

Daniel 11:2-12:4 “Futility and Steadfastness” March 25, 2018

There is a warning in this passage for us.

There will be people who compromise with the spirit of the age.
And that compromise will weaken the people of God.
Even some of the wise will stumble.

The glorious Man comes to warn Daniel –

to urge him – and us – to stand fast and wait patiently for the coming of the Lord.

Though – as we have seen from James –

waiting patiently does *not* mean waiting *passively*!

We must be active and eager in our prayer, in our work, and in our love.

I want you to think about the *detail* of this passage.

On one hand, it is really easy to correlate all this detail
with the events of the Persian and Macedonian empires.
But it also describes Anglo-Saxon England *really* well.
Apocalyptic language is designed to have multiple referents.

Sure, in one sense, this is telling the story of the Jews –
but in another sense, it is telling the story of the church.

As we saw last time, in Daniel 10,
this final vision covers three chapters.

It is the longest and most comprehensive vision –
tying together themes from earlier in his life and ministry,
bringing them together in a grand conclusion.

And it came in the third year of Cyrus – around 536 B.C.
This is two years after the vision of chapter 9.
It is the last date in the book of Daniel –
since Daniel is now well over 80 years old.

Chapters 10-12 consist of a single vision.

10:1 is the summary statement about the word.
10:2-11:1 is the lengthy introduction to the word.
11:2-12:4 is the “word” that was revealed.
12:5-13 is the final instruction to Daniel regarding the word.

1. “A Word Was Revealed” (10:1)
2. “Understand the Words That I Speak”: The Vision of a Man (10:2-11:1)
3. “I Will Show You the Truth”: The Word of the Days Yet to Come (11:2-12:4)
 - a. North and South: The Futility of Kingdoms (11:2-20)

² “And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth

shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. ³ Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. ⁴ And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.

Verses 2-4 briefly summarize the history of the Persian empire until the coming of Alexander the Great.

Xerxes was the Persian king who stirred up all against the kingdom of Greece.
And then Alexander was the “mighty king” who ruled with great dominion.
But in 323 B.C., Alexander suddenly died and his generals divided up his kingdom.

The two generals who came out with the strongest realms were Ptolemy and Seleucus – here named the king of the south and the king of the north.

Ptolemy ruled Egypt.

Seleucus ruled Mesopotamia and Syria –
so you can see how from a Judaeian perspective,
they would be the king of the south and the king of the north!

⁵ “Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority. ⁶ After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported^[a] her in those times.

Verses 5-12 summarize the era of Ptolemaian rule – from 323-198.

Verse 6 refers to an event around 250 B.C.,
when Ptolemy II gave his daughter, Berenice, in marriage to Antiochus II.

There was only one problem:

Antiochus II was already married – and already had a son!

But in order to make the alliance with Egypt work,

Antiochus II divorced his wife and renounced his son.

But two years later, Berenice’s father (Ptolemy II) died –

and Antiochus II divorced Berenice and tried to take his first wife back!

(She, however, had not forgiven him for those two years of exile –

so once she was back in the palace, she poisoned her husband,

had Berenice and her child executed,

and established *her son*, Seleucus II, as king!)

So the alliance between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids came to a brutal and bloody end...
and verses 7-9 describes how the Ptolemies responded:

⁷ “And from a branch from her roots one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall deal with them and shall prevail. ⁸ He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold, and for some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north. ⁹ Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land.

For the next 50 years, the two sides invaded each other with some regularity – verse 10:

¹⁰ “His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. ¹¹ Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north. And he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand. ¹² And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. ¹³ For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the first. And after some years^[b] he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies.

Verses 13-17 seem to describe the career of Antiochus III (223-187 BC).

And particularly, verse 14 introduces the role of the Jews:

¹⁴ “In those times many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail.

We don’t know much about this –

but apparently there was an Jewish uprising that sought to fulfill the vision,
and restore the kingdom of Jerusalem –
but failed.

And instead, Antiochus III took control of Judaea,
thus bringing the Jews under Seleucid rule.

So for 125 years, the Jews had been under the Ptolemies of Egypt –
but now they are under the Seleucids of Syria.

¹⁵ Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siegeworks and take a well-fortified city. And the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand. ¹⁶ But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him. And he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand.

The glorious land is Judaea.

Around the same time, Antiochus III decides to play the same marriage alliance game
in order to bring Egypt under his control

¹⁷ He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the

kingdom,^[c] but it shall not stand or be to his advantage.

He gave his daughter, Cleopatra, to Ptolemy V (who was a teenager at the time).
But Cleopatra loved her husband better than her father –
and so the marriage alliance backfired on Antiochus III!

So Antiochus III turned his interest westward and sought to conquer Greece in 192 B.C.
(the coastlands of verse 18).

One of Antiochus's generals was a young Carthaginian named Hannibal Barca,
(who would later make his name by crossing the Alps with his elephants!).

¹⁸ *Afterward he shall turn his face to the coastlands and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed,^[d] he shall turn his insolence back upon him.*

But by that time, the Roman Republic had gained control of most of Greece,
(that would be the “commander” of verse 18),
and they soundly defeated Antiochus III at Magnesia
and chased him back into Asia.

But the Romans, led by Scipio, forced him to pay a large indemnity –
and so Antiochus III started looting temples in order to raise the funds.
(That would be the *insolence* referred to in verse 18).

¹⁹ *Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.*

Antiochus III was killed by a pro-Zeus mob
who were deeply offended that he would rob temples to pay his debts.

Verse 20 then summarizes the career of his son, Seleucus IV:

²⁰ *“Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle.*

Seleucus took a page from his father's playbook –
this time trying to loot the temple in Jerusalem.
According to Jewish sources, his agent had a vision of terrifying angels,
and so did *not* seek to carry out his mission.
Shortly thereafter the agent poisoned Seleucus and so he was broken –
neither in anger nor in battle.

What is this historical summary doing?

Think about it:

The Persian king Xerxes stirs up the world against Greece –
only to have a Greek (okay, Macedonian) king conquer his empire.

Alexander conquers the world in six years – and then dies –
and his kingdom is divided.

Ptolemy II has a great plan to use a marriage alliance to undermine the Selucids!
It backfires.

Antiochus III has a great plan to use a marriage alliance to undermine the Ptolemies!
Guess what?
It backfires!

We could fast-forward a couple thousand years:

King George III had a great plan for replacing Saddam Hussein with a democracy!
That went well!

The King Barack I thought he had learned his lesson –
so he didn't interfere with the war in Syria.

And now we have Putin.

Do you see the pattern in history?

The rulers of this age have all sorts of clever plans.

And of course, nowadays we also have economists, sociologists, and political scientists
who claim to have special knowledge

(really, we should view them like the magicians and soothsayers of old!).

Because, seriously –

all the sophisticated technology in the world

is not going to change the fact that it is still *people* running the show!

And when people are running the show,

you will find that pride goes before a fall –

and all the wisdom and skill that humans can muster
will still fall short.

One commentator puts it this way:

“On one level, it is the continual story of wars and rumors of wars,
as one human ruler and empire after another seeks to gain power
by cunning or force.

Yet though the tide in the affairs of men comes in and goes out,
in the end it accomplishes precisely nothing.

The balance of power in earthly politics may shift but it never comes to a permanent rest.

On the one hand, therefore, Daniel 11 shows us the fallen world
pursuing the wind and finding it elusive.

What do power and politics gain for all their toil?” (Duguid in Davis, 152).

But *futility* is not the final word!

After all, we need to remember what this story is doing here!

When you are tempted to feel like you are caught “in the gears of vicious regimes
and that the corpulent heavyweights of this age” are smashing you to bits,

“our text teaches that the Lord brings judgment not only at the climax of history

but also *within history*
as he injects futility
into the designs of self-exalting, saint-ignoring rulers of this world,
so that their schemes end in shambles.
Not that he *always* does this;
but the text, by its repeated examples,
implies that this is his tendency,
that he does it far more often than we may be aware.” (Davis, 152)

And so we come to the *contemptible person* at the heart of our story:

b. A Contemptible Person: The Importance of Standing Firm (11:21-35)

²¹ *In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given.*

Verses 21-35 tell the story of Antiochus IV – sometimes known as Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus IV was the *brother* of Seleucus IV –
he obtained the throne by flatteries (and by killing his nephews...)

He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

Verses 22-24 summarize his reign.

The “prince of the covenant” in verse 22 is probably the high priest, Onias,
whom Antiochus IV deposed and replaced with a priest who would support him.

²² *Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant.*

²³ *And from the time that an alliance is made with him he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people. ²⁴ Without warning he shall come into the richest parts^[e] of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers' fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time.*

Verses 25-27 recounts his assault against the king of the South (Egypt).

²⁵ *And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. ²⁶ Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. ²⁷ And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed.*

It is a story of duplicity, betrayal, and lies.

In other words, it is a story of international diplomacy!

“They shall speak lies at the same table.”

If you expect the kings of the earth to be honest and honorable,
you will be sorely disappointed!

But their lies will *not succeed* –

“for the end is yet to be at the time appointed.” (v27)

Don't worry about the deceptive manipulator in the White House –
whoever he may be!

Verse 28 begins to introduce what happens to God's people in the middle of all this:

²⁸ *And he shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. And he shall work his will and return to his own land.*

This is only a piece of foreshadowing...
because it gets worse first!

Verse 29:

²⁹ *“At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before. ³⁰ For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant.*

When Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Egypt the *second time*
he ran into a Roman general with an ultimatum from the Roman senate:
Rome would consider any attack on Egypt as an attack on Rome.

Antiochus answered that he had to consult with his advisors.
Immediately, the Roman general drew a circle on the ground around Antiochus's feet
and said, “You must decide before you step outside the circle.”

Of course, the Romans were the ones who had humiliated his father at Magnesia 20 years earlier.
Antiochus had spent 10 years in Rome as a hostage –
so he knew exactly what he was up against.
He knew that he couldn't fight *both* Egypt *and* Rome.

So he withdrew.

Oh, you may wonder, what is meant by “ships of Kittim”?

Kittim is the name of a city in Cyprus.
“Ships of Kittim” in one sense would simply mean “ships from Cyprus” –
except that “Kittim” began to take on a new meaning in eschatological texts.
It is used of various enemies of the Jews at different times,
and some have suggested that Kittim became shorthand for
“eschatological gentile archenemy.”

Daniel's usage seems to set this up –
because while the ships of Kittim are ostensibly *against* Antiochus –
the *result* of their interference is particularly painful for Jerusalem!

Because his humiliation at the hands of the Romans gave his temper a *very* short fuse!

Have you ever experienced this?

After a long day – after a bad day –
when people have not treated you well –
do you find that you take it out on others?

But do you also find that you are capable of a *certain* measure of self-control?
You won't take it out on *certain* people – because that would be *bad*.
Who do you take it out on?

The people who can't do anything about it.
Those who are most helpless against you.

Antiochus Epiphanes is an especially awful example
of a very common human experience.

And verses 30-35 describe what Antiochus did in Judaea after his humiliation by Rome:

He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. ³¹ Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. ³² He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. ³³ And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. ³⁴ When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, ³⁵ and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.

In 167 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes launched an all out campaign
against traditional Jewish religion.

The Jews had been a difficult people to rule.

Their distinctive religious identity had been annoying to their neighbors for centuries.

For generations, the Seleucids had sought to “Hellenize” the peoples they ruled.

Antiochus now went a step further.

Rather than just reward those who Hellenized,
he decided that the Jews needed to accept Hellenism fully.
Since the Greeks believed that all nations worshiped the same gods,
he demanded that the Jews accept this as well –
and thus they should stop speaking of Yahweh –
and should call him Zeus instead.

Anyone who circumcised their sons,
observed the Sabbath,
refused to offer sacrifices to Zeus,
or was found with a copy of the Torah (the 5 books of Moses)
would be put to death.

In other words, everything that was distinctive to biblical religion
was stripped away.
Circumcision, Sabbath, sacrifice, and scripture.

The most effective persecutions in history have followed this pattern.
After all, if you eliminate all the distinctive practices of a religion,
you will eliminate the religion!
What is Christianity without baptism, the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper,
and the scriptures?

So while in one sense we can say that this is describing Antiochus –
it is equally descriptive of much of the persecution of the Christian Church.

Verse 33 borrows from Isaiah 52:13 –
where we are told that the suffering servant will justify many by his knowledge.

The people of God will suffer great affliction and persecution for the sake of the gospel.
Indeed, Revelation 7:14 then borrows from verse 35,
as the martyrs “have washed their robes
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Daniel is also told that “many shall join themselves to them with flattery.”
We should not be surprised to discover flatterers in the church.
There will be those who say all sorts of nice things about you –
but they do not love Jesus.
They love their own pleasures.
They love to appear holy and good –
when in fact all they are doing is causing the wise to stumble.

c. A King Who Does as He Wills: The Time of Trouble (11:36-12:3)

The last section of chapter 11 has caused great difficulty.
It bears little to no resemblance to the life of Antiochus Epiphanes.
Dale Ralph Davis suggests that verse 35 has concluded the previous section –
“until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.”

After all, we have been seeing a pretty clear description of history –
so if the description here doesn't fit Antiochus –
then it's probably *not* about him!

In the same way that the vision of Daniel 2 saw a single image –

with Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold –
connected to the Persian chest of silver –
and the Macedonian legs of bronze –
and the Roman feet of iron and clay –
so also this story of the “king”
is not merely about Antiochus Epiphanes.

Indeed, verses 11:36-12:3 provides a parallel structure to the account of 11:21-35.
Both start with a summary statement of the rise and success of “the king.”
(11:21-24 and 36-39)
Both then talk about the conflict and oppression sparked by the king.
(11:25-31 and 40-45)
Both conclude with a focus on suffering and steadfastness.
(11:32-35 and 12:1-3)

Since the first account sure sounds like Antiochus – but the second account does not –
that strongly suggests that Daniel is showing us that Antiochus
serves as a paradigm for the Antichrist –
for the king who exalts himself above every god.

³⁶ *“And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. ³⁷ He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. ³⁸ He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹ He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.”*^[1]

These are the sorts of things that the kings of the earth have done
in their rebellion against the God of heaven.

And it will be especially true of that “fourth kingdom” of Daniel 7 –
the kingdom that was *different* from all the rest –
and exceedingly terrifying.

The Kingdom of Antichrist – has been expressed throughout history in lots of ways.
First and foremost is a king who does *as he wills*.
He exalts himself and magnifies himself above every god.
He abandons the gods of his fathers
preferring instead the “god of fortresses” – a warrior god.

Verses 40-45 then describe his assault on the glorious land – Jerusalem:

⁴⁰ *“At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack^[g] him, but the king of the north shall*

rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. ⁴¹ He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites. ⁴² He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. ⁴³ He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, and the Libyans and the Cushites shall follow in his train. ⁴⁴ But news from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction. ⁴⁵ And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain.

Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.

Notice how quickly he passes!

He may have *thought* that he was a god –
but he will disappear in a moment!

Yes, persecution is awful – and it is *hard* to undergo –
but God has a habit of overthrowing persecutors suddenly.

Diocletian – in the early 4th century – tried to stamp out the Christian church.
But just a few years later, Constantine converted to Christianity
and ended the persecution of Christians.

Likewise, Mary Tudor – known as “bloody Mary” –
had over 200 Protestants burned at the stake for heresy –
but her reign was mercifully short.

He doesn't always do this –

the Muslim occupation of the middle east has lasted for 1300 years so far –
but we are beginning to see signs that their stranglehold on the region is lifting.

But the end of our passage warns that we should expect trouble:

12 “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above;^[a] and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

Notice that Daniel is assured of two things:

“a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time”

AND

“your people shall be delivered,
everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

4. “How Long?” Final Instructions (12:5-13)