

The People Who Know Their God

Daniel 11 has more individual historical prophecies than any other chapter in the Bible. In verses 2-35 there are 135 specific future events which are foretold. Unless one is really up on his ancient history, the chapter reads like a mind-numbing sequence of obscure historical events that seem to have absolutely nothing to do with our lives today. The Bible, however, teaches us that “all Scripture is God breathed and is useful...” and that all these Old Testament stories “were written down for our instruction....” so this chapter, too, is here for our encouragement.

Daniel 11:2-45

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.

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 her in those times.

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.

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 he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies.

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. **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. **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, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage.

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, he shall turn his insolence back upon him.

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.

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. **21** In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. **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 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. **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. 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.

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. 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.

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.

⁴⁰ “At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack 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.

The chapter can be divided into three major sections: 1) verses 2-20 predict in accurate detail 369 years of history in the Middle East from the Persian kings and their defeat by Alexander the Great, through the division of the Greek kingdom into four sub kingdoms, especially the two warring kingdoms of the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemys in Egypt; 2) verses 21-35 tell of 168-164 BC, predicting accurately the reign of terror by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the response of the Maccabees; 3) verses 36-45 predict a coming ruler who will set himself against God and His Kingdom and who will be destroyed in the last day.

The reason this chapter encourages us is made clear especially in verses 21-35. Here we have the story of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his disgraceful treatment of the Jews and their worship in 167 BC. You can read about it in your Bible dictionary or in the ESV Study Bible (pp. 1615, 1616). This was one of the lowest points of Jewish history. God's people were being ravaged and humiliated by vicious enemies. In the midst of this persecution, undoubtedly, God's faithful people would have turned to the Scriptures. And what would they have read? Daniel 11 — words from 369 years before, words which would have reminded them that God ordained all of this; that He is not surprised or dismayed; and that He will put down every ruler who rises up against Him or His people.

They would also have seen in verses 32-35 Daniel's prediction that when persecution occurs, the "people who know their God" will respond in a peculiar way:

I. They will stand firm and take action (v. 32)

The classic illustration, of course, is the very family prophesied by Daniel, namely, the Hasmoneans or "Maccabees." The father, Mattathias refused to offer false worship, and he and his sons (especially Judas Maccabeus) eventually restored the desecrated temple to its use for the true worship of God in December of 164 BC, exactly three years after it was defiled by the Seleucids. This is celebrated by Jewish people today during Hanukkah.

We, too must stand firm and take appropriate action when we see darkness and evil break out.

II. They will make many understand (v. 33)

When we undergo trials and afflictions, one of the purposes of our suffering is that we might be able to share with others the truth of God's power and grace. The purpose of our lives is to know Christ and to make Him known. When you have been brought through a tough time don't forget to look around to see whom God puts in your path to help with a godly word of wisdom.

III. They will abound in their afflictions (v. 34,35)

A. They will receive God's help (v. 34)

The Bible doesn't say "if you stumble," but, "when you stumble...". We all stumble. The only question will be whether we will look to the Lord for help. Some are too proud to admit they've stumbled. Some just like to remain defeated. Some get depressed and discouraged. Notice that you will arise, not by your power and might, but by His. So look to Him. Ask Him for His help. Expect Him to enable you to persevere.

B. They will benefit from their sufferings (v. 35)

Notice that when we stumble and receive His help, we shall "be refined, purified, and made white...." As believers, even when this world and our lives seem to be completely out of control, we can rest assured that God is working all things together for our good. Compare that promise for God's people to what is said in v. 45 about the final antichrist: "Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him." What a profound warning that is to all who would oppose God's Sovereign Majesty.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Daniel Chapter 11 encourage us to stand firm and take action in the face of ungodly opposition? What are some of the most urgent ways in which God's people need to stand firm and take action today?
2. Why are we more effective witnesses for Christ after we have endured suffering by His grace? (see verse 33) Why do we sometimes fail to help others after we have experienced deliverance?
3. Describe an experience when you stumbled and God gave you His help to enable you to persevere? Why does it encourage us to hear this prophecy in verse 34?

4. What do we learn in verse 35 about the effects of suffering upon our own lives? What other Scripture texts come to mind about the value of sufferings? Why is it important that we believe this promise?

5. After studying this chapter, what are the most significant changes you want to make in your outlook or your behavior?

Going Deeper

1. What are the most difficult trials for you to handle successfully?

2. Why are they so difficult for you?

3. What can you do to prepare yourself to engage this trial successfully next time it occurs?