

## **Series Daniel**

### **Scripture Daniel 11:21-12:3**

The last revelation given to Daniel comprises chapters 10, 11, and 12. In the previous message, from chapter 10, we learned that the conflicts and wars which characterize earthly human history are influenced by the activities of good and bad angels in the spiritual realm, angels which carry out the desires of either God or Satan.

We know that Satan has been defeated in the heavenly realms. The inevitability of physical death is Satan's ultimate way to intimidate people, but we know that Jesus Christ has overcome death and that He offers everlasting life for those who put their trust in Him. Although Satan is defeated in the heavenly realms, he and his forces are still active on earth, and they will be until God puts an end to the circumstances of this present age.

The description of spiritual warfare given to Daniel in chapter 10 must have greatly expanded his understanding about the attitudes and behaviors of the powerful people he had been with during his lifetime. Daniel would have realized that all the conflicts and blood-thirsty ambitions of the world rulers he had seen in the visions were not exclusively human, but were influenced and inspired by spiritual beings, and because of the existence of this spiritual dynamic of evil, Daniel could better understand the rebellion against God and the oppression of God's people.

In the same way that the insights given by the angel lifted Daniel's perspective above earthly events and conflicts, I hope the teaching of chapter 10 helped us to understand how dependent on God we are for our spiritual protection, guidance and hope.

Chapter 11 is a depressing record of earthly rulers who have evil motives, self-gratifying ambitions, deceitfulness, and attitudes of rebellion against God. It is a record of the never-ending conflict between sinful men who are seeking to fulfill their selfish ambitions.

The prophetic record provided by the angel to Daniel covered the 375 years immediately after Daniel's lifetime, plus some information about the very end of the age. From the information Daniel learned how the purposes of God were going to work out through the interactions of several kings.

I want you to notice the references to the sovereignty of God in the chapter: verse 27, "the end will still come at the appointed time," and at verse 29, "at the appointed time," and the end of verse 35, "it will still come at the appointed time," and verse 36, "what has been determined must take place," and verse 40, "at the time of the end." All these statements call attention to God's sovereign control over human activities.

In chapter 10, the angel had said to Daniel, "I have been sent to you ... to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future" (*Daniel 10:11, 14*). Chapter 11 was the record of what was going to happen. God had a sovereign plan for the future, and, as revealed in this chapter, it was a very detailed plan. According to some scholars, more than 130 specific prophecies from this chapter have been fulfilled and can be verified in the history books. God intended the events of human history to occur precisely on His schedule.

Chapter 11 is a very long chapter, and it is also very complicated because it pulls together and clarifies much of the material we have previously covered. I am going to paraphrase the information in the first 20 verses. Then I will remind you of some relevant background information, and then we will peruse and think about the text in the last part of the chapter.

The angel who was speaking to Daniel had said that he had come to tell what was written in "the Book of Truth," that is, truth from God. History follows God's playbook. The angel began his monologue by announcing that four more kings would arise in Persia after Cyrus the Great, and that the fourth of these kings would arouse the animosity of Greece. History informs us that this fourth king was Xerxes, the man who made Esther his queen. He attempted to conquer Greece and expand his empire unto European territory. He was soundly defeated in his effort, and, one century later, the army of Greece retaliated and defeated Persia.

The king who led the military forces of Greece against the Persians was Alexander the Great. His abilities and powers were extraordinary but he died at age 33. All the territories held by Greece were then divided among four of Alexander's generals. At this point the angel narrowed the focus of the prophecy to the dynasties of two of those four rulers. The base territories of these two rulers were Egypt in the South and Syria in the North. The terms "North" and "South" are relative to the land of the Jews. Palestine was in the middle. The interactions between these southern and northern kingdoms severely impacted the well-being of the Jews.

Egypt and Syria became like superpowers. They frequently fought each other for supremacy in the Middle East. Whenever one of them made a move against the other, they had to pass through Palestine, the land of the Jews. Each side coveted the Jewish territory, which was like a land-bridge and buffer zone separating the two powerful kingdoms. The angel had come to tell Daniel what would happen to his people in the future (*Daniel 10:14*), but, unfortunately, the angel did not have good news concerning the Jews because Israel was caught in the middle of the military campaigns of the Northern and Southern rulers.

Eventually, in 198 BC, the king of the North was able to establish his authority over all of Palestine, and during the next 25 years, this king and his successors attempted to expand and consolidate territory around all the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the individuals referred to in the early part of chapter 11 are not very important as far as the general flow of world history is concerned, but, because these minor historical figures had a great impact on the Jewish people, they were very important in the purposes of God.

Daniel had been given an incredible amount of information in the visions. However, as we said when thinking about chapter 10, there were still some facts that he could not fit together in his mind. You will recall that all of the previous visions ended with the description of a very evil cruel ruler who defied God, set himself up in the place of God, and persecuted God's people. Let me briefly remind you of some important background information.

From the vision in chapter 2, Daniel learned that this evil ruler would be judged and destroyed by a supernatural force — by "a rock cut out of a mountain but not by human hands" (*Daniel 2:45*). This would occur at the end of the age.

In chapter 7 Daniel saw in vision “a little horn” which emerged from the fourth and last of the beasts representing world empires. This “little horn” spoke “boastful words” against the Most High and waged war against the saints until he was directly judged by the Ancient of Days (*see Daniel 7:8-12, 19-26*). That judgment would occur at the end of the age.

In chapter 8 Daniel saw in vision another horn. This horn emerged from one of the divisions of the Greek empire, that is, the second world empire. This horn “grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land” of Israel. This horn “grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host. It took away the daily sacrifices ... , and the place of the sanctuary was brought low. ... It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground” (*Daniel 8:9-12*).

Daniel was told that this ruler would be “a stern-faced king, and a master of intrigue. ... that he would become very strong. ... and would cause astounding devastation. ... He would destroy the mighty men and the holy people. ... He would take his stand against the Prince of princes” before “he would be destroyed but not by human power” (*Daniel 8:19-25*). It may have seemed to Daniel that the visions in chapters 7 and 8 described the same evil ruler, but he had been told that one of them came from the fourth beast and the other from the second beast.

Another major part of Daniel’s perplexity concerned the time frame in which the evil ruler would appear. In chapter 9 Daniel was given a time line about when certain events would occur, but the time line didn’t clear up his confusion about the evil ruler or rulers.

It was the objective of the angel to clear up these matters, and so, in the last part of chapter 11, starting in verse 21, the angel finally got around to giving details about the evil rulers seen in the previous visions.

History informs us that the “contemptible person” in verse 21 was named Antiochus Epiphanes. This was the man described in the vision in chapter 8. The angel mentioned several additional details about this man’s life. He was not in line to become king, but he took over the throne of the kingdom of the North. The year was 175 BC. He secured and advanced his position by “intrigue.” In the beginning of his reign, he offered friendship and alliance to many people, spread gifts among his followers, leveraged his relationships for his personal benefit, and didn’t hesitate to turn against people when it was to his advantage. *(Not unlike some politicians today!)*

Antiochus led campaigns against Egypt two times. Verses 25 through 28 describe how he was partially successful the first time, although his success was not due entirely to his military competence. He had actually attacked Egypt at a time when the strength of Egypt was diminished because of internal disloyalties.

In 170 BC Antiochus invaded the South a second time in an effort to capture more of Egypt, the western part around the city of Alexandria. He was not successful in this effort because the Roman naval and military forces provided assistance to Egypt.

Verse 30 explains what happened next. As Antiochus was returning to his own land, which meant that he had to pass through Palestine, he vented his frustrations on the Jewish people. He had tried for several years to get the Jews to adopt Greek culture and habits and to abandon their Jewish religion. He showed “favor to those Jews who were willing to forsake the holy covenant,” that is, those who quit following the law, but he prevented faithful Jews from offering their daily sacrifices, and he desecrated the temple by setting up an idolatrous altar dedicated to the Greek pagan god Zeus. This altar became known as the “abomination that causes desolation.”

Some of the Jews did indeed “violate the Mosaic covenant” in their efforts at self-preservation. However, other Jews resisted the actions of Antiochus in two ways: some of them took up arms and joined an underground resistance movement; another group, “those who were wise began to instruct” their fellow countrymen in the ways of God. When members of these two groups were apprehended by the Syrians, they were killed.

One of the outcomes of this difficult time was that some of the Jews were “refined, purified, and made spotless” in their faith. Because of persecution, they turned to God and began to pattern their lives according to the Scriptures. The Jews who turned to God were following the Old Testament pattern. Throughout the history of Israel, the most common cause of spiritual refinement and purification was persecution and suffering. The word for “refine” sometimes described the process of smelting metal. “To refine” meant to burn off the dross. The word “purify” had the meaning of “separating from what is unacceptable.”

We come now to the reason why God, in His sovereignty, permitted all the bad things to happen to His people at this time. God’s intentions can be stated quite simply: the uncertainties and dangers of the times to which the Jews people were frequently subjected were intended to get them to turn back to Him in dependence, sincerity, and purity of faith. The unspiritual attitudes and behaviors of the Jewish people were one of the reasons why God permitted “the times of the Gentiles,” this era in which the Jews are dominated by the Gentile powers. Generally speaking, God’s people had never learned the lessons He wanted them to learn through the many years of Old Testament history. Most of the Jews continued to be resistant to His ways generation after generation.

The Old Testament describes many episodes of the unfaithfulness and rebellion of the Israelites. They were always forgetting and ignoring their loving and protective Yahweh. Their complaints and disobedience began shortly after Moses led them out of Egypt, and they never stopped. There were numerous periods of disobedience after they entered into the promised land. Harassment by neighboring people groups, famines, natural disasters, disease epidemics — for the most part, the Jewish people did not learn enduring lessons from any of these catastrophes. And neither did they learn from their years of exile in Babylon. The people of Judah neither repented of the behavior which brought about their punishment nor did they follow the ways of God after they returned to their home land.

Verse 35 states that those who are “wise” will be “refined, purified, and made spotless until the time of the end.” This implies that spiritual wise people will be faithful no matter what comes their way. It implies that God wanted His people to remember the lessons learned from the Old Testament and learned from the experience with Antiochus until the end of the age. God wanted His people to stay close to Him, and, just as in the centuries of the Old Testament, He used persecution and suffering to get at least some of His people to turn back to Him in trust and obedience. It was God’s desire that those who were “wise” would be faithful to Him until “the time of the end.”

There is a transition beginning in verse 36. Verses 36 through 39 describe attitudes and behaviors which were typical of Antiochus, but, all things considered, the last section of this chapter cannot be reconciled with any historical records involving Antiochus. The last verses in the chapter focus on a second person who will be similar to, but worse than, Antiochus. The one who is yet to come, the one who will be alive at the end of the age, will be far-and-away a more “contemptible person” than was Antiochus.

Jump ahead to the statement in chapter 12 verse 1. Notice what it says about the circumstances at the end of the age. At the time of the second contemptible ruler there “will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” The distress and sufferings caused by Antiochus were really bad, but they were only a taste of what is yet to occur.

The angel tempered his statement about “distress” by adding some encouraging facts about deliverance. Follow along as I read and comment on a few verses from chapter 12. “But at that time your people, (that is, Daniel’s people, the Jews, but even more importantly) everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise, that is, those who act sensibly and appropriately in view of circumstances, they will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, they will shine like the stars for ever and ever.”

We will return to some of these verses next week. The application I leave with you today is the need to be faithful and obedient no matter what happens. The lesson we can learn from the message of the angel is the need to be faithful to the time of the end, whenever that may be — either the end of our physical lives or the end of the age. The Antiochuses of this life may come and go. God's people may face times of spiritual persecution causing physical suffering, but, if we are wise, we can be hopeful. God has an appointed end for this age. The times of adversity in this age are a part of the plan and purpose of God for purging and purifying His people in preparation for the coming of His kingdom.