

Lesson 31

Last week, when we ended, we had just started looking at verse 21.

Daniel 11:21

21 And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

We now arrive at a major focus of Daniel 11, which is a major focus that we also saw back in Daniel 8. Verses 21-35 are devoted to the activities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

As we recall, Antiochus IV Epiphanes did his best to completely wipe out the Jewish religion and culture by persecuting the Jews and forcing them to adopt Greek culture.

Last week, we paused to look at two issues about Antiochus IV, and we are on the second of those two issues.

A second potential problem we should consider at this point is that it may seem as if this chapter spends a disproportionate amount of time on Antiochus IV. Why is there such a focus here on Antiochus? What was different about him?

The liberal critics say that Daniel spends so much time on Antiochus because that was when the book was written. But, in addition to ignoring the evidence of an early date that we have looked at, that view also ignores the time Daniel spends discussing Nebuchadnezzar who came long before Antiochus and the Roman kings who came long after Antiochus, especially Domitian.

What is it that distinguishes Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus IV, and Domitian from all of the other kings? What distinguishes them is that they each tried to unify their kingdom by imposing by force a particular ideology on everyone in their kingdom.

We saw that back in Chapter 3 with Nebuchadnezzar, and that was also true of Domitian and the other Roman emperors who took their claims of divinity seriously. And we have already discussed how that was true of Antiochus IV. He wanted everyone to be unified around Greek culture.

There is a great warning in the Bible and in history about rulers who attempt to unify their people

through the adoption of a single ideology - one that is invariably opposed to the word of God. They often start out trying to look like our friend, but they never end up that way. Rome did much more damage to the church after it embraced the church than Rome did when it was persecuting the church.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes is the "vile person" in verse 21 to whom "the honor of the kingdom" has not been given, or better translated, "to whom royal majesty has not been given."

Will Durant described Antiochus IV as "the most interesting and the most erratic of his line, a rare mixture of intellect, insanity, and charm."

But how is he even here? Isn't he a Roman hostage? Not any more.

Back in verse 18, we saw that, as a result of his father's humiliating defeat, Antiochus IV Epiphanes had been taken back to Rome as a hostage. After his older brother Seleucus IV Philopator followed their father onto the throne in 187 BC, Antiochus IV Epiphanes was exchanged as a hostage for his nephew Demetrius I Soter, the son and true heir of Seleucus. Why? Because Seleucus was now the king, and the Romans wanted their hostage to be the son of the current king. Antiochus was exchanged not because his brother loved him but because his brother cared nothing about him, which meant that Antiochus had suddenly become a worthless hostage.

After this exchange, Antiochus lived in Athens, and he was there when his brother was assassinated in 175 BC by Heliodorus, as we saw in verse 20. Antiochus IV then traveled back from Athens and reached Syria in November 175 BC.

So who would be the next king?

Seleucus' legitimate heir Demetrius I Soter was still a hostage in Rome, so Antiochus proclaimed himself co-regent with another of Seleucus' sons, an infant, whose murder Antiochus arranged a few years later.

Antiochus was able to set aside Demetrius' claims to the throne, but Antiochus was not the legitimate successor to the throne, which is why verse 21 says that he had not been given royal majesty.

As Durant describes him: "[Antiochus IV] enjoyed his own qualities so keenly that he labeled his coins Antiochus Theos Epiphanes - the God Made Manifest." But his enemies sarcastically referred to him instead as "Epinanes," which means "madman."

Antiochus was a smooth talker who was able to bend people to his will by flattery and deceit. As verse 21 tells us, "he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries," which is what he did. He did not come to power by military conquest, but rather he came to power by political trickery and flatteries.

Daniel 11:22-24

22 And with the arms of a flood shall they be overflown from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant. 23 And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people. 24 He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time.

Commentaries disagree over the placement of verses 22-24 in the overall timeline.

Some believe that verse 22 is a general statement about Antiochus IV's reign with a brief foreshadowing of a later event involving the Jewish high priest (which we will see in more detail later in this chapter). Verses 23-24 then go back to describing Antiochus' initial takeover of Seleucia from his nephew. Under this view, the high priest Onias III is the "prince of the covenant" mentioned in verse 22.

But others believe that verses 22-24 are chronological and discuss the first phase of the Syrian-Egyptian war. Under this view, Ptolemy VI is the "prince of the covenant" mentioned in verse 22.

As shown on the handout, I favor the first view that the "prince of the covenant" is Onias III, the Jewish High Priest. But I don't favor the view that verses 23-24 are describing the takeover of Seleucia by Antiochus. Instead, I think the focus in these verses is on Antiochus' interaction with the Jews.

Under this view, the "small people" or the "few people" in verse 23 are the Jewish collaborators with Antiochus IV.

Onias III was the high priest, which was not only the most important religious position in Jerusalem at the time but was also the highest political office. But Onias was pro-Egyptian.

Onias had a brother named Joshua, who preferred his Greek name, Jason. Jason was from the pro-Syrian Tobiad party, which wanted to turn Jerusalem into a Greek city.

Antiochus, of course, liked Jason and the Tobiads much better than Onias and the Egyptians, and so Antiochus manipulated the situation so that Onias III was replaced by Jason as high priest.

Second Maccabees 4:7b-10 describes these events:

Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corruption, promising the king at an interview three hundred and sixty talents of silver and, from another source of revenue, eighty talents. In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred and fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the men of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life.

Jason was later replaced by Menelaus who offered a larger bribe. Menelaus then had Onias III, the legitimate high priest, killed.

The "league" or "agreement" in verse 23 is likely the agreement by which Antiochus assumed power by flatteries. But after that agreement, he worked deceitfully. Antiochus was not what he promised to be.

What do we mean by that? The remainder of verses 23-24 give us an example.

Antiochus came up (to Palestine) and became strong (by making his supporter the high priest) with a small people (with the Tobiad party).

But what about verse 24?

He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time.

I think verse 24 describes the lavish gifts that Antiochus gave to his friends to win their support and keep their support. One commentary provides a good summary:

This king, Antiochus IV, will make covenants without the slightest intention of inconveniencing himself to keep them, motivated by desire for his own aggrandizement. Though his collaborators were a small people, he would succeed in penetrating the sources of wealth and use the plunder, spoil, and goods to lavish on those who would then support his cause. Plans to take further lucrative cities would be made, but only for a time. The living God whom he had defied would intervene.

Daniel 11:25-26

25 And he shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand: for they shall forecast devices against him. 26 Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow: and many shall fall down slain. 27 And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed.

With verse 25 we again turn back to continuing fight between the Syrians and the Egyptians.

Polybius tells us that the south was the initial aggressor, but the first actual battle took place as the northern army passed into southern territory.

What was political situation in Egypt?

After the death of Cleopatra I, the wife of Ptolemy V, her young son Ptolemy VI Philometer became king.

Now we need to review the family tree. Remember that this Cleopatra was the daughter of Antiochus the Great, and that Antiochus IV was the son of Antiochus the Great. So what that means is that Ptolemy VI, the king of the south, was the nephew of Antiochus IV, the king of the north. Ptolemy VI was married to Cleopatra II, who was also his sister. So, yes, the family tree was a bit complicated!

What happened next was the Sixth Syrian War. The cause of the war is unclear, but it seems to have arisen from a desire by Egypt to unify their people against a common enemy.

By this time, Ptolemy VI and his younger brother Ptolemy VIII (both between 10 and 16 years old) had been declared co-rulers.

Antiochus IV heard of the Egyptian preparations for war and was able to surprise and defeat the Ptolemaic army in the Sinai desert. Antiochus continued on toward Egypt and camped near Alexandria.

The Egyptians suffered internal unrest as a result of the war, and envoys were sent to negotiate a peace treaty. Antiochus took his nephew Ptolemy VI hostage under his guardianship with the intent of making Egypt a client state of Syria.

The people of Alexandria responded by proclaiming Ptolemy VIII as sole king. Antiochus then besieged Alexandria but eventually withdrew his army, leaving Ptolemy VI as his puppet king in Memphis.

Ptolemy VIII is also known as Ptolemy Physcon, which means "fat paunch."

And, for those keeping track of such things, you may have noticed that we went from Ptolemy VI to Ptolemy VIII. What about Ptolemy VII? That was Ptolemy Neos Philopator (the new beloved of his father), who may have reigned briefly before being murdered by his uncle Ptolemy Physcon. Some sources suggest he never reigned at all.

In Antiochus's absence, Ptolemy VI and his brother Ptolemy Physcon were reconciled.

So how does this all fit with verses 25-27?

And he (Antiochus) shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south (Ptolemy Physcon and Ptolemy VI as co-rulers - **note correction to handout**) with a great army (the army that surprised and defeated Ptolemy VI in the Sinai desert).

The king of the south (Ptolemy Physcon and Ptolemy VI) shall be stirred up (by their advisors) to battle with a very great and mighty army (the army that marched against Syria); but he (Ptolemy VI, in particular here) shall not stand (because he was taken hostage by his uncle): for they shall forecast devices against him (Antiochus's plans against him, the activities of disloyal subjects in Egypt who quickly gave him up, and the poor counsel of his advisers).

Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him (his advisors failed him by unwisely urged the young king to recapture Syria and Palestine, thus incurring the wrath of Antiochus), and his army shall overflow (be swept away): and many shall fall down slain (die in

the battle).

And both these kings' (Antiochus IV and his nephew, Ptolemy VI) hearts shall be to do mischief (plotting to make Egypt a client state and plotting against each other), and they shall speak lies at one table (to an oriental mind the worst sort of treachery); but it shall not prosper (Rome would soon ruin their fun): for yet the end shall be at the time appointed (a reminder that God is in control of these events; they are occurring at the appointed times).

Daniel 11:28

28 Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits, and return to his own land.

Antiochus IV returned to his capital city of Antioch in Syria with a great deal of plundered wealth from Egypt. It is at this point that he set his mind against the "holy covenant." That is, he began to persecute the Jews in earnest.

The deposed illegitimate high priest Jason had heard a rumor that Antiochus had died in Egypt, and so he took the city of Jerusalem and locked up the other illegitimate high priest Menelaus.

Antiochus decided to get rid of the Jewish religion altogether. He took the city back, released Menelaus, killed 80,000 people, and eventually (after another foray into Egypt discussed next in verse 29) robbed and desecrated the temple in 168 BC. We saw some of these events back in Chapter 8.

Daniel 11:29-30

29 At the time appointed he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter. 30 For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.

Again, verse 29 reminds us that these events are not random events. They are occurring at appointed times.

These verses describe Antiochus' humiliation by Rome after his fourth invasion of Egypt and his subsequent return to persecute the Jews and desecrate the temple in Jerusalem.

The ships of Chittim are Roman ships. Chittim refers to Cyprus, which was under Roman dominion, and all areas beyond. The Greek translators understood this so well that they rendered this verse to say "the Romans will come against him."

Antiochus, angered at his loss of control over the king, invaded again in 168 BC. The Egyptians sent to Rome asking for help.

On the outskirts of Alexandria, Antiochus met the Roman Popilius Laenas, with whom he had been friends during his stay in Rome. But instead of a friendly welcome, Popilius offered the king an ultimatum from the Roman Senate: he must evacuate Egypt and Cyprus immediately.

Antiochus begged to have time to consider but Popilius drew a circle round him in the sand with his cane and told him to decide before he stepped outside it.

This ended the Sixth Syrian War and Antiochus' hopes of conquering Egyptian territory. Still, the Ptolemies were greatly weakened by the war as well as the conflict between Ptolemy VI and VIII.

Antiochus left in humiliation - and most likely for that reason he then turned his wrath on the Jews after he returned (which means that Rome was at least indirectly and partially responsible for this first desecration, as they were directly responsible for the second desecration in AD 70).

Those who "forsake the holy covenant" in verse 30 are the allies of Menelaus who did not protest as Antiochus pillaged the temple. Antiochus has "intelligence with them," which means he plotted with the collaborators.

Daniel 11:31

31 And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.

This verse gives more details about the desecration of the temple that occurred in December 168 BC.

The "abomination that maketh desolate" likely refers to a statue of Jupiter that was set up in the inner sanctuary. In fact, the temple was renamed the temple of Zeus Olympius. It may also refer to the desecration of the altar that occurred when a pig was sacrificed and the temple was sprinkled with

pig broth.

The Roman emperor Caligula later ordered that his own statue be placed in the Holy of Holies, but that order was never carried out due to the delays by the Roman governor and the intervention of Herod, who both knew what the result would have been.

In Matthew 24:15, Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation of which Daniel the prophet spoke. However, Jesus made it very clear that the event he was referring to had not yet occurred, but would occur soon. (See Matthew 24:34.) And so Matthew 24:15 cannot be referring to Daniel 11:31 because the event prophesied by Daniel 11:31 came to pass before the birth of Christ. To what then was Jesus referring? Jesus was talking about a second desecration that we have already seen in Daniel 9:27, and that we will see again in Chapter 12.

This all seems a little confusing - two different events, both involving a desecration of the temple and both called an abomination of desolation. Shouldn't we expect some sort of warning to be extra careful in our interpretation of this particular language?

Whether we should have expected such a warning is open to debate, but this is not - we are given such a warning, and by none other than Jesus himself. In reference to the other abomination (the one by the Romans mentioned in 9:27 and 12:11) to which Jesus referred in his warnings in Matthew 24, Jesus said:

Matthew 24:15 - When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (**whoso readeth, let him understand**).

Whoso readeth, let him understand! Jesus warned us to be extra careful on this point, and I hope that we have been.

The abomination here in verse 31 is the one perpetrated by the Greeks. It occurred nearly 200 years before the birth of Christ, and so could not have been the one that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24, which occurred in AD 70.

Daniel 11:32

32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

Antiochus was a master at winning over people with flattery and empty promises. He convinced many of the influential Jews to adopt his pro-Hellenistic policies. These are the ones who "do wickedly against the covenant." That is, they violated their covenant with God by compromising with the world. One commentator notes:

In some ways this defection of the would-be progressives among the Jews themselves was an even more serious threat to the survival of Israel as a nation than the tyrannical measures of Antiochus. For it was the same kind of large-scale betrayal of their covenant obligations toward the Lord that had made inevitable the former destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity in the days of Jeremiah.

Those who "shall be strong and do exploits" are the Maccabeans who stood up to Antiochus and started the revolt that eventually led to the first independent Jewish nation since before the Babylonian captivity. Again, one commentator notes:

Their uncompromising commitment to faithful adherence to the Mosaic covenant and law resulted in the spiritual survival of the nation till the first coming of the Lord Jesus.

Just as they were called to be faithful and loyal in the years leading up to Jesus' first appearance, so are we called to be faithful and loyal as we await the second appearance of Christ.

That is a wonderful phrase in verse 32 - "the people that do know their God." We want to be that people. Why? Verse 32 tells us. They do great things for God!

Daniel 11:33-35

33 And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. 34 Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. 35 And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.

The Maccabean leaders went throughout the countryside and preached a message of repentance and a return to the law of Moses. These are "they that understand" and "instruct many" in verse 33.

But they suffered great hardship. Many lost their lives as Antiochus pursued them and burned their fields and cities. Many of the initial leaders, including Mattathias himself, died early during the struggle. Those who were left received a "little help" (verse 34) from early supporters of their cause.

Some argue that Mattathias and his family provided much more than just a little help, but compared to the help that God was providing it was just a little help.

And that phrase also confirms that Daniel was not written by a second century imposter - such a person would never have described this help as only a little help. That description could only have come straight from God.

When it began to look like the Maccabees were going to win, many more joined their cause. Many of these latter converts were insincere and switched over only to save their own necks. They joined "with flatteries" as mentioned in verse 34.

Verse 35 gives us some understanding of the reasoning behind God's activities here. The persecution was to try them, and to purge them, and to make them white, even to the time of the end.

God wanted to know those who were on his side, and one way to do that is to bring about persecution. Would we all be here this morning if we faced persecution and possibly death by the authorities for assembling? There are places in this world today where such is the case.

The context of verse 35 suggests that the "time of the end" is the end of the Jewish struggle with the Seleucids, which came to an end in 142 BC when Judea became politically independent 25 years after the start of the rebellion. The Seleucids lasted a little longer but their power had been permanently broken.

Another possibility is that the "time of the end" may refer to the time of the end of the vision, which would take us to the beginning of the Roman empire.

Finally, we are once again reminded that God is in control of these events. Verse 35 tells us it was "yet for a time appointed."

I think these repeated reminders of appointed times is yet another indication that God is not just telling Daniel what was going to happen - God is telling Daniel what God was going to do! These things were not happening by chance; they were happening at appointed times!

#daniel