretation of the history of Alexander, and as Christians we need a heaven-given, long-term perspective on world events and leaders, and I think that's perhaps more true in our technological age than ever before. Why? Because we are bombarded now, 24 hours a day, with news on both radio and TV. There was a time many, many years ago when you had to depend on the newspaper to find out about world events. Then, there was a time many, many years ago when you had to depend on the Saturday newsreel to find out about the hottest thing in world events. Now, you can turn on Ted Turner any time of the day or night, and you can find out about news events, as well as any new channel and the weather channel. We are bombarded with information. Someone said that "We receive more individual items of information in a week than a person in the Eighteenth Century would have received in their lifetime." Now the problem with that is, we are preoccupied with the trivial because a lot of that information isn't that significant in the scheme of things, and we more than ever need to see history from God's perspective. And that's exactly what Daniel is pointing us to in the first four verses.

I'm reminded of a story that Charles Colson tells in his book, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, about his days in the Nixon White house. He said, "You know one of the things about us is that we thought we were running the world." He said he can remember a meeting with Nixon and Kissinger and himself and other advisors, and Kissinger -- it was perhaps before the China visit, and Kissinger opened the meeting up by saying, 'Gentlemen, what we do today will determine the future history of the world.'" Now, he said, "While I was sitting there it sounded, you know, goose pimples kind of ran up my back and I thought, 'boy, I'm really important. I'm determining the future history of the world.'" He said, "Looking back on that from prison, I realize how utterly arrogant and wrong it was. It didn't matter. We were not determining the future history of the world. That was in God's hands." We Christians need to remember that in a day and age where people would like to convince us that they can control the course of the future,

we need to see history from God's perspective.

II. Christians must pray in light of God's refining providence of history.

There's a second thing we learn in this passage, and we see this in that long center section from verse 5 all the way down to verse 35. That center section is basically a picture of the battle for the city of God, the beautiful land which is mentioned a couple of times is the land of the people of God, the land of Israel. And notice, that it seems to be a pawn as this king to the north and this king to the south war against one another for supremacy. But in this section, we learn that Christians must pray in light of God's refining providence in history. It is clear in this passage that the persecutions which will be undergone by the people of God are designed to refine them, to purify them, to commit them to the cause of God, to the kingdom of God.

Notice the perspective change. In verses 2 through 4, we're looking at history from God's perspective. Now, in verses 5 through 35, we're looking at history from the perspective of the land, the glorious land, the land of Israel. And notice that verses 5 through 35 look like a travel log. One time, it's the king of the north heading through the land of Israel down to the south, to attack the king of the south. The next time, it's the king of the south heading through the land of Israel to attack the king of the north. The next time, it's the people in the land of Israel being attacked because one of the kings was unsuccessful in his attack on the other king. And so, over and over, we see these kings moving through the land of Israel wreaking havoc while they are trying to build their own kingdoms. The lesson there is that conflict in human history is part of the battle for the city of God.

The reason that God is so much more concerned about the kings of Syria and the kings of Egypt in this time of history than He is for Alexander, is because they play into the persecution of His own people. That teaches you something about how precious you are in His sight. Alexander is insignificant, but you aren't, because you are His people and He cares even when petty monarchs are vexing the souls and the lives of those that He loves. I'm not even going to attempt to give you a catalog of the kings that are referred to here, but understand this: the king of the south is Egypt and that refers to the various Ptolemies. There are a series of kings, about six or seven of them, all with the name Ptolemy, who reigned in Egypt, and they are described in detail in this passage. And then also, the king of the north, that is Syria. The Seleucids were reigning there, and a series of kings named either Seleucus or Antiochus were reigning, and they are described in detail in this particular passage.

Then ultimately, from verse 22 all the way to verse 35, the focus of the passage is on one of those kings of Syria whose name was Antiochus Epiphanes, and he is the one that you know the most about, because he is the one who went into

Jerusalem and tore down the temple and set up a statue of Zeus in the temple and offered sacrifices to Zeus on the altar in the temple. That was what Daniel referred to as the abomination of desolation. Antiochus is the one who performed that wicked act.

But how are we to apply all that? There are several things that we are to remember about the history recorded here for us. First of all, it reminds us that interpretation is hard work. To really get the most out of this passage, we do have to know the secular history behind it, and then we have to recognize the things that God is drawing our attention to within that secular history that's part of His plan for His people. We're also to remember that this history is foretold here for the sake of explaining the implications of these kingdoms for the people of God. God is encouraging Daniel to pray now for the people of God who will be persecuted under the reign of these wicked kings. Maybe God thought it was important to have an intercessor of the stature of Daniel, not simply focusing his prayers on the return of the children of Israel from exile to the land of Israel, but even to pray for those people who would come long after him because of the effectiveness of that man's prayers and the heart that the Lord had planted in him. Let me remind you again, the significant thing in this passage is God's focus on certain events and His interpretation of them.

There are a number of applications that we can glean from this central section of the passage. It reminds us of the instability of kingdoms in this world. In both the north and in the south, there are at least seven changes in monarchy in the time which is recorded here. Evil is always instable because it does not have a foundation in God, and God is the moral ruler of the universe, and if you want to have stability, you have to be based in the foundations which He has laid. And so evil will always be instable. That's why there's a constant overturn in those who are leading the forces of evil. We learn that in this passage.

We also learn that evil gains a foothold in the city of God because of a spirit of cooperation within the professing people of God. Where do I get that from? We are told that Antiochus was able to gain a foothold in Israel by doing what? Passing out goodies and cooperating with those who were interested in drawing Israel away from the holy covenant of God and toward the cultural practices of the Romans and the Greeks. And so he gained a foothold in the land of Israel which eventually he used to destroy them. Doctrinal, moral and spiritual compromise with the world is how the city of God is broken down, and we learn that in this passage. And it's an important message for us with the world pounding at our heads and at our doors hour after hour after hour. We must be devoted to the covenant and be determined that we are not going to compromise doctrinally and morally and spiritually with the way of the world.

This passage also reminds us that man may plan but God intervenes. If you were to look through this passage, the word *but* occurs in verses 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27 and 29. Now *but* is a common word, but in this passage *but*

often occurs when one plan is made by a king and then the passage says “but this happened and so that didn't come about.” Over and over, we learn *that man proposes but God disposes*. Man may plan, but God is sovereign. Man plans, but God intervenes.

And we also learn in this passage that God is working His purposes out in the circumstances of our lives. We learn that lesson particularly in verses 33 through 35. Look at that passage: “Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many. Yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days. Now when they fall they will be granted a little help and many will join them in hypocrisy and some of those who have insight will fall in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time because it is still to come at the appointed time.” This indicates that even the suffering that God's people will go through is part of God's purifying plan for their lives. There are no accidents in God's providence, only purposes for the good of His people.

III. Christians must pray and live with a clear understanding of the nature of the war we are in.

And then in verses 36 through 45, the scene shifts one more time in this passage. Now the focus is on Antichrist. The focus is against the spiritual forces aligned against the people of God. We learn there that Christians must pray and live with a clear vision of the nature of the war in which we are. We must pray and live with a clear understanding of the nature of the war that we are in. Many answers have been given to the identity of the person who is described here. The liberals used to say that this is merely a continuing description of Antiochus, even though it is a flawed description of him because it does not match the final events of his life. But it is apparent in verse 35 that we have come to an end of Daniel's thought with the phrase, ‘but it is still to come at the appointed time, until the end time, but it is still to come at the appointed time.’ And then he begins to describe someone else. And that someone else is usually identified as Antichrist.

And there have been various candidates put forward for who is being spoken of here. Calvin thought the Roman Empire was being described. Others have suggested that this was Herod or Muhammad or the papacy or the final Antichrist. Military language is used throughout this passage to stress, not that there will be some sort of in-time final military conflict, but to stress the spiritual warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

Now let me say two comments about how we might identify who is being spoken of here. First of all, if you'll look at Daniel chapter 12, verse 8, we read this: “As for me, I could not understand so I said, ‘My Lord, what will be the outcome of the events?’” First thing to recognize is that Daniel himself did not fully understand his visions. So be humble. Don't be quick to come along and say that you've figured out all the details when Daniel himself says ‘Lord, I don't understand the

vision. Help me.' So we should be humble when we come to these hard questions.

Secondly, notice that whatever we say, whoever we identify as this figure, here in verses 36 through 45, there are principles about the spirit of Antichrist that will benefit us now in our prayers no matter how we identify the person.

So let's look at the main features of the Antichrist as described in this section. First of all look at verse 36. Clearly the Antichrist, the spirit of Antichrist, is reflected in the quest for autonomy, the quest for self-rule. Look at verse 36: "Then the king will do as he pleases and he will exalt and magnify himself above every God." You can hear the spirit of the Garden of Eden: 'Eat it. You will be like God.' The Antichrist is in a quest for autonomy to be a god unto himself. Notice also in verse 36 that blasphemy and inhumanity are associated with the spirit of Antichrist: "He will speak monstrous things against the God of gods, and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done. And he will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women." There he manifests both blasphemy towards God and that phrase that "he will show no desire for women" seems to indicate that he will have no component of his character which is compassionate. There will be an inhumanity about his rule which lacks entirely that feminine aspect to human nature.

Notice also in verse 38, his doctrine is 'might makes right.' Instead, he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know. Here again he follows the rule, the doctrine that 'whoever has the power makes the policy.' His doctrine is 'might is right.' But in verse 45, after all this description of his mightiness, his end comes in a very anticlimactic way. He pitches his pavilion between the seas and the mountains, and yet he will come to an end and no one will help him. God will triumph over him. Those four aspects are important for us to remember as we pray about the future of the kingdom of God. This whole chapter serves to remind us again, that the great conflict in which we are engaged is at bottom spiritual. And thus it reminds us to pray and to keep watch over our hearts and our lives and to trust in God's deliverance.

Malcolm Muggeridge, a few years ago, said these words: "Let us then rejoice that we see around us at every hand the decay of the institutions and instruments of power. That we see intimations of empires falling to pieces, money in total disarray, dictators and parliamentarians alike nonplused by the confusion and conflicts which encompass them, for it is precisely when every earthly hope has been explored and found lacking, when every possibility of help from earthly resources has been sought and is not forthcoming, and has been explored to no effect, when every recourse this world offers, moral as well as material, has been found ineffective, when in the shivering cold the last stick of wood has been thrown on the fire, and in the gathering darkness every glimmer of light has finally flickered out, it is then that Christ's hand reaches out firm and sure, then Christ's words bring their inexpressible comfort, then His light shines brightest abolishing

the darkness forever. So finding in everything only deception and nothingness, the soul is constrained to have recourse to God Himself and to rest in Him alone.” Daniel learns that from the history which God foretells him, and he learns how to pray against the spiritual enemies of God's people in Daniel, chapter 11. May we so learn to pray for the kingdom of God and against the kingdom of Satan. Let's look to Him now.

Our Father, we thank You for this word. We thank You that this passage is long and confusing and is beyond our ultimate grasp, but we thank You for the sure messages that are in it for us. Strengthen us by them, by Your spirit, we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, **subscriptions are free**. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).