

## Daniel 11: Conflict in the earthly realm

Exegetical Big Idea: Daniel is shown what is written in the Book of Truth. All of the wars and rumors of wars even until the end of time are ordained and used by God to accomplish his tasks.

Homiletical Big Idea: **There will be wars, and rumours of wars, but God's plan and his people are never in jeopardy.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Evil will always be in the world until Christ comes again. Evil can and may very well grow and target God's people. We cannot lose focus of God's plan and his protection of his people.

### Background:

We are in the last part of Daniel today. Not the last chapter but the last segment of the book. This last segment began in chapter 10 where we saw Daniel being visited by a being from God, and chapters 11 and 12 are the vision that the being was sent to give Daniel.

It's interesting to note that the focus of the last chapter was largely on the happenings of the spiritual realm, but today we shift our focus to events that happen on earth. Now this isn't meant to communicate that we should forget what is happening in the spiritual realm for this chapter. Just the opposite! We have a fresh reminder in our minds that all that we will see here mirrors the conflict that is happening in the spiritual realm.

Read Daniel 11

Pray

Intro:

Recently our family went on a bit of a road trip before March break. This road trip in particular meant that we were going to spend two whole days in the van together. Now whether you are a kid or an adult, two days in a vehicle can be hard! To be honest I wasn't confident that the drive would go well but the kids did amazing! Overall it was a happy can ride and mostly thanks to Alana's planning, the kids had lots of stuff to do. Right when they were getting bored, Alana would have a new activity for them to do to keep them occupied and entertained.

It could have gone much worse! We could have had crying kids for 2 days and probably as a result crying adults as well. Now there were some difficult moments I'm not going to lie but we made it! In fact making down there as far as it was up to Alana and myself was never the question. Changing our destination and only making it half way was never an option and it never entered our minds. Turning around and canceling the trip was never an option, and it never entered our minds. No matter how crazy things could get during that drive, we were NOT turning around.

Whether it's a quiet van or a noisy van, whether the people in the van are happy or crying, we're still hurdling down the highway at 100km/h and we're not changing the destination or turning back!

I get this sense as I read and study this chapter. There is lots of squabbling! There was back then and there is today. There is lots around us that we would look at and agree that history is crazy, and will continue to be, but either way, we are all still hurdling down the highway of God's ordained history and

he will bring us to our destination. There is no changing the destination. There is no turning back. God has ordained an end and he will bring it about, and he will securely bring his people through it all.

Sure it's going to get bumpy, as we'll see in this chapter today, and:

**There will be wars, and rumours of wars, but God's plan and his people are never in jeopardy.**

**Vv. 1-20: Earthly Conflict can bring no true resolution.**

This chapter is full of prophecy about rulers who will rise and fight against each other. It's full of wars and rumours of wars. In fact the first 20 verses of this chapter are mainly about two kingdoms fighting against each other. As they go back and forth we can't help but come to the conclusion that all this earthly conflicted is really getting them nowhere.

No earthly conflict can truly bring any real resolution to the world's problems.

Now we are not told the identities of any of these kingdoms or rulers. However, God in his wisdom revealed the future in very specific detail here to Daniel, and consequently, to us. All of the scholars I read while studying this are agreed as to who these kings are. Now this shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us. God has ordained and is sovereign over all of history and it's not hard for him to reveal it to Daniel because God will make it happen exactly as he says it will! We have the luxury of looking back and seeing it play out exactly like God foretold.

So it is definitely worth spending some time seeing how this history unfolded.

Remember that it is in the third year of Cyrus' reign when Daniel receives this vision. In verse 2 of this chapter it is revealed that 3 more kings will rise in Persia, but then a fourth will rise who will be far richer than the others. This is in all likelihood Xerxes, the husband of Esther. If you remember from the book of Esther he was extremely wealthy and held a giant banquet in his palace. Xerxes did in fact attempt an attack on Greece but failed, as verse 2 indicates.

In verses 3-4 a new king arises who is powerful, but come to a quick end and his kingdom is divided four ways but not to his offspring. This is very likely Alexander the Great. He swept down the middle east and into Egypt and controlled a huge swath of land around 333 B.C. But he died young and his kingdom was split to four generals, not his offspring.

2 of these mini kingdoms were in constant struggle against each other to try and reclaim the Greek empire. We read about these two kingdoms at war all the way until verse 19.

If we take a close look at the events in verses 6-8 we can see just how specific this prophecy is.

Ptolemy II was king of the South. Antiochus II was king of the North. Ptolemy sends his daughter Berenice to Antiochus to make peace. Antiochus was already married to Laodice. But marries Berenice as well and has children with her. The plan was for Antiochus to divorce his first wife and his kingdom, instead of given to his kids with Laodice, would be given to his children with Berenice. But, Laodice figures this out and poisons Antiochus and Berenice and their son. That same year, Ptolemy king of the south and Berenice's father dies in Egypt, and it's Berenice's brother who takes the throne and successfully attacks and captures the capitol city of the North.

So why is this so specific? Well for one as we already mentioned we should see how it's not hard for God to make these predictions because he causes it all to take place! But another reason I think is so that we see and understand that real wars with real kingdoms and real weapons fight real conflicts. But, as real as these conflict are, they do not bring any real resolution to the world's problems.

There is a pattern in these verses that looks like a ping pong game. It seems as though the kingdom of the South has won, but then we read in verse 15 that the king of the North musters his strength and the forces of the south are defeated. But even then, in verse 19 the king stumbles and falls and is defeated.

There is a never ending struggle between earthly kingdoms, because those conflict happen because of sin! And no matter who wins, sin always remains.

[I like science fiction movies and books. A few weeks ago I was watching one of my favourite sci-fi movies and in the movie the humans of the future, who have space ships and have discovered aliens go back in time and they meet humans from our time. There's one conversation that takes place between two characters about wars and money in the future. The guy from the future explains that in the future on earth there is no money and there are no wars. All that stopped because when humanity discovered that if could travel the galaxy and meet new aliens we started working together in harmony with the single goal of bettering ourselves. Sound nice! But off all the space ships and aliens in that movie, that conversation was the most fiction in the entire thing!]

There will not be an end to wars and rumours of wars on this earth. Earthly conflict happens because of a spiritual problem. So an earthly solution is not going to solve our spiritual problem. We're not going to decide one day to all of a sudden live in peace. We need our sin dealt with.

Conflicts on earth will continue to ping pong back and forth until sin is ultimately dealt with.

And of course Christ has done that. Christ came not to set up a kingdom on this broken world, but to bring in a kingdom in a New Heavens and a New Earth. As he took our sin away when he died on the cross, he cleansed all who believe in him from sin. The result is that one day we will live in conflict-free world because our spiritual problem has been dealt with.

In the meantime, we are in the middle of it. I can't help but notice who is in the middle between the kingdom of the North and kingdom of the South. It's God's people! And even in verse 14 we are caught up in the middle of it. A reminder that though we are in the middle of it, we do not fight like the world fights. We do not take up arms against those who persecute us, but we do fight nonetheless. We fight against the forces of evil in the heavenly realm. We engage by prayer and seeking the Lord by standing firm in God's Word and declaring his gospel.

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**Vv. 21-35 Evil aims its wrath at God and his people.**

Not only are we in the middle of it, but evil seems to have its crosshairs pointed at God and his people.

We meet a familiar character in verse 21. The focus of the chapter zooms in now. In the first part there are many kings spanning a great number of years, but not we are focus primarily on a single ruler.

We read in verse 21 that he comes to power with flattery. He doesn't forcefully take the thrown, but does so out of cunning deceit. In verse 23 we see that he has grasped power with only a small following.

He is a king of the North, and he has some successes and some failures between verses 2 and 27.

So who is this figure? We've met him before in chapter 8. This is in all likelihood Antiochus the IV, Otherwise known as Antiochus Epiphanes. I think the vision now focuses on Antiochus his true motivation is revealed to us in verse 28. We read that "his heart shall be set against the holy covenant".

And the real rage against God's people starts in verses 29 and 30. He sets out against Egypt in a military campaign. He had had success in Egypt before, but this time is different. This time the Egyptians have the help of the up and coming Romans. The Romans send ships and block Antiochus IV from getting into Egypt. He's angry and humiliated and he aims to take his rage out on Israel.

In verse 31 we read that he profane the temple and put a stop to the sacrifices. In fact this is exactly what he does. He removes the high priest and replaces him with one that will do as Antiochus wants. He sacrifices a pig on the altar of the temple, something that is abhorrent to Jews. He puts a stop to the regular sacrifices, and even sets up a statue of Zeus in the temple and makes it a place to worship Zeus rather than the only true God. On top of all this, he kills a great number of Israelites.

This is a huge offense to the people of God. The reality is that Antiochus IV is not the only one in history to take evil aim at God and his people. But here is the good news, no matter what evil tries to hurt God and his people, it can never do any real damage. Oh it can hurt, but it can never do any real damage.

[I have a picture in my study of my family. Well to be honest I need to update it because it's a picture from before Judah was born. It's Alana and myself holding our two girls. Now suppose someone was extremely mad at me. Suppose they came one day to the church and came into my study and yelled at me and called me horrible name and all kinds of mean things. Suppose in their rage they look over and see the picture of my family and take the picture and smash the frame and rip it to pieces. How will I feel? Well not happy! I'll be upset for sure that they went so far not only to disrespect me but also to disrespect my family. But here's the reality, though the picture of my family would be destroyed, my actual family is not touched by the rage at all.]

Just like the picture in my study is a representation of my family, so the writer of Hebrews reminds us that even earthly temple is only a shadow and representation of the heavenly temple! So Antiochus can make all the sacrifices of unclean animals he wants on the earthly altar. He can set up whatever statue he wants in the earthly temple. He can put a stop to animal sacrifices, but he can't touch the heavenly temple. He cannot stop Christ from entering into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple and offering himself as the once for all sacrifice for the sins of his people, securing their eternal salvation.

It's no different today. Evil powers can take aim at God and his people and persecute Christians and burn churches, but they can never truly touch the Church, who is the bride of Christ, because we belong to him and we are held securely in his hands.

That's why we read in verse 32 that "the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action". Those who know God belong to God, and he causes them to stand firm and continue trusting in him. But at the same time that God's true people are standing firm, those who are false followers of God are revealed. The start of verse 32 reads that "he [meaning Antiochus] shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant". There are those who are in the church but not part of the church and when evil presses against the church, they welcome it instead of stand firm against it. We see this in our time. Any

church (or so-called Christian) who knowingly and willfully celebrates sin is only revealed to be a false church or false Christian. God's people will stand firm and take action amidst evil, not be seduced by it.

Rather, God uses evil to refine us. Look at verse 35. The purpose of hardships and even our discipline when we stumble, is to refine and purify us until the day of Christ. It never ceases to amaze me that God takes evil that is meant to harm his people and turn it around for their good and his glory.

Just as Joseph's brothers meant harm towards Joseph as they sold him into slavery, but God used it for good. So God takes the evil that is aimed at us and uses it to transform us more into the likeness of Christ for the good of each other and spreading of the good news of Christ, and ultimately, for his glory.

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**Vv. 36-45: All bad things must come to an end.**

Antiochus has been the focus of the last number of verses, but something interesting happens as we move into verse 36 till the end of the chapter. These verses don't seem to fit as neatly with the history we know of Antiochus. So are these verses continuing to predict Antiochus, or somebody else.

This question has led some scholars to think that we are seeing the vision starting to change from near history to far history. Some things in the text that might point to that is the description of the rebellion against God in verses 36-39. He exalts himself above all other gods and blasphemes the true God. He gives out riches and honour to those who follow him. These do sound an awful lot like antichrist descriptions. On top of that, chapter 12 is clearly dealing with end times. So some scholars see the antichrist starting in verse 36.

Now I'm not completely sure, but I think we can safely understand that whomever is in view from verse 36 on is *an* antichrist, if not *the* antichrist. John spells this out for us in the New Testament when he writes that the antichrist is yet to come into the world, but that we have already seen many antichrists. It's the reality that there are figures in history that have stood in direct opposition to God and his people and have led others in that rebellion. And though we have seen many, there is yet to come one antichrist who will be the final and worst one.

In that sense I think we can see that Antiochus was an anti-christ, and he is a picture of the antichrists to follow, until the final antichrist is revealed.

He is one of many. He's evil, but he's still just one of many.

[It's cold season. It's the time of year when everyone is getting stuffy noses and coughs. If you have kids, this is the season that they are sick for months at a time, and just as they are getting over one cold they get another. Nobody likes getting a cold, but that's just the reality of life. When you're in the middle of it, it's nasty and it hurts and you want to be over it. And for the vast majority of people, it's not going to be your last. You'll get over this one, but it's just a matter of time before you get another.]

Antiochus is an anti-christ, but these verses reveal that he's just one of many. He will fall, but another will take his place, and this will continue until Christ returns.

Not only that, but it's bound to get worse as history moves forward. Look at verses 36-39. They are filled with astonishingly horrible things. We often think, and possibly rightly so, that our world is the most

depraved it has ever been. The level of rebellion against God is at an all-time high. But I think we need to buckle up, because it can very easily and quickly get worse.

Not only are we bound to see evil rise in general before the end, but we are bound to see more horrible things done against the people of God. Look at verse 41. Whoever this figure is will slay tens of thousands of God's people. And yet interestingly enough, Edom, Moab, and many Ammonites will be spared. These nations are traditionally Israel's enemies! Are we to understand here that things can and likely will get very very bad for God's people? I think so.

But that does not mean there is no hope. Go back to verse 36, right at the end. Everything that happens is decreed by the Lord. We read "for what is decreed shall be done". God has decreed all events of history! We can't forget that. No, God is not to blame for this evil as if he caused it, but he is sovereign over it.

Which means there is no one and no thing, human or spiritual, that can stand against the Lord. Even what looks invincible comes crashing down in verses 44-45. News will alarm him and he will set out to fight and preserve himself but in the end, he will fall.

This chapter has 45 verses in it. The vast majority of these verses speak of horrible and evil things that will happen, but in the end, the last verse puts it all into perspective for us. "Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him."

Evil will one day come crashing down, and all who are evil will come crashing down as well. Throughout this whole chapter God's people are being assailed, but in the end, it is God's people alone who remain standing.

I'm reminded of the two men who built their homes in Jesus parable. One man builds it on sand, while the other built it on solid rock. No doubt as they are both building away the house on the sand look really impressive! No doubt the man building on the sand was full of confidence. But it's not how big you can build it that matters. What matters is is it going to last?

In the end it's not about how big the empires of the world get. It's not about how scary they are and how much harm they can cause God's people. Because in the end, Christ will keep his bride and cause her to stand before him in the end. It doesn't surprise me to read a chapter like this that makes such precise prophecies about the future. We worship a God who is not afraid to make promises, because he keeps every one of them.

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