

Daniel 11:37–39 — The Inner Heart of the Willful King

Not Regarding the God of His Fathers; The God of Forces; Sycophants vs. God's Order; David and Goliath; and Dividing the Land

Scripture Reading: Daniel 11:37–39; John 5:22–23; Matthew 4:9–10; 1 Samuel 17:16; Ephesians 1:3; Revelation 19:20

“Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.” (Daniel 11:37)

“In his estate shall he honour the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things.” (Daniel 11:38)

Not Regarding the God of His Fathers: A Jewish Apostasy

Verse 37 gives us the inner moral character of the willful king, as distinct from the political description that follows in verse 38. He shall not regard the God of his fathers. This is a Jewish apostasy — a departure from Jehovah and from the Messiah. In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read the apostasy of Christendom: the abandonment of the name of the true Christ. Here in Daniel 11, it is the abandonment of Jehovah and of the Messianic hope. They are two forms of the same fundamental departure from God, one in the sphere of Christendom and one in the sphere of Judaism.

John 5:22–23 brings out the positive principle that this apostasy inverts: the Father has committed all judgment to the Son, that all men should honour the

Son even as they honour the Father. You cannot honour one without the other; it must be both. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who sent him. The willful king has no regard for Jehovah and no regard for the Messiah — a twofold rejection of everything God has revealed of himself to Israel. This verse has been known to disturb Jehovah's Witnesses, for whom the equal honouring of the Son with the Father is an unacceptable claim.

The God of Forces: What He Outwardly Honours vs. What He Inwardly Thinks

There is an important distinction between what a man thinks within himself about himself and what external circumstances compel him to acknowledge outwardly. Inwardly, this man knows nothing that is superior to himself; he magnifies himself above all. Yet he is a vassal — a lieutenant of the beast, the first beast of Revelation 13 — and his political position depends on that relationship. In his estate, in connection with his place and his standing, he honours the God of forces (or fortresses in J.N. Darby's translation). This is the beast, whose military and governmental power he depends upon.

This passage alone disposes of the theory that the Antichrist is the Pope. A man who does not regard any god, who magnifies himself above all, is simply not a man who professionally acknowledges God. The objection is not a polemical one but a textual one: the passage precludes it. One may find moral similarities among various enemies of God in history — and there is something of the spirit of Antichrist in many — but that does not make them all the same person. As was once said in ministry here, there is a Pope Self I within each of us: the old nature in every believer possesses those characteristics that in the great enemy show themselves so heinously. Except for the grace of God, those tendencies could rise up in any of us.

The Abomination Set Up: An Unbeliever's Own Idol

The abomination of desolation that the willful king causes to be set up in the holy place is an image of the beast, the first beast. He gives it breath through satanic power and directs the worship of it. Ordinarily one assumes that the man who makes an idol at least himself believes in that idol. But this person magnifies himself above all; he does not truly believe in what he has caused to be worshipped. The abomination does not even have the distinction, such as it is, of having as a devotee its own architect. This is the depth of cynicism in his character: worship is directed to the image of the beast for political reasons, while inwardly the willful king regards nothing as superior to himself.

Sycophants and the Patronage System vs. God's Order

Verse 39, in J.N. Darby's translation, reads: whoso acknowledgeth him will he increase with glory... and he shall divide the land for a reward. This is the patronage system in Scripture, and it does not appear in a favorable light. Those who acknowledge the Antichrist's authority are given power and reward. You acknowledge me; I advance you. The contrast with Satan's offer to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:9 is exact: all these kingdoms will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me. The Lord refused. The willful king has his sycophants who do not refuse.

The contrast with God's order is total. Ephesians 1:3 says that God the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ — and that is at the very opening of the epistle, before any service or faithfulness on our part is mentioned. God gives first, before we can do anything to glorify him. The willful king seeks those who approve him first, and then rewards them. In the kingdom of Christ, those whom the Lord has enriched first will gladly cast their crowns at his feet. Those rewarded by the Antichrist for their sycophancy — can one imagine any of them casting those rewards back to him in love?

David, Goliath, and the Five Smooth Stones

Goliath defied Israel for forty days — suggestive of the forty centuries of the Old Testament, until the right man came on the scene. His challenge, give me a man, was the defiance of man against God. David took five smooth stones from the brook: the five books of Moses, shaped by the action of the running water of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus in the wilderness temptation used one of those smooth stones — three quotations from Deuteronomy, the book of Israel's responsibility to hearken to God — to meet Satan's assault. The subsequent action of finishing the conflict came through death: it was through death that the Lord annulled the power of death.

Before the temptation, the heavens had opened and expressed approbation of the Son in his manhood. Heaven declared its satisfaction in him before he was tested, not after. An Arminian theology would require him to be tested first and the approval given afterward. That is not God's order. He who came to fulfil all righteousness would certainly glorify God on the earth and finish the work he was given to do; the outcome was not in question. It is the inverse of the patronage system of the willful king: God gives to those he has called before they have done anything to deserve it, and they serve in gratitude for what they have already received.

Dividing the Land: A Perversion of What Belongs to Christ

The willful king divides the land for gain and for reward (verse 39). The land — the land of Israel — is not his to divide. That right belongs to the Lord Jesus, who will divide it among the twelve tribes in the millennium, as we see in Ezekiel's vision. Joshua, whose name is the same as Jesus (Jehovah the Saviour), divided the land in type when Israel first entered Canaan; Christ himself will do it in reality when he reigns. For the willful king to divide the land is a perversion and an anticipatory usurpation of what belongs to Christ. This pattern — the false triad's imitation of the divine — runs through all the actions of these personages

in the time of the end. They do not consciously enter into the fact that they are imitating what belongs to God; but that is, in result, what they do.

For he shall magnify himself above all... for that that is determined shall be done.