

## The Rise of the Despicable Ruler

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Read Daniel 11:20-35

Daniel 11 is a remarkable chapter in the Bible. Daniel has already seen various visions for the king of the coming empires of Persia, Greece and Rome, as well as that of a more ferocious kingdom.

And he has seen the coming of the King of kings and his remarkable Kingdom.

But Daniel 11 gives us – not another breath-taking picture, but a more intricate and detailed map of one part of what is to come.

Instead of a bird's eye view, we are given a worm's eye view. And because of that, many find this chapter tedious and hard to follow. It certainly does lend itself more to a Sunday school class than for a sermon.

There is an old African proverb, “When the elephants fight, it is only the grass that gets trampled!”

But we are not merely warned of the coming of a really bad king, or called to simply brace ourselves against the worst. Daniel learns that God is sovereign even over the worst of times and rulers.

We have passed over the first 19 verses, but they have their importance.

Chapter 11 is like a map, and we have the biggest picture in the beginning, and then it narrows to two kingdoms, the North and the South, and then we come to the rise of this despicable king.

In truth, chapter 11 should be a continuance of chapter 10. There is a spiritual battle taking place over Persia and soon over Greece.

We **begin** then in the first 4 verses.

We see the fall of Persia, under her 4<sup>th</sup> king, Xerxes, the wealthiest of his line. A million man army subdued all of Greece down to Corinth, passing through the famous battle at Thermopylae and the brave 300, and reduced Athens to ashes. But the navy came through, Xerxes had to retreat, and his now 100,000 man army was defeated in the Battle of Plateau. So much for Persia, verse 2!

Then comes Alexander the Great for Greece – a mighty king, ruling with great authority, doing all he pleases. In a decade, he subdues all the civilized world, as far east as India. But as fast as he arose, so fast did he fall – so Greece rises and falls in 2 verses – 3-4.

Out then of the four parts of the mighty kingdom of Greece, two are set before us, called the South and the North, describing the two kingdoms, Ptolemy in Egypt and Palestine, and Seleucus over the rest of Asia.

Pause here a second and consider – the Lord not only knows the future of all the kingdoms of the earth; he as well ordains and plans their history. All the ups and downs, all the movements this way and that, are owned and ordained by the Lord over all men.

You and I look back a most tumultuous century, don't we? We have seen two World Wars, and several smaller ones throughout the world and especially in the middle east; and the horrible division that took place in Vietnam. And who knows that America one day might not be split, the way we are going.

While we feel so small and helpless next to such movements, we trust in a God who measures the mountains in his scales, and the heaven with his ruler; he holds the oceans in his palm, and the nations are like a drop in a bucket, the dust on his scales! All the nations are as nothing before him! Isaiah 40!

Let us bow the knee to him, King Jesus, the ruler of the kings of the earth, says Rev. 1.5. He ever has been, is now, and ever shall be!

We come **then** to a contest in 5-20, which stretches over about 135 years.

Let us hit the highlights:

5 – Ptolemy and Seleucus together in 310 BC, expanding their territory greedily.

6 – after the death of Ptolemy a peace accord is struck by marriage, that goes terribly wrong; divorce, assassinations, poisonings, a coup d'etat, are described here, as the two sides battle by intrigue.

7-8 – describes the ensuing battles; including Egypt's leader recovering treasures long before taken by Persia. Egypt's rule of the sea led to a ceasefire for a time.

9 – Seleucus takes Syria and Phoenicia around 230 BC.

10-12 – introduces the rise of Antiochus the Great, father of the despicable one later on. There is much intrigue taking place between the sons and rivals. At this time, Egypt defeats the Seleucids with a smaller force, where the former lost 2200 men, and the latter, 17,000 troops! Antiochus turns to consolidate his rule elsewhere with great success.

When the successor of Ptolemy came to the throne at the age of 4, the North saw its chance. Verse 13 tells us of his great army that takes back Phoenicia, Palestine and Gaza, which falls in 201.

Verse 14 gives the battle of Panium, between Antiochus the Great and General Scopus. The North won, and in verse 15, the army of the South has Scopus pinned in Sidon. In verse 16, Israel would fall into the hands of the North from then on.

17 is about how Antiochus sought to take over Egypt by his daughter being married to the heir, who was only 10 at the time. In short order this plan failed when both died within about 15 years or so.

Verse 18 tells the efforts of the North under Antiochus pushing into the Greek arena; but a great commander, Scipio of Rome, would put a stop to his progress. The terms of surrender in 188 were severe, a real turning point, no doubt, in the history of Rome. Most of Asia Minor had to be given up; his entire navy handed over with his elephant brigade; and a hefty yearly toll. Verse 19 tell us of the end of Antiochus the Great, who failing to raise the payments to Rome, led him to pillage the temples of Bel, where the townspeople stormed him and killed the king.

It was during this time that Rome had demanded 20 choice hostages, including the son of the king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who would return to rule this Northern Kingdom.

Let us pause here and make this point, that the Lord could have, if he so purposed and desired, to dethrone this Antiochus the Great a 1000 times over in his career. There was no limit to the devices and

instruments he could have used to bring him to an end, and so stop the rise of his more wicked son.

The idea that God can only control the good and not the evil presents a very weak God indeed. The whole book of Job seems to resolve over this very point – that the Lord knows what he is doing in allowing wickedness to walk in this world, that he has a purpose for it, and that he overrules it for his own glory.

Sinful man thinks that because he rebels, that God does not hold him anymore. That is simply wrong; he holds him still, but in a different way.

Let us praise God on the one hand, that he has control of all the sin and sinners in the world; and on the other, that no weapon devised against him and his people can ever truly prosper.

See how the Lord time and again has made the most awful things to bring him glory and bring his people good. Look at awful Saul persecuting the church! Look at awful Haman building his gallows! Look at awful brothers selling their favored fellow into slavery in Egypt! Look at awful priests and awful Pilate crucifying Jesus!

Well let us come **thirdly** then to the rise of this despicable ruler. We have seen him before, back in Daniel 8:

<sup>8</sup> Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven.

<sup>9</sup> Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land*. (Dan 8:8-10)

And a little later, in verse 23: "...A king will arise, Insolent and skilled in intrigue.

In 11:21-35, we learn of his rise and character; his two campaigns against Egypt – the first successful and the second not so; and his evil done in Jerusalem and the rise of the Maccabees to defend the Jews.

If this were a Sunday School class, we could take more time to see how wondrously and fully these lines were fulfilled in history.

But here we will have to be selective.

First of all see his character – he is a despicable person who rises by dishonor rather than honor.

The word here means contemptible, despised, scorned, and is used in Ps 15.4 of how the righteous feel toward the reprobate, and in Is. 53:3 of how Christ was despised and rejected of men.

Antiochus Epiphanes was not the next in line for the throne, but as the steward for his nephew who was next in line, he was able to bribe the Roman officials to set aside that claim.

He tried to live up to his name, Epiphanes, which means “light” or “illustrious one”. He would sometimes walk the streets throwing money as he laughed, as people scrambled for the gold. He built pagan temples – including a colossal one to Zeus in Athens. He combined great stinginess and generosity, switching back and forth with ease.

He claimed for himself divine honors, desecrated Jerusalem in 168 BC as he sat, enthroned, in the temple court, like unto the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians 2. His detractors called him Epimanes instead of Epiphanes; madman instead of enlightened one.

He was wildly successful in Egypt because of a civil war that took place there, and Antiochus wound up on the right side, at first.

Long story short, two brothers were at odds as to who would be king in Egypt, and this despicable one came to the rescue of the one brother.

Antiochus came close to ruling over all of Egypt, had it not been for the Romans intervening with their navy and threatening total destruction.

The captain of the Romans had grown up with Antiochus in Rome and they were friends. But when they met here, it was not on friendly terms. Antiochus wanted to throw a party for the captain; but the captain said no, I have a message for you. Antiochus said, let's talk it over at dinner, and the captain said, no, you will give an answer right now. After reading the terms of surrender, Antiochus said, let me talk it over with my advisors. But the captain drew his sword right there, drew a circle in dirt around where Antiochus stood, and said he would make his decision right then and there before stepping across that line!

What happens after this first campaign is his further efforts at regaining power through intrigue, and his failure to be victorious. This leads him to vent his anger on the Jews.

He would strip them of their sacraments, sacrifices, Sabbath and Scripture. Circumcision was forbidden upon pain of death. Offerings could be made to Jehovah, but only under Zeus as god. Sabbath keeping was punishable by death. If any were found with the Bible, they too were put to death.

Verse 30 gives a short statement on the intrigue which took place between Antiochus and the High Priests of Jerusalem. Here again we find men producing bribes to Antiochus to be made high priest.

Again, long story short, after a series of atrocious deception and slaughter, Antiochus is found encamped against Jerusalem in 167. He marched in and suppressed the Jewish religion altogether for raising arms against him. He slaughtered 80,000 men, women and children. And he profaned the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar, and robbed it of its sacred vessels (worth 1800 talents). This took place on Dec. 16, 168 - the exact date three years later that Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple, cleansing it from its defilement, on what came to be known as Hanukkah.

29-30 tell us of those in Israel who followed the crooked priest who sided with Antiochus. They forsook the covenant.

31 gives a more detailed description of the Abomination of Desolation, setting up an image of Zeus in the Temple, and dedicated the building to the pagan gods of the Olympus. This is the passage quoted by Jesus in Olivet Discourse. Daniel 12:11 also references the Abomination of Desolation.

32a further details the efforts of the Jewish compromisers, seeking to blend in with their Roman-Syrian overlords. A Greek Gymnasium was built in Jerusalem, and the Greek games were held, including the men competing in the nude. This was a more insidious threat than the blatant attacks by Antiochus.

You can see how trying to get along with this madman means you need to forsake wisdom, the knowledge of God, as well as giving up courage, to get along.

So in those day arose a patriot priest name Matthew from Ephraim, and his five brave sons, the brothers Maccabee. They became the Hasidim party, which resisted the paganizing influences in Israel. A



subgroup out of the Hasidim, the *Perusim*, later came to be known as the Pharisees, protectors of the law of Moses.

The exploits and battles of these brothers for their country and their faith, are included in Hebrews 11:34-35. One of them came to be called “The Hammer”, and another died when he sank his sword into the heart of an elephant before it fell on him and crushed him to death.

So they put the enemy to flight.

Verse 34 tells us that not all who joined their ranks were pure. And verse 35 outlines the end of the original Maccabees with the battle of Mt. Azotus. The efforts at exterminating them failed, and a strong Jewish kingdom was founded under John Hyrcanus, grandson of Matthew. The work of the Spirit here implies cleansing and purifying God’s people in afflictions.

They proceeded to set up treaties with Sparta and Rome, though neither lent them aid. And they would win their independence until Rome swept all into her pocket. It is interesting – the despicable king who would win all of Egypt, and from there, who knows – cannot even keep little Israel!

What can we take from this? Well, it seems that the further prophecy of these times in Zech. 9:11-13 lends us aid.

*<sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope; This very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you. <sup>13</sup> For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; And I will make you like a warrior's sword. (Zec 9:11-13 NAU)*

First, be men of the covenant, men of the Word, men of the blood of Christ – live as freed men, men who have been rescued, delivered,

redeemed. Sometimes it goes well with the godly, and sometimes it does not. Doesn't matter – in good times, be faithful; in hard times, have hope! Live for the reward of your Savior, for his praise, his honoring you at the last.

Second, know who the enemy is and to battle. Who are the Greeks and the Romans today? Who is the Antiochus who infiltrates the church and sits as god in worship and who is the Caesar who demands we bow the knee to him as god? Know that your battle is not with flesh and blood, but a spiritual warfare – fought over the minds and hearts of men, fought on college campuses, fought in the media, fought in our homes. Take every thought captive for Christ; keep your heart in the love of God always.

Third, be an instrument then in the hand of your Lord and Savior. It is one thing to draw up a nice battle plan; it is quite another to put yourself at his command and go forth to the fight. Be his bow, be his arrow, be his sword; raise up your covenant sons and daughters to stand in the evil day and to resist Satan!

The lesson here is – to arms! We are told of the rise and fall of this wicked fellow so that we might stand up and be counted, to serve and to offer battle; to have both the sword and the trowel in our hands, fighting and building always.

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Take up and put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph 6)*

Amen.