



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 14 Issue 8

March 1, 2015

Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 20

Daniel 12 is not an easy text to understand. In fact, there is significant debate as to whom exactly is in mind AND whose mind/perspective this was written from?

There are two prophetic tools in play here which we must be aware of if we are going to make heads/tails of this passage. The first prophetic tool is known as dual fulfillment. Isaiah 7:14 and the promise of "a virgin with child," is an example of this. Centuries ago commentators took this only as a prophetic reference to Christ. However recent scholarship has noted a deficiency in this view, for it would have made Isaiah's promise to Ahaz unintelligible and quite irrelevant. Accordingly, it is now understood that there were two references in mind with Isaiah 7:14. A young maiden in Isaiah's day who was about to

give birth to a child, most likely from the royal court; for Ahaz would have had to have known whom Isaiah was speaking about for the promise here to make sense. In God's mind, two women were being spoken about which means this one prophecy had two points of fulfillment!

We see this same "tool" employed in Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:8; Psalm 22 and the many other messianic psalms. Think of it. When David wrote Psalm 22 he was describing his own personal conviction of what it was like to be persecuted as he was. Yet we also see unquestionable reference to the cross of Christ.

Psalms 22:1, 6-8, 14, 16-18, "1 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?...6 But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*, 8 'Commit *yourself* to the Lord...' 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me... 16 For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

When we read this psalm we behold the image of two different men, and sometimes it is hard to discern when and where we are seeing one over the other!

The second prophetic tool is what I call compound prophecy. Oft-times in prophetic discourses two or more foretellings are announced — a short term prophecy and a long term prophecy. The focus is on the latter prophecy, yet to prove that the prophet ought to be heeded, an event that would shortly take place is announced. When it came to pass, then the people would know the second prophecy was certain!

In Isaiah 7 Isaiah announced two different prophecies; a short term and a long term prophecy. The first young maiden would have a baby and before that baby reached the age of 3 to 4, the northern kingdoms would be gone (vv. 10-16). Yet later in the history of God's people, severe trial and difficulty would come upon Israel (vv. 17ff). Because the short-term prophecy occurred within five to six years of Isaiah's prediction, God's people would most certainly know the latter prophecy also would come to pass.

Two prophetic tools come into play in Daniel 11. The first is a compound prophecy. The first five prophetic discourses were the short-term prophecies which Daniel nailed (Daniel 11:2-35)! As we saw, there is LITTLE IF NO debate as to the historical events foreseen here in detail! The implication is that if Daniel was correct with the first five prophecies, then the final prophecy detailing the last days (Daniel 11:36-12:4) most certainly would come to pass!

In recognition of this tool, we note therefore that the intended audience of this final vision

(Daniel 10-12) ultimately was NOT Daniel's contemporaries, BUT those living in the latter days- which is you and me! It is as we saw in Daniel 12;8-9.

Daniel 12:8-9, "As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, 'My lord, what *will be* the outcome of these *events*?' And he said, 'Go *your way*, Daniel, for *these* words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.'"

The second prophetic tool, dual fulfillment is also in play here. Daniel 11:2-35 contain an indisputable detailing of historical events pertaining to Persia, Greece, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, and the Maccabean era. Yet when we get to Daniel 11:36ff, Daniel's accuracy breaks down rather severely if we take this section in reference to Antiochus Epiphanes alone. For example, we know that Antiochus Epiphanes did NOT "stretch out his hand against *other* countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape" (v. 42). Furthermore, Antiochus did NOT die when he "...pitch[ed] the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain..." (v. 45). Add to this the cosmic language invoked here, "at the end time" (v. 40)- which takes us to the edge of history/the latter days and to events which could not have occurred at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. This has led many scholars to the conclusion that much more is being described in this last section than the regency of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Yet even here there is hesitancy. For example, there is no clear transitional statement between vv. 35 and 36- which is somewhat out of character for Daniel in this chapter. In the earlier part of the chapter, there are clear signals that Daniel moved from one king to the next (cf. vv. 2, 7, 20-21), but NOT in the present section. So, either Daniel blew it and made a huge mistake when it came to Antiochus; which would render him a false prophet (and so Christ since the Lord accepted Daniel as a true prophet [Matthew 24:15]), or Daniel failed to realize that in this section he saw the shadow of TWO distinct persons; Antiochus and the Antichrist.

Today with our familiarity with the different prophetic tools utilized in the prophets, we recognize that the section at which we are looking involves a dual fulfillment as Daniel saw two men whom he thought was one: Antiochus and the Antichrist! Accordingly, I have titled this last section as "The Final Era" and I take it as THE reason God gave Daniel 10-12- that we the intended recipients might have hope and so believe. It is as Christ said in John 16:

John 16:1, 4a: "These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling... that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them." (cf. also John 13:19; 14:29)

Tremper Longman wrote this:

In Daniel 11:36-45 we see references to Antiochus Epiphanes taking on larger than life

characteristics, which we, living in the light of the New Testament, might describe as anticipatory of a figure called the Antichrist. (Longman, 1999, p. 282)

Daniel 11:36a, "Then the king will do as he pleases..."

This could reference Antiochus as well as the Antichrist. As it is said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely!" And that is exactly what we see in both characters. Because he had unchecked power, Antiochus Epiphanes ravaged the land and God's people! And so it will be in the last days!

The Antichrist already has been described by Daniel. In Daniel 7:8 he is called "the little horn" and he is one who "...exalts himself against everything (that is) called God or worshiped." In Daniel 7:25; 8:25 he is called "the man of lawlessness" and "the one who opposes." In Daniel 8:9-14 he "seats himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." In Daniel 8:23 he is "insolent and skilled in intrigue." In Daniel 8:26, he is identified as "the son of perdition." In Daniel 9:26 he is called "the prince who is to come." In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 he is called "the man of lawlessness," and "the son of destruction," which is a Hebraism meaning he is doomed. And in Revelation 13:1 he is called "the beast." All of these titles have reference to the same person. And here he is called "the king who does as he pleases"- that is, "the willful king." Truly, this is part and parcel of the spirit of antichrist that has and continues to curse so many peoples and lands throughout history...

1 John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour."

In light of this our passage is a description of the character and intent not only of THE antichrist, but of the many antichrist figures that would come to this world following the days of Daniel. They will flourish, but in the end they will culminate in one person who is described in some detail in 2 Thessalonians 2 where we learn that:

- He will come out of the great apostasy or rebellion, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
- He will be a person, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4, 6, 8.
- He will be revealed immediately before the coming of Christ, 2 Thessalonians 2:8.
- He will be an object of worship, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

Hendriksen describes him this way:

"In his reckless audacity and ferocious insolence he uplifts himself... not only against the only true God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and against all so-called gods, but also against all sacred objects, against whatever stands in connection with religious cults. (Hendriksen, 1979, p. 177)

- He will use great signs and deceptive miracles, 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 11.
- He can only be revealed after that which restrains has been taken out of the way, 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7.
- He will arrogate to himself authority over the true church which will not recognize his authority and so will refuse to render homage to him. The result will be great tribulation for them, Matthew 24:15, 21, 22, 29.
- And as we will see, he will be totally overthrown by Christ when our Lord returns, 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

It is this man whom Daniel ultimately saw in the vision given to him here. With that, let's consider some of the characteristics revealed here about him and Antiochus.

Daniel 11:36b, "...and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and 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."

Recall on account of the pressure he felt from Rome, in 168 BC Antiochus deigned to "homogenize" his kingdom endeavoring to make the many people-groups of the Seleucid Empire into one. The primary way he did this was by choosing one of the many religions in his kingdom to be THE religion and so THE only valid god that could be worshipped (he chose the worship of Baal Shamem- the Syrian version of Zeus). Accordingly, every religion in his kingdom had to make an offering to Zeus (which involved a pig because that was believed to be one of Zeus' human forms). In this way he:

Daniel 11:37, "...show[ed] no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women [an epithet of Tammuz whom Jewish women particularly liked to worship at this time; we'll talk more about him when we get to Ezekiel], nor will he show regard for any *other* god; for he will magnify himself above *them* all."

That is exactly what Antiochus Epiphanes did when he exalted Baal Shamem above any and every god of his kingdom. Yet you will notice that the text here contains details which did not apply to Antiochus. In v. 36 we read that he "...will speak monstrous things against the God of gods..." Here is where the shadows of the two figures- Antiochus and the Antichrist-cross. There is no doubt that in these decisions Antiochus directed his hatred against God. Recall in v. 28, "...his heart will be *set* against the holy covenant." Yet such is also the passion and bent of Satan and his antichrists throughout history. Speaking of Satan, Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 14:13-14, "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'"

Recall, one of the most fundamental passions of Satan is the desire to supplant God; Satan just doesn't want to *share* in the worship directed to God, he wants to be the one and only God! Accordingly, any and all vessels that he would use would likewise have that passion. Speaking of the Antichrist, Paul said this:

2 Thessalonians 2:4, "...opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God."

As a result, the Antichrist will speak blasphemies against God.

Revelation 13:5-6, "And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven."

Such is the spirit of antichrist- the juxtaposing of himself as the object of any and all worship. Fueled with this passion, nevertheless he would be a worshipper himself.

Daniel 11:38, "But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor *him* with gold, silver, costly stones, and treasures."

Antiochus/Antichrist would not be "god-less"... for truly they would pay homage to "a god of fortresses." IOW, each would give great attention to their military machine and their insatiable desire to oppress any and every kingdom around them. Truly, they each would bow down to the god of power!

Daniel 7:23 says that when the antichrist comes he "will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it." That's why he can magnify himself above all because he's going to have military power. And with this, he will honor his god with "...gold, silver, costly stones, and treasure." The idea here is that he will dump large amounts of money into his war machine. And so:

Daniel 11:39a, "And he will take action against the strongest of fortresses with *the help of a foreign god*..."

The "foreign god" again is that of power! With this as his passion, Antiochus/Antichrist will attack the strongest of fortresses seeking to devour it and all things. This is the spirit of antichrist. History is replete with example after example of evil, wicked men who resort to military might to impose their will and so their worship upon others.

Daniel 11:39b, "...he will give great honor to those who acknowledge *him*, and he will

cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price.”

In other words, those who submit, the antichrist will honor with land. He will place his devotees in positions of authority over which to rule in his name.

What do you think is behind ISIS... or Islam? You know, there has never been a peaceful Islamic nation. When Islam enters a country, it uses force to subjugate all peoples. *“Bow down or die!”* That is the only option. Such a spirit will continue to permeate the forces of darkness in this world. Coordinately, with this the focus of the text shifts to describing the national conflict that would occur on account of Antiochus/Antichrist. With this, let me give you a couple of thoughts.

First, there is very little correspondence this next section with the reign and rule of Antiochus. Accordingly, we take most if not all of the next section in reference to the Antichrist. Furthermore, we must be careful that we not read the following too literally; many Christians have and continue to make that mistake today and so are forced to contend that in the last days, in the future, the key battles against antichrist will be fought “with chariots, horsemen, and ships” (v. 40)- which is ludicrous! So we must avoid a rigid literalism.

Daniel 11:40, “And at the end time [the reference here most likely is to the last days- the age in which we live] the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North [Antiochus/the antichrist] will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen, and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow *them*, and pass through.”

The study of eschatology involves a study of the signs of the times, those things which Christ said will characterize the Interadventual period and which, like birth pangs, will increase/intensify just prior to the coming of the Lord. For example such signs are:

- Tribulation, Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1b; Matthew 5:10-12; 24:15-25; John 15:20; 16:33.
- Apostasy, Psalms 106; Matthew 24:10-12, 24; Hebrews 6:6; 10:29; 2 Peter 2:20; 1 John 2:19; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.
- Natural phenomena (like earthquakes and famine), Matthew 24:7b-8; Romans 8:18-25.
- Wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6-8) as referenced here!

Each of these characterize the age in which we live, but again each will intensify as we near the last day. Accordingly to read of a major conflict which will characterize the end of the reign and rule of the Antichrist fits quite well with the rest of Biblical prophecy. In fact, the picture here is of a colossal conflict. Notice the violent language:

- Collide: this is the word for “goring” as in an ox (cf. Exodus 21:28; 31-32; Deuteronomy 33:17) and therefore pictures a violent, bloody conflict.
- Storm: lit. means to “bristle with terror” and is used of a tornado which brings sudden, unexpected destruction (cf. Is. 21:1; Jeremiah 4:13; Habakkuk 3:14; Zechariah 9:14).
- Overflow: is the language of a massive flood. The same word is used in Isaiah 8:8 in which the inescapable devastation caused by enemy armies is compared to that of “a flood”!

There is much more written in God’s word about the clash expected on the last day between Christ and the Antichrist. However the language here preps us for that violent, bloody conflict in which even God’s people will suffer.

Daniel 11:41, “He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many *countries* will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.”

It is rather ironic that “Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon” were the perennial enemies of God’s people. The significance of this is that while the “Beautiful Land” (which is a reference to the land promised to God’s people) and many other lands will be overrun, those who hate God’s people most will be protected and in fact do just fine!

Daniel 11:42-43, “Then he will stretch out his hand against *other* countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians *will follow* at his heels.”

Antichrist and his followers will overwhelm what then was the known world. Egypt would fall along with its wealth. And yet so would Libya and Ethiopia which in Antiochus’ day were under the influence of Rome. Again, the idea is that of an unstoppable world power and so world domination. Submission to this world power would mean life, livelihood, and prosperity. Rebellion would mean conflict, war, and great suffering!

Daniel 11:44, “But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him, and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.”

At the height of his success, this conqueror will suddenly be recalled by bad news from the opposite side of his empire. Here, as Hebrew is inclined to do, the text itself *demonstrates* the rather sudden end of the Antichrist. While he endeavors to “annihilate many,” he suddenly will meet his end- notice...

Daniel 11:45a, “And he will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and

the beautiful Holy Mountain...”

This is a picture of arrogance as well as great threatening. He will situate himself such that God’s people will feel quite exposed and vulnerable. So just when God’s people think that they are a goner- at a time where hope is lost- suddenly:

Daniel 11:45b, “...yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”

In the end, the oppressor will find himself without ally and will meet his end when the True King, King Jesus, comes in His glory!

So what do we have before us? A shadowy prophecy because in Daniel’s mind he no doubt was describing what he thought was one person, but in God’s mind he was describing two: Antiochus Epiphanes as well as the Antichrist. And through the prophetic tools of Dual Fulfillment and Compound Prophecy we recognize that what God gave Daniel in this fifth revelation was actually intended for us!

So how do we apply this passage? How are we to take it?

We must begin with Christ’s words in John 16.

John 16:1, 4a, “These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling... that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”
(cf. also John 13:19; 14:29)

God gave us Daniel 10-12 to frame our thinking as we serve the Lord in these latter days. This passage was given to keep us from stumbling over Christ! How would we do that?

Recently as we enjoyed the Lord’s Day, ISIS beheaded 21 Egyptian Christians? And now I just read they’ve rounded up many more Christians in order to execute them! I wonder... what would it be like to be a Christian living in the Near East today? Would you raise your children to anticipate a long life? Would you raise them with the anticipation that upon graduation from high school they naturally will attend an university, get a good degree and then a good job, get married, parent children, live a long life, retire, and then someday... a long time from now, die? I dare say you would raise your children with the understanding that they might not make it out of their teens- but instead could die for their Lord. You’d raise them therefore to love Christ more than life and so be willing to sacrifice all if need be. You’d raise them not to cling to life, but to Christ. You’d teach them that in this unchanging world, there is a Rock that cannot be moved, and therefore they should spend the majority of their effort in this life investing in that which will never perish!

What a contrast to the American Dream which the church in America has Christianized. Today in America as Christians we expect an easy life, success, prosperity, resources,

provisions and wealth. We rarely realize that these were given to us NOT so that we could serve ourselves, BUT that we might do good and so serve the Lord! But we've missed this. Our easy lives have led us to expect that life will NOT be too hard. Accordingly we don't expect to suffer and we don't expect hardship. Again we've Christianized the American Dream!

In this context when the harsh, cold realities of life in this state of sin and misery crash in, American Christians typically trip over Christ, "*Why? How dare you? I thought you loved me?*"

Matthew 11:6: that is exactly what Christ had in mind when he told John who was in prison on account of the Lord, "...blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." Christian, I remind you that the prophetic discourse we've examined today was written for us- that we might have hope and so believe when we are in the crucible! Accordingly, let us take this passage and bear it to heart that whether we enjoy ease of days or bitter providence, we might live with the joy of the Lord knowing that in and through all things, "Our God Reigneth for His Glory and our Good!"

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