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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 19

Each book of the Bible has its peculiarities. What makes Esther so unique is that in this ten chapter book containing 167 verses, the name of God is nowhere mentioned- not even once! And yet the entire book is about the goodness, glory, and sovereignty of God!

The story begins during the reign of the Persian King, Ahasuerus. His wife has displeased him and so he deigned to hold a beauty pageant in order to replace her with a new bride. Yet behind the scenes is the sub-plot of the conflict that existed between the people of God and the heirs of the Amalekite king, Agag whom the prophet Samuel killed in 1 Sam. 15 on account of Saul's irresponsibility. This execution incited a strong hatred on the part of the Amalekites toward God's people. Accordingly, roughly 600 years later, an Amalekite by the

name of Haman is so offended by a Jewish man named Mordecai that he gets the Ahasuerus to sign a decree allowing any in Persia on a certain day to execute any Jew they wanted. Yet in God's providence, the Lord ordained that a Jewish woman by the name of Esther win the beauty pageant and so become the queen of Ahasuerus. Yet, she kept her identity hidden for whatever reason.

At the eleventh hour before the nation would be free to kill any Jew they desired, Mordecai exhorted Esther to approach the king, reveal her identity, and then appeal for the protection of her people. Yet in the ancient world to approach a king without a summons could mean your death; and so Esther hesitated! This is where we read what perhaps the most well-known verse in Esther is:

Esther 4:13, "13 And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" — the expression oozes forth a trust and reliance upon the sovereignty of God, and so has been used throughout the centuries in pastoral contexts in which people are up against great odds.

Daniel reflects this glorious confidence in the sovereignty and glory of God. Indeed, the future looked quite bleak for the people of God as they suffered in exile! Yet they needed to know and understand that their times and welfare were in the hands of a glorious, great, and sovereign God! This theme has already been proclaimed quite boldly in Daniel; first with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego facing certain death:

Daniel 3:16-18, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.'"

God's sovereignty is also shown in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and his humiliation:

Daniel 4:17, "This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers, and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes, and sets over it the lowliest of men."

In chapter 2 we learned that God is ruler over the entire world. Here that rule is said to involve the individual parts/elements in the realm of mankind!

Daniel 4:35, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’”

Yet talk is cheap! It is one thing to say that God is in control of all things, but it is quite another to behold that control. The book of Daniel is a demonstration of the sovereignty of God! In fact it is so amazing, many non-believers do not believe that Daniel 11 was written by Daniel, so they attack this book and say that it had to have been written after the fact. Yet stylistically, grammatically, and linguistically this book belongs in the sixth century BC (not the second century as the liberal weakly argues)!

As ones who believe in a great and glorious God who “holds the heart of the king in His hand” (Proverbs 21:1), allow this chapter *to demonstrate* the sovereignty and goodness of God!

Daniel 11, revolves around five Kings and their Kingdoms. From this section we learn that, in the spirit of Elisha, “even the thoughts of a man in private are governed by the Lord” (2 Kings 6:12)!

God is the Keeper of History

Daniel 11:2a, “And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all *of them...*”-

There is much debate as to this simple statement primarily because there actually were nine kings following Cyrus who rightfully sat on the throne in Persian. Accordingly, men like E. J. Young viewed the mentioning of four kings as the beginning of four different ages in Persian history. Others have suggested that this is simply talking about the three kings directly preceding a fourth, powerful king. Yet I think we are over-thinking the passage a bit here. A common Hebraism found throughout the Old Testament is this very expression, “there are three things... and then a fourth.”

Proverbs 30:15b¹, “There are three things that will not be satisfied, four that will not say, ‘Enough.’”

Amos 1:3, “Thus says the Lord, ‘For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its *punishment.*’”

Accordingly, most today believe that Daniel simply was utilizing that literary tool.

Regardless, there is little if no debate, even among liberals, that the fourth king was Xerxes-who from the perspective of Scripture is a significant figure.

Daniel 11:2b, "...as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole *empire* against the realm of Greece"

Xerxes was indeed a wealthy and powerful king. He was the son of Darius the Great, the grandson of Cyrus. He became sole ruler of Persia in 486 BC. Ironically, he wasn't the greatest king in the world, *and it was on account of this that he is remembered!*

Xerxes was the Ahasuerus of Esther, which should give you a good idea as to how foolish a leader he really was, divorcing his wife and holding a beauty pageant? Truly, he lacked the toleration and sensitivity of Cyrus and the foresight of Darius, and so made foolish mistakes when it came to his rule. For example, not satisfied with his power, and urged on by bad advisers, he began an assault on Greece in 480 BC- as the text says, "he arouse[d] the whole *empire* against the realm of Greece." He would be defeated many times in many battles and ultimately turned back, but not before committing such atrocities against Greece that they would never forgive or forget him. According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:

Xerxes inherited an empire that was basically sound, but he was not equal to the task of maintaining its vitality. The description of his character in Esther... agrees with evidence from other sources. His undisciplined temper and moral weakness cost him everything he had gained. (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 1995, p. 1161)

Xerxes was assassinated in 465 BC! Yet from this point forward, Greek children would be raised with a disdain for Persia which was predicted here by God way before it happened! In fact, it came to a climax in the fourth century BC with Greece.

Daniel 11:3, "And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority and do as he pleases."

A good 150 years after Xerxes, a young Greek soldier; in fact a boy, rose up in his father's army and took control not only of Macedonia (upon the death of his father), but all of Greece. His name was Alexander (356-323 BC) perhaps the greatest war general ever to have lived!

Daniel said that he would "...rule with great authority and do as he please[d]." And that is exactly what happened! By the age of 33, Alexander had conquered the ancient world, everything from Europe to India! In fact, the only thing that stopped him was his own army... they didn't want to go any further! Accordingly, in 323 BC Alexander divided his forces into three groups in order to travel the long distance back home. He took one of the groups and went south from the mouth of the Indus River and returned to the city of

Babylon. However along the way, he contracted malaria which ended with his death at the age of 33 in Babylon! Accordingly we read the incredibly accurate prediction:

Daniel 11:4, "But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass, though not to his *own* descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded; for his sovereignty will be uprooted and *given* to others besides them."

Remember this was written hundreds of years before Alexander was born. And yet, in His divine Sovereignty, God indicated to Daniel that Alexander's kingdom would be divided into four kingdoms which would be ruled by men who were not related to him! And that is exactly what happened. Alexander had a half-brother who was mentally impaired, an illegitimate son, and a baby born posthumously, all of whom were murdered upon Alexander's death. So Alexander's kingdom did not go to his descendants. Rather, after much conflict, four generals emerged, just as God predicted, and each claimed a portion of the Kingdom as their own.

- Antigonus I took Asia Minor.
- Antipater took Macedonia and Thrace (Greece).
- Ptolemy took Egypt and Palestine.
- Seleucus took Syria.

Now because Daniel 11 is about "the conflict" (Daniel 10:1) which would involve "God's people" (Daniel 10:14), the focus of this passage from this point on revolves around the Ptolemies and Seleucids who would be at constant war in the desire to control the Promised Land.

In and throughout all this time, which lasted for more than 200 years, God's people would be the pawns of these two warring nations! We begin looking at the Ptolemaic Empire since they first took control of Palestine.

The Ptolemaic Empire

Daniel 11:5, "Then the king of the South [the Ptolemies; since all of this is written with God's people in mind, all direction-language is given from the perspective of Jerusalem. So a reference to the "south" would be a reference to Egypt/Ptolemies and a reference to "north" would be a reference to Syria/Seleucids. And so, speaking of Egypt/the Ptolemies, its king...] will grow strong, along with *one* of his princes who will gain ascendancy over him and obtain dominion; his domain *will be* a great dominion *indeed.*"

Once again, this is incredibly specific, yet to see it you need to know some of the back-history.

The Ptolemaic dynasty started out a little more powerful than the Seleucid dynasty, but it didn't take long until the north gained strength and boldness and so began threatening the Ptolemaic control over Palestine. On account of a growing tension it was decided that an alliance was necessary to avoid war.

Daniel 11:6a, "And after some years they will form an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the South will come to the king of the North to carry out a peaceful arrangement..."

In the ancient world and in fact recent history, alliances between nations typically were forged through marriage. An important daughter of the nation (maybe the king's daughter or a niece) would be given in marriage to an important son of another nation or even its king. It was hoped that the union would keep peace. Think of it... if you gave your daughter to a land and then attacked, that land most likely would kill your daughter.

Now get this; hundreds of years before the event, God revealed to Daniel such specific details about this attempt at peace we are left in amazement over God's sovereignty and greatness!

Daniel 11:6b, "...but she will not retain her position of power, nor will he remain with his power, but she will be given up, along with those who brought her in, and the one who sired her, as well as he who supported her in *those* times."

The key players here are Antiochus Theos (of the Seleucids) and Ptolemy Philadelphus (of the Ptolemies). Antiochus wanted to forge an alliance with the Ptolemies by marrying the daughter of the king of the Ptolemies, Berenice. The only problem was that Antiochus was already married to a woman by the name of Laodice! Yet that was easily solved, for Antiochus simply divorced her and took Ptolemy's daughter, Berenice, as his new bride.

Yet in God's providence the Egyptian king died (which, from the perspective of Antiochus, there no longer would be a need for an alliance; the next Egyptian king would have his own family to be given in alliance). Accordingly, Antiochus divorced Berenice and remarried Laodice! And yet, having just been "burned" by her husband, Laodice decided to take matters into her own hands. She poisoned Antiochus and encouraged her son, Callinicus, to poison Berenice. History records that Callinicus did a thorough job killing not only Berenice but also all of her attendants, exactly as the text says, "...but she will not retain her position of power, nor will he remain with his power, but she will be given up, along with those who brought her in..."

Daniel 11: 7, "But one of the descendants of her line [this would be Ptolemy III, the brother of Berenice] will arise in his place, and he will come against *their* army and enter the fortress of the king of the North, and he will deal with them and display *great*

strength.”

History records that because of the execution of his sister, Ptolemy III overcame the forces of the north and executed Laodice. Then to add insult to injury, he pillaged the Seleucid temple such that we read this:

Daniel 11:8, “And also their gods with their metal images *and* their precious vessels of silver and gold he will take into captivity to Egypt, and he on his part will refrain from *attacking* the king of the North for *some* years.”

Ptolemy took 40,000 talents of silver, 2,500 idol statues, and much, much more- exactly as God prophesied here a good 200 years before it happened! In retaliation, Callinicus (the man who murdered Berenice), now king of the Seleucids, attacked the Ptolemies. Yet he was defeated.

Daniel 11:9, “Then the latter [Callinicus] will enter the realm of the king of the South, but will return to his *own* land.”

After his sound defeat at the hands of the Ptolemies, Callinicus returned home! Are you amazed yet? The detail of this prophecy is so specific! The only way God could have given it is if HE HIMSELF ordained it... if history were in fact HIS-STORY!

At this point the focus of the prophecy shifts to the northern kingdom, the Seleucids. Now you must see that the history and names that we are discussing here are universally accepted. Whether you use a liberal or conservative commentary, all will be talking about the same people and the same events; there is no debate (the only debate is when this was written)!

The Seleucid Empire

Daniel 11:10, “And his sons [Callinicus’ sons, Ceraunus and Antiochus III] will mobilize and assemble a multitude of great forces [history records that it was 75,000 men]; and one of them [Antiochus the Great (Ceraunus died shortly thereafter)] will keep on coming and overflow and pass through, that he may again wage war up to his *very* fortress.”

Angered over the defeat inflicted upon their father and their nation, Callinicus’ sons took action. The stronger of the two, Antiochus III, engaged in a sortie into Ptolemy territory bringing his troops all the way up to Ptolemy’s fortress! Yet the reigning king on the throne of the Ptolemies at the time, Ptolemy IV, had had enough.

Daniel 11:11, “And the king of the South will be enraged and go forth and fight with the king of the North. Then the latter will raise a great multitude, but *that* multitude will be given into the hand of the *former*.”

Ptolemy IV indeed went out in battle against Antiochus III and soundly defeated him, “...the multitude was given into the hand of the former”- this battle occurred in Raphia on June 22, 217 BC. Though Antiochus led a great army, Ptolemy’s was even larger involving 73,000 men, 5,000 cavalry officers, and 73 elephants! Ptolemy’s victory encouraged the general such that we read this:

Daniel 11:12, “When the multitude is carried away, his heart will be lifted up, and he will cause tens of thousands to fall; yet he will not prevail.”

History records that following the Battle of Raphia, Ptolemy went on the offensive, attacked the Seleucids, and inflicted great losses against them. Yet Antiochus eventually would regroup and reset Ptolemy’s army such that in the end the Seleucids would withstand the attack sending the Egyptian king home in defeat...

Daniel 11:13, “For the king of the North will again raise a greater multitude than the former, and after an interval of some years he will press on with a great army and much equipment.”

After the humiliation of the Battle of Raphia, Antiochus regrouped so effectively that he overwhelmed Ptolemy IV! And evidently many amongst the Jews reading Daniel at this time participated in Antiochus’ army believing that they were fulfilling Biblical prophecy!

Daniel 11:14: “Now in those times many will rise up against the king of the South; the violent ones among your people [these were Jewish mercenaries who, based on the word choice,² most likely were outlaws and thugs] will also lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they will fall down.”

It is interesting to note that God’s people under the reign and rule of the Ptolemies did quite well. The Ptolemies were gracious toward the Jews such that while this time was a time of “great conflict” for God’s people, many Jews were welcomed in Alexandria where they took refuge. Accordingly it would only have been a band of Jewish thugs that joined Antiochus against the Ptolemies believing themselves to be fulfilling Biblical prophecy. Too bad they didn’t read the rest of this chapter and the horror that would be perpetrated against their land on account of the Seleucids!

Daniel 11:15, “Then the king of the North will come, cast up a siege mound, and capture a well-fortified city; and the forces of the South will not stand *their ground*, not even their choicest troops, for there will be no strength to make a stand.”

Antiochus' defeat of Ptolemy IV was just the beginning! He wasn't content to go home and glory in his recent victory. Accordingly the Seleucid King pursued Ptolemy's army eventually holding it in siege in the city of Sidon. Eventually, Antiochus would conquer the city and crush those inside. It was at this point- in 198 BC- that Palestine became subject to the reign and rule of the Seleucids- which means life for God's people would become quite difficult- as the next verse ominously noted...

Daniel 11:16, "But he [Antiochus] who comes against him [the Ptolomies] will do as he pleases, and no one will *be able to* withstand him; he will also stay *for a time* in the Beautiful Land [the Promised Land including Jerusalem], with destruction in his hand."

As we've seen, this prophecy is indeed one of "great conflict" involving God's people. And here we read what really was the tip of a large iceberg of suffering and persecution.

It is clear that Antiochus' victories went to his head; and so he began ruling with an iron fist- doing anything and everything he wanted! During this time, God's people suffered greatly which ironically was nothing in comparison to what awaited them with Antiochus Epiphanes.

And yet as successful as Antiochus III was throughout the course of most of his life, he wasn't the great man he thought he was such that the waning years of his reign were met with multiple defeats and eventual assassination- just as God predicted.

Daniel 11:17, "And he will set his face to come with the power of his whole kingdom, bringing with him a proposal of peace which he will put into effect; he will also give him the daughter of women ["daughter of women" was an expression which denoted a beautiful young lady] to ruin it. But she will not take a stand *for him* or be on his side."

Once again, let me give you the history here! In a bid to control the internal affairs of the Ptolemies, Antiochus endeavored to forge a marriage alliance by betrothing his beautiful, young daughter, Cleopatra, to Ptolemy V. Yet, as this verse indicates, his daughter "ruined it." As sometimes happened in dynastic marriages, Cleopatra placed her affection/self-interest with her husband- which if one were after power was a good move. For upon the death of Ptolemy V, Cleopatra became one of the most important leaders in Egypt at the time.

Again we might ask, "Why the detail about such an insignificant event that would take place hundreds of years in the future?" Once again, this was given to show us how absolutely God controls and so knows history before it ever happens. So having failed in his bid for power over the internal workings of the Ptolemies, Antiochus III endeavored to subdue the Mediterranean- which once again seems like more insignificant history until you recognize that God could describe this event only because He ordained it!...

Daniel 11:18, “Then he will turn his face to the coastlands and capture many. But a commander [from Rome- his name was Lucius Scipio] will put a stop to his scorn against him; moreover, he will repay him for his scorn.”

Antiochus turned his attention to Asia Minor and many of the Greek Islands just off its coast! At this time, who do you suppose was the emerging power in this area? Rome! Accordingly, in 190 B.C. Antiochus’ attempts at expanding his boarder into Greece were routed by Rome at the battle of Magnesia!

Daniel 11:19, “So he will turn his face toward the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall and be found no more.”

There was no place left for him to go, but “toward the fortress of his own land.” And so in his boredom or anger, he began to rape and pillage his own land. Yet this would prove to be his undoing. While trying to rob a temple in Elam in 187 BC, Antiochus was assassinated by the local peoples and so, “...stumbled and fell and so was found no more”- just as God predicted so many years before! He was then followed by another ruler.

Daniel 11:20, “Then in his place one will arise who will send an oppressor through the Jewel of *his* kingdom; yet within a few days he will be shattered, though neither in anger nor in battle.”

This verse details the rise of Seleucus IV (also known as Philopator) who succeeded Antiochus III as ruler of the Seleucids. The “conflict involving God’s people” didn’t end as Seleucus sent his chief minister throughout the land of Palestine to rob the people of their money. Why was that? Rome, as was their practice, charged the Seleucids for the battle of Magnesia (v. 18) which placed a monetary burden on the Seleucid Empire. Accordingly, Seleucus IV passed the bill to the people of God which, according to 2 Maccabees, resulted in an attempt to pillage the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Shortly after, Seleucus was assassinated opening the way for the evil, wicked reign of Aniochus Epiphanes.

I don’t know about you, but the passage before us is incredible! It accurately predicted with specificity and accuracy leaving the reader with only one of two options. Either Daniel was written after the fact- in the 2nd Century BC. Or God clearly is in control of even the most insignificant things of life!

If you refuse to believe, you most likely will opt for the former. But if you are a child of God, then you ought to be amazed, encouraged, and challenged! God truly is that sovereign! Listen to the testimony of His word!

Luke 12:6-7, “Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And *yet* not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

From the failure of a bird to the number of hairs on your head, God is in control!

Proverbs 16:33. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

And yet, it not only is the small, it is the big things as well...

Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Ecclesiastes 7:14a, "In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider- God has made the one as well as the other..."

Lamentations 3:37-38, "Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded *it? Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?"-

This includes even the ultimate destination of man.

1 Samuel 2:2, 6-7, 8b, "There is no one holy like the Lord, indeed, there is no one besides Thee, nor is there any rock like our God... The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts... the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He set the world on them."

Proverbs 16:4, "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Speaking of the non-Christian:

1 Peter 2:8b, , "...they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed."

Let us take from these passages and this message the hope and confidence that comes from knowing that God remains on the throne. Don't miss it... centuries before God's people would be confronted by the horrible providences of the fifth, fourth, third, and second centuries BC, God had Daniel record a prediction of world events with such specificity God's people could only conclude that God was in control of all things! Truly, it is one thing to say it... but quite another to behold it!

Accordingly, seeing God's sovereign control, let us set our hearts with confidence and joy toward the future! For unlike God's providence when it comes to the reprobate, God's people the confidence that all that occurs in our lives is for the best!

Psalms, 25:10a, “All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth...”

And thus with confidence, Joseph could say to his brothers in the face of their evil...

Genesis 50:20, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

Our call therefore, is to trust the character and so the goodness of God in and through all things!

Bibliography

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, E. (1995). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company.

End Note(s)

¹ cf. also Proverbs 30: 18, 21, 29; Amos 1:3, 6, etc.

² The Hebrew lit. reads, “sons of breaking” or “children of breaking” implying these men were covenant breakers!