

When the Lights Go Out

Daniel 11

We know that children are often afraid of the dark, but do you know, experts say that more adult Americans than ever are afraid of the dark?

According to a recent USA Today article: “While fear of the dark is most common among children 3-12 years old, many adults are also prone to fears of darkness. An estimated 11% of adults were already struggling with this fear before the pandemic, and experts say COVID-19 has made matters worse. ‘Fear is triggered by a real or perceived threat. The global pandemic has evoked much uncertainty in different aspects of all our lives,’ said [one expert]” (Gifty Ampadu).

Children and adults suffer from a fear of the dark for a variety of reasons. For example, darkness impairs one's vision. Not being able to see as well "increases anxiety, uncertainty and tension and this can lead to fear of the dark in any age group," explained [another expert] (Dr. Gene Beresin).”

So the reason many are afraid of the dark is because darkness impairs our vision, which increases uncertainty and uncertainty leads to fear. This is why we often refer to difficult and uncertain times in our lives, like being diagnosed with cancer, as a dark time.

In our text, we are going to examine the vision that God prepared Daniel to receive through the assistance of divine beings. The vision is about dark times that the people of God will face for many years to come, as one empire after another battles for political dominance.

But although the prophetic vision of the darkness that looms ahead could certainly invoke fear and even hopelessness, it also reveals that even in dark times God still rules and is working to accomplish His saving plans.

Main idea: People who know their God stand firm in faith even in dark times.

This morning we are going to consider some essential ways our faith must operate so that when the lights go out we can stand firm in hope in the midst of the darkness.

1. Enlarge your faith by seeing the worthiness of God.

To stand firm in hope, especially in dark times we must enlarge our faith by seeing the worthiness of God. Before unpacking the first point in our message, which focuses on verses 32-33, let me give you some background about chapter 11.

The prophetic vision that Daniel received, recorded in chapter 11, is a continuation of the vision recorded in chapter 10, which was given in the third year of Cyrus. It was Cyrus the Persian King that issued the decree that allowed the exiled Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the desolate city.

Although the returning of some of the exiles was an answer to prayer, there was still many challenges to overcome and many unanswered questions. These challenges, which included fierce opposition from local enemies and the wavering devotion of his people, moved Daniel to pray and fast for 3 weeks with great mourning before God.

As we learned last week, Daniel's prayer stirred up a spiritual conflict in the invisible realm as the angelic being sent to assist Daniel was opposed by demonic forces who were behind the rulers of the kingdom of Persia. The angel sent to assist Daniel was opposed for 21 days. But because of the persistent prayers of Daniel, and the assistance of the Angel Michael, the angel Gabriel reached Daniel and prepared him to receive the prophetic vision of chapter eleven.

We will not be able in one sermon to cover all the details of this prophetic vision that spans some 300 plus years of human history. But with the Spirit's help I want to highlight some key details, which can help us capture the main message these prophetic revelations were meant to convey.

What is the main message? In the climax of the angel's prophecy, which focuses on one of the greatest enemies of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanies IV, we read this testimony about the faithfulness of God's people during this dark time: *"He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action"* (Daniel 11:32).

Keep in mind that Daniel received this prophecy after praying about the challenges his exiled people were experiencing as some were returning to Jerusalem. The trials and tribulations, which we can read about in Ezra and Nehemiah, were no doubt causing the exiles to lose heart.

Let me ask you, in dark times, in times of uncertainty, in times when we are blind sighted by the unexpected, what keeps us from losing hope? What enables us to persevere in the ways and work of God when we encounter resistance? What enables the people of God to persevere in hope is not the promise of comfort and prosperity in this life.

God can and does turn difficult situations around. God can and does restore broken bodies, broken lives, broken homes and broken marriages. Against all odds in Daniel's day and after the great Nazi holocaust in recent history, the Jewish people were miraculously able to return to their land.

But this did not mean that all their troubles would be over. Those who remained faithful to God and accomplished His purposes, did so not because God promised a trouble free life. They remained faithful because they came to know the trustworthiness of God.

Peace is not the absence of trouble but an awareness of God that comes through His word and by His Spirit.

Now its important to note that although the prophecies revealed to Daniel do not paint a pretty picture about what's to come for the people of God, they did remind them and us that God rules over the affairs of men. What is revealed to Daniel about the coming empires

and rulers battling for dominance with Israel stuck in the middle, was not that things were going to get easier for Israel.

Rather having the knowledge that God knew what was coming was for the purpose of increasing their faith in knowing that although they were not in control of the future, their God was still on the throne.

With this in mind, the prophecies revealed to Daniel begin with a summary of the Persian and Greek empires. After the angel, who assisted Daniel in answer to his prayer, reveals how he also assisted the angel Michael, he prophesied beginning in verse two: *“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”* (Daniel 11:2-3).

After Cyrus, who was the Persian King in power when Daniel received this prophesy, four other kings would succeed him. The fourth king, who entered into a conflict with Greece, most scholars agree was king Xerxes, who is mentioned in the book of Esther, (486-465 BC), and also married Esther. Xerxes was the most powerful of the Persian kings, but his conflict with the kingdom of Greece, as prophesied by the angel, was the beginning of the end for the Persian empire.

As one commentator noted, “And with that we are finished with Persia. God used it to send Israel back home. It did its job. To the dustbin of history it goes. God supported and protected it to accomplish his chosen purpose” (Danny Akin).

After the prophesy of the conflict Xerxes had with Greece, the next mighty king that the angel prophesied about is Alexander the Great (v.3). As Daniel’s other prophecies revealed and history bares out, Alexander was one of the greatest conquerors the world has ever known. He conquered the known world by the time he was thirty years old. But soon after, he died of Typhoid fever at the age of thirty three. As quickly as he rose to power, he was gone.

Concerning Alexander, we read in verse five: *“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”* (Daniel 11:4).

As this prophesy incredibly predicted, Alexander’s kingdom was broken up into four smaller kingdoms which were ruled by four of his generals, none of whom were related to him, just as the angel foretold.

Now after the kingdom of Alexander was divided between his four generals, we read beginning in verse five: *“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”* (Daniel 11:5).

Out of the four kingdoms that arose from Alexander’s empire, two of them became the most powerful and would have many conflicts between them. These two kingdoms were the Ptolemies, headquartered in Egypt to the south and the Seleucids, headquartered in Syria to the North.

One commentator noted: “From an Israelite perspective, the conflict of these two dynasties—the kings of the south (Ptolemies) and the kings of the North (the Seleucids)—were the most significant events in world history during the third and second centuries B.C. These events are at the heart of this chapter. The precision of the predictions in this chapter is truly astonishing.” Iain Duguid

Now concerning these two significant kingdoms in the history of Israel, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, the angel reveals more incredibly precise prophetic details in verses 6 to 35. Most of chapter eleven is devoted to the succeeding rival dynasties of the Ptolemy and Seleucid kingdoms. Time will not allow us to cover these verses with much detail. In the sermon notes, which you can find online, you can find more explanation of chapter 11 and also some recommended resources for further study.

Now verses 6-35 continue with the prophecies about the conflict and wars between the Ptolemies and Seleucids dynasties in the history of Israel between 322 BC and 163 BC. The prophecies are not only about general historic events in world history, but specifically how these events will impact Israel. Verse 14 tells of a rebellion against Egypt (the king of the south) by militant Jews, which did not succeed. Verse 16 is a prophetic account of the conquest of Syria (the king of the north) that will succeed against the weakened Jewish people. Verses 21-35 tells of the rise and rage of Antiochus Epiphanies who fiercely persecuted the Jewish people and committed great abominations in the temple of God.

Now what I want us to focus on in this sermon is the main message that these amazing prophecies were meant to convey to Daniel and His people in uncertain times. Although they predict key historic events, they don't tell us that we can know the future details of our earthy pilgrimage.

These prophecies about the endless conflicts of earthly kingdoms and coming AntiChrists are first meant to tell us something about God. They are meant to increase our faith by demonstrating that although we will go through uncertain times, which remind us that we are not in control, our God is always in control.

These prophecies didn't give the Israelites the precise solution to all their earthly problems, but they did assure them that God knew what they were facing "and because God's people knew that He knew, they were able to keep going" (Bryan Chappel).

I appreciate Bryan Chappel's example: "Knowing that God knows is what we need to keep going as he desires. More than once I have endured in ministry by thinking, "God knows," when others have attacked, thought me foolish, or thought my motives ungodly; and, though all the world hate, ridicule, and view me with suspicion, I can walk this path because I know that God knows it. In all the difficulty that Daniel predicts for his people through God's revelation, he provides at least this assurance: God knows what we are facing."

Remember that before Daniel had the capacity to receive this prophetic revelation, he encountered the blazing glory of what was likely a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus (Daniel 10). He was also reminded repeatedly by the angel Gabriel that he was a man greatly loved. Daniel and others could stand firm even in dark times because they knew their God.

Daniel not only knew that God knew what he was going through, but that God loved him. Daniel, who was a man of prayer and a man of the word, beheld the glory of God's sovereignty and love. And his intimate knowledge of God is what enabled him to keep on keeping on for decades as one kingdom after another came and went.

Similarly this side of the cross, if you are going to stand firm as a follower of Christ in this dark age, you must enlarge your faith by seeing and beholding the glory of God in the person of Christ. You must know the love of Christ in your inner being through the might of the Spirit and in the word as you seek His face day by day. We can't wait to find time for God; we must make time for God.

2. Exercise your faith by submitting to the will of God.

Secondly, to stand firm, especially in dark times, you must not only enlarge your faith by seeing the worthiness of God, you must exercise your faith by submitting to the will of God. Remember that in the climax of the angel's prophesy, which focuses on one of the greatest enemies of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanies IV, we read about the faithfulness of God's people during this dark time: "*He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action*" (Daniel 11:32).

Most commentators agree that verse 32 is a prophesy of the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanies IV (167 B.C.) and the faithful Jews who stood firm and resolved not to compromise their devotion to their God. A more detailed account of their faithfulness to God even to the point of death can be found in the book of first Maccabees. Today the Jewish holiday called Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabean

victories over the forces of the Seleucid king [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) and the rededication of the Temple on December 25, 164 B.C.

Now the church today is not the nation of Israel under the old covenant. Therefore our resistance to the forces of evil does not come in the form of physical or military might. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds”* (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Our primary weapons are the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and prayer.

We advance the kingdom of God by letting our light shine before men, as we submit to God’s will so that others in our circles of influence might see our good works and glorify our father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). We are not called to curse the darkness, but to light up the darkness by demonstrating the selfless love of God and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

It’s been said, a faith that can’t be tested can’t be trusted. Do you know that faith that’s born in the light is developed best in the dark. In other words, uncertain times, dark times can bring us to a place where we lean hard on Jesus, while we take steps of faith, which results in experiencing His persevering grace. As a wise person put it, “You’ll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.”

To grow in faith and experience the power of God we must act upon the word of God and obey the will of God even when it cost us. To overcome the forces of evil and conformity to this world we must be submitted to God. “You’ll never be over what God has put under you, until you are under what God has put over you.”

This brings us to our final point.

3. Extend your faith by spreading the word of God.

In addition to enlarging your faith by seeing the worthiness of God and exercising your faith by submitting to the will of God, to stand firm in faith, especially in dark times, you must extend your faith by spreading

the word of God. After prophesying about the people who know their God, stand firm and take action in the dark days of Antiochus Epiphanies, we read beginning in verse 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”* (Daniel 11:33).

Notice in verse 33 that the faithful people of God, who were wise, resisted the darkness of Antiochus Epiphanies by making many understand. Presumably they were wise because they had knowledge of the word of God and the prophesies of Daniel. Through their wisdom from the scriptures they could encourage others by showing them that God predicted the persecution of Antiochus and that in God’s appointed time his days would come to an end.

There’s no doubt that the times we live in today are growing darker. In these dark days we are called as Christians not only to enlarge our faith in the word of God for our own sake, but to extend or pass on our faith by spreading the good news of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:14).

This call to preach the good news of Jesus so that others could hear, believe and be saved is not reserved for Pastors only; it’s the call of all believers.

The mission the church extends beyond consuming the word of God within the four walls of a building. Rather our main mission is to communicate the word of God outside the four walls in our communities and circles of influence. The goal of the church is not increasing its seating capacity, but increasing its sending capacity (i.e. making disciples that spread the fame of Jesus).

But the truth is that in a society that is increasingly becoming more hostile towards Christians who believe in objective truth, many believers are shrinking back in fear rather than shining the light in faith.

Other believers who are being more influenced by our culture of rage than they are the word of God seem to be more interested in fighting the culture wars than shining the light of Christ.

But as the prophecies in the book of Daniel revealed, this hostility to the truth of God's word is not new. The spirit of AntiChrist has existed in every age and will continue until the end of time.

Most commentators agree that from verses 5-35, the AntiChrist figure being depicted was Antiochus Epiphanies who fiercely persecuted the people of God. But many commentators also agree that beginning around verses 36 the AntiChrist figure being described, who magnifies himself as God and speaks astonishing things against God, extends beyond Antiochus to the final AntiChrist. Beginning in verse 36 we read:

“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^[g] 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” (Daniel 11:36-45).

As I said, it appears that from verses 36-45 the prophecy begins transitioning from Antiochus to the final AntiChrist. Up to verse 35, Daniel speaks of appointed times, but in verse 40 the prophecy refers to the time of the end.

Iain Duguid summarizes this passage well: Iain Duguid summarizes this passage well: “Antiochus was powerful, able to do as he pleased (Daniel 11:36) up to this point, but throughout his reign the power of the Romans was far greater than his, as his retreat from Egypt made clear. Antiochus certainly viewed himself as a god—his nick name “Epiphanies” means “god made manifest”—but so too did many ancient rulers. Antiochus abandoned the god that his father worshipped, Apollo, and showed no regard for the one desired by women,” (v.37), which is probably a reference to the worship of the god Adonis or Dionysius, which was common in Egypt. He thus could be said to have turned his back on the traditional deities of the kings of the North and the kings of the South, in favor of the worship of Zeus, a god who embodied military strength (v.39). Yet at the same time, even while aspects of the language of Daniel 11:36-39 seem to fit Antiochus, the passage as a whole seems to be speaking of a king who will be larger and more ultimate version of Antiochus. This coming ruler will truly “do as he pleases,” (v.36) “attack the mightiest fortress” and make his followers “rulers over many.” (v.39)

There is no clear shift in the language of Daniel 11 that marks the transition from Antiochus to the final king, perhaps because Antiochus forms a model with which to compare the ultimate ruler. One striking difference between them though, lies in the events surrounding the kings death in verses 40-45, which do not fit with what we know of the death of Antiochus. Particularly when compared to the precision of the fulfillment of the previous verses of Daniel 11. Therefore, these verses seem to still be looking for a greater fulfillment that is yet to come. Matthew 24 similarly anticipates a dual fulfillment, referring both to the events of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and also to the events that

will mark the end of all things. History will not come to a conclusion, it appears, until the coming of another Antiochus-like king.”

Now keep in mind that although history awaits the final AntiChrist, there have been many antichrists like figures throughout the ages. How many of you know, the spirit of the AntiChrist, which verse 36 says, *does as he wills*, opposes God and exalts himself as God, is alive and well today.

My truth has replaced the truth which has created among other things the confusion and chaos of gender rebellion. Tolerance of all things is the highest virtue and the only sin today is to call sin, sin. Because “my truth” is what reigns in the heart of many and not God’s objective truth, many today call evil, like abortion, good, and good, like protecting the unborn, evil.

Knowing that speaking the truth even in a spirit of love, as we’re called to do, can cost you, many Christians are shrinking back in fear instead of spreading the word in faith. It’s been said, the main problem in our world is not the pervasiveness of the darkness, but the absence of the light.

How do we overcome the dark forces of this world at work to keep followers of Christ from shining their light?

What was true in the days of Antiochus is still true today: *“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,”* (Daniel 11:32-33a).

Keep in mind that these prophetic revelations that Daniel received from the angel, who was resisted by demons, and that he eventually communicated to his people, came in answer to prayer.

As Ron Hutchcraft explained: “The starting point for any rescue conversation about Jesus is not talking to a person about God, but talking to God about that person.”

The blood that Jesus shed not only sets sinners free from the power of sin, satan and death, but gives us access to the throne room of heaven where we can receive the divine assistance we need to push back the darkness.

Do you regularly talk to God on behalf of others so that you can talk to others on God's behalf? Do you pray as the New Testament teaches us for doors of opportunity to be opened to share the word, for hearts to open to pay attention to the word and for your mouth to be open to speak the word with clarity and courage?

We don't overcome the darkness by isolating ourselves but by praying for the grace to engage the darkness with the saving power of the gospel.

John Piper said it powerfully: "Prayer is a war-time walkie-talkie, not a domestic intercom for ringing up the butler to change the thermostat. It is a war-time walkie-talkie to call in firepower because the enemy is greater than we are. If you try to turn this into a domestic intercom to bring another pillow, it malfunctions, and you wonder why. Its not made to be an intercom. Its made to be a war-time walkie-talkie."

Conclusion

The ending of Daniel says of the coming AntiChrist: "*Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him*" (Daniel 11:45). He shall come to an end because, as the New Testament reveals, *the Lord shall consume [the AntiChrist] with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy [Him] with the brightness of his coming*" (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 KJV). Until then let us in these dark days prayerfully be about our Father's business.

Resources for further study:

Daniel: The key to prophetic revelation, John F. Walvoord, Moody

Daniel Akin, Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Daniel, BH Publishing

Bryan Chapel, *The Gospel According to Daniel*, Baker Books

Ian Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preachers Commentary: Daniel*

Erwin Luther, *The Church in Babylon*, Moody

Elliot Clark, *Evangelism As Exiles*, TGC