

DANIEL 11 CBC 31.1.2021

Do you ever wonder how you're going to cope with the pressure you're under, and what in the world God is doing? Da 11 addresses these questions. It's the centrepiece of one long unit that runs through chs.10-12, and it's all about the pressure God's people will face in this world, and how to cope when everything feels too big for us.

Daniel is given a remarkable vision which stretches from his own day to the end of the world. It contains many detailed revelations of the future. But it's not about God showing off His paranormal skills. He's showing us His pastoral care, preparing us for what's to come, and enabling us to live wisely and well.

It's a long chapter so we can't read it all. We'll be dipping into the first part, and we'll read the closing section when we get there. And what we're going to see is how pressure mounts on God's people, but how God brings us to victory in the end.

The first thing to note in ch.11 is that in this fallen world there is always pressure on God's people.

That's the general condition of things. Daniel has just seen God's people released after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Many have returned home to Jerusalem. Surely life will be easier for them now? But it isn't! You can read the story of their continuing difficulties in the book of Ezra. And it's as Daniel prays about this that God gives him this vision. In ch.10 he learns there are evil spiritual forces battling against God behind the scenes. And now in ch.11, he gets a glimpse of how this impacts life on earth. Incidentally, if you've ever wondered what happened between the Old and the New Testaments - that blank page in your Bible - it's the history that's foretold in Daniel 11.

Daniel is given a prophetic vision of breathtaking accuracy. For example, v.3 describes the rise of Alexander the Great, and v.4 describes exactly what happened after his early death. His empire didn't go to his descendants. His generals took over and split the empire into four parts (cf. Da 8:8).

The rest of the chapter focuses on two of the powers that emerged from Alexander's empire. They're described as "the king of the South" (in the area of Egypt, v.5) and "the king of the North" (the region of Syria, v.6). Sometimes these rival powers co-operate; mostly they fight; and it's all foretold in vv.5-35 which cover about 160 years of history. The prophecies are absolutely precise. I'll give just one more example since it relates to one of the more famous people in this chapter: v.17 - the daughter referred to is Cleopatra. Her father ruled the northern kingdom and married her into the southern kingdom thinking to gain influence. It didn't work - Cleopatra sided with her husband against her father and became decidedly pro-Egyptian, just as God had said! Well, go to the commentaries for the rest of the details.

But what's all this doing in the Bible? Simply this: that sandwiched between the king of the North (Syria) and the king of the South (Egypt) is Israel. As these two kings fight for dominance, God's people are the meat in the sandwich. They're always under pressure. Daily life is hard because their land is

constantly invaded by warring armies. Spiritual life is hard because for the next couple of centuries they're blasted from both ends by Greek culture – values and doctrines that challenge their faith in God and entice their children.

That sums up vv.1-20. It's a panoramic picture that's typical of the world we live in: rival powers, great forces at work in the world that we can't control. Circumstances that make life difficult. Cultural pressures that threaten our faith. Don't be surprised when life is a struggle as a Christian in a fallen world. That's the general condition of things.

But there are times when the pressure on us intensifies into deliberate, targeted attacks.

This is what Daniel sees in the second phase of his vision in vv.21-35. The vision zooms in on one particular northern king described in v.21 as “a contemptible person.” We've met him before in Da 8 (“the little horn”). His name is Antiochus IV and he called himself “Epiphanes” - “God manifest” - he had a large ego and was a corrupt, bullying thug. He seized power through intrigue (v.21); he was deceitful (v.23); he rewarded his cronies (v.24). We know the type! And very significantly (v.28), he's pointedly anti-God.

And in v.25 he attacks and defeats the South, and a little while later he decides to repeat the exercise but this time it doesn't work. Look at v.29: *“At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before.”* Why? v.30: *“Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart.”* And that refers to the growing strength of the Roman empire. The Romans met Antiochus on the Egyptian coast, and told him to go home. And realising he was outgunned, Antiochus had no choice but to turn his army round and march back the way he'd come – through Israel.

So there's a megalomaniac bully who's just been humiliated in front of all his troops. And he's looking for someone smaller to kick. The result for God's people is described in the second half of v.30: *“Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. [But] he will show favour to those who forsake the holy covenant.”* In other words, He said, *“I will make you Jews eat dirt. You will give up your religion. and instead of loyalty to God you will pledge allegiance to me and my ways and my values. Stick with God and you'll die; come over to me and I'll let you live.”*

And there followed a terrible time of persecution referred to in vv.31ff, in which thousands of Jews were tortured and killed in unimaginably horrible ways. I won't go into detail – the story is told in the books of Maccabees, and I found this week I had to stop reading it because it was so awful. But as God foretold in vv.32-35, it was a time of sifting. Many deserted the faith. Others were clinging to their hope in God, finding it a desperate struggle but being purified in the process.

And we'd like it if this sort of thing were confined to ancient history, but it isn't. In many parts of the world today the church is passing through these same fires – in places like North Korea and northern Nigeria Christians are suffering horribly. What we see in Da 11 are specific incidents in history that are a

pattern of *all* history. There's a general pressure on God's people at all times, from circumstances and from gospel-opposing culture. But in some times and some places, the general pressure is ramped up in deliberate, horrific attacks. And in every generation, v.32 is true of the visible church: some fall away, but those who really know God stand firm. Brother and sisters: you and I are in v.32 somewhere!

But where in Da 11 *is* this God that we're supposed to know? Has He gone on holiday while we're suffering? Daniel 11 answers with a calm but firm NO. Here's what God does:

- He tells us what's coming so we won't be unprepared. It shouldn't surprise us to find God doing this, because Jesus does the same for us (Mt 24:25). He warns us to prepare us. *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (Jn 16:33).
- God rules over this fallen world. He frustrates the schemes of people who ignore Him so that they don't become even worse. Note the word "BUT" (or equivalent): (NIV: vv. 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32, 44, 45). There's a great comfort in this. It's not kings, presidents, or prime ministers who are in charge of the universe, but God. And all things serve His purposes.
- God sets limits to evil. We don't understand always why God permits the things He does. But what God reveals to us here - three times - is the phrase "the appointed time" - v.27, 29, 35. What the chapter calmly says is that dreadful things are happening and God is in total control of the boundaries. No matter how overwhelming life seems.

Listen friends, this isn't just history we can take or leave. It's pastoral care we *need*. Because this is our world! You can't escape Da 11! There will always be pressure on us in a general way; and there'll be times when as Christians we'll be deliberately attacked.

And at the end of history, there'll be a particularly awful time that's prophesied in 11:36 - 12:4

36 *"The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. 37 He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. 38 Instead of them, he will honour a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his ancestors he will honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. 39 He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honour those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.*

40 *"At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. 41 He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. 42 He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. 43 He will*

gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Cushites in submission. 44 But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. 45 He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

12:1 *“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”*

What on earth is going on here? v.36 starts off as though still describing Antiochus, but then says things which just don't fit, and by the time the vision finishes in ch.12 we're reading about the resurrection of the dead (12:2) and "the time of the end" (12:4)!

It's as though Daniel is seeing *through* Antiochus to view someone else like him who comes in the future, at the end of history. That shouldn't surprise us, because Daniel saw the same thing in ch.8.

Antiochus was a figure of evil in history who becomes in Scripture a symbol of evil (like Hitler in the modern world). And Scripture reveals that what Antiochus stood for will be repeated in history by other, similarly evil, anti-God figures. And this pattern of evil will culminate in the worst of the lot - the one described in the New Testament as the antichrist (cf. 1Jn 2:18). That's what Daniel glimpses here. A foreshadowing of the final enemy of God's people.

Daniel describes the last battle symbolically using the language and imagery of his day. He speaks of chariots and cavalry (v.40) we needn't think they're going to become fashionable weapons again! They symbolize violence and the threat of violence. He says (v.41) that Edom and Moab and Ammon will be OK under antichrist - and these nations don't exist any more! But historically they were the enemies of God's people, and that's what's meant here. People who oppose God's kingdom will do fine under antichrist. They're all on the same side!

But before you lose heart, look at the outcome: v.45: he will pitch his tent right at *"the beautiful holy mountain"* - Zion! It looks like God's people are about to be overcome - BUT at that moment v.45, *"he will come to his end, and no-one will help him."* God calls time on him and he's utterly destroyed. But God's people go on to resurrection, and to shine like stars (next week!).

What a terrifying phrase that is at the end of v.45! He exalts himself above God and thinks he's getting away with it. And then the judgement of God falls on him, and he comes to his end, with no-one to help him.

I can't think of anything worse than coming to the end of your life and facing the judgement of God with no-one to help you. And I can think, *"Well, these*

evil people in Da 11 deserve that” - and they do. God’s judgement is always just. But when I see the evil in my heart, I know that I deserve to be left alone with no-one to help too. But thank God, I’ll never be in that situation, because Jesus came and took my place. He took the judgement my sins deserved, and died alone with no-one to help. And He says to me and to all who trust in Him, “I’ll never leave you or forsake you. Let me take you through death to resurrection.”

Conclusion

So Daniel’s vision starts with a wide-angle shot in which we see that God’s people in every age will come under pressure from the kingdoms of this world. And then the vision narrows to show that from time to time the pressure on us will intensify because of people like Antiochus. And finally through the lens of Antiochus the vision focuses right down on this terrible moment of extreme opposition to God’s kingdom at the end of the age - and that’s still ahead of us. Which means it could be any generation of Christians. It could be us. That’s why following Christ is a serious business and anyone considering it needs to count the cost. God has not hidden these things from us.

But the people who know their God will stand firm, because they know it isn’t unbelieving tyrants who are in charge of the world. God runs the universe. Sometimes He lets tyrants have their day, but He removes them exactly when He wants to. And all they achieve is to fulfil God’s purposes, even though that wasn’t what they intended. Sometimes we don’t understand at the time how God is working because He hasn’t revealed it. But as Jesus said to Pilate, you have no power over me except that which is given you from above. And we know that God allowed the worst evil of all - the killing of His own Son, our Lord Jesus - and through it He brought about our salvation.

And we’ll be better prepared for life if we’ll learn the lesson of Daniel: that there’ll always be pressure on us in one degree or another, but nothing happens without God’s permission. Nothing happens without furthering His plan to bring about the final defeat of evil and the salvation of His people. And nothing lasts beyond the time appointed. Take this message seriously, because the people who know their God will stand firm.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, our life and times are in your hands. You never lose control; you never leave us alone. Help us by your Spirit to trust in you at all times, and to live for Christ our King in every situation, no matter what the cost; and lead us to the joy of your eternal kingdom. For your glory’s sake. AMEN.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- How did you get on with trusting God last week when life was out of your control?
- What have you learned from Daniel 11 to help you trust God *next* week?