

The Willful King and the End of Gentile History

Daniel 11:39 – 12:3 · July 17, 2013

The Antichrist — A Strange God and a Patronage System

Verse 39 returns us to the king introduced in verse 36, and the question of identity is settled by a phrase that is easy to pass over. He will practice in the strongholds of fortresses with a strange god. The word strange implies that there is a god who is not strange to him — a god with whom he has a prior relationship. For a Gentile king, every god would be more or less interchangeable. But for a Jewish man, there is one God who is distinctly his own, the God of his fathers. The fact that this man practises with a strange god is therefore a strong indication that he is Jewish — an apostate Jew who has set aside his heritage entirely.

This is consistent with everything else said of him. He does not regard the God of his fathers, which is Jehovah. He does not regard the desire of women — which is the Messiah, the hope of every godly Jewish mother. He magnifies himself above all. He is the one whom the Lord described in John 5:43: I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not. If another come in his own name, him ye will receive. That man is this one. Israel rejected the Messiah who came in His Father's name; in a coming day they will receive the willful king who comes entirely in his own.

Verse 39 also describes a patronage system. Those who acknowledge him — who attach themselves to him, aggrandize him, make themselves his sycophants — he rewards with authority and with land. He divides up the land as though it were his to give. It is not. The land belongs to God, who drove out its former

inhabitants to give it to Abraham's seed. To carve it up as a reward to those who flatter him is one more expression of the self-will that has characterized him from the first. There have been men in history who built their power this way — rewarding those who supported them with pieces of authority — and it has never ended well. This man's end is no exception.

Attacked from Both Sides

Verse 40 confirms what was said in the previous session: this king is not the king of the north. At the time of the end, the king of the south pushes at him, and the king of the north comes against him like a whirlwind with chariots, horsemen, and many ships. He is the target of both. He cannot be one of the two who attack him. He is a third figure — the apostate Jewish king, set up in Jerusalem — caught between those ancient competing powers that have been fighting through his land for centuries.

The king of the north, here as throughout the chapter, is the power associated with Syria — what earlier chapters called the king of bold countenance, the Assyrian, the rod of God's wrath. His power is not entirely his own; there is a force behind him. In chapter 8, it was said his power shall be mighty but not by his own power. What that backing is — whether a great confederacy, or a nation like Russia with strategic interest in controlling the energy-rich Middle East — Scripture does not specify. We know only that he will be exceedingly strong, equipped with a navy, and that he will come with a fury that overwhelms everything before him.

He enters the land of beauty — Israel — and many countries are overthrown. Egypt falls under his hand; her treasures are plundered. Libya and Ethiopia follow in his wake. The scope of his conquest is vast. But in verse 44, tidings out of the east and out of the north trouble him. He moves with great fury to deal with this new threat. And then, suddenly, in verse 45, he plants his palace tents

between the sea and the mountain of holy beauty — between the Mediterranean and Jerusalem — and he comes to his end, and there shall be none to help him.

Broken Without Hand

The abruptness of his end is deliberate. No detail is given of a battle, a siege, a campaign. He comes to his end. Chapter 8:25 supplies the explanation: he will stand up against the Prince of princes, but he shall be broken without hand. The Lord does not engage this man in a prolonged conflict. He is not destroyed by superior generalship or better weapons. The same power that drove Nebuchadnezzar from men and made him eat grass like an ox is the power that deals with this one. There is no need for detail because the Lord's action requires none.

This is the end of what Daniel has to tell us about Gentile history. The chapter began with Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, and has traced the times of the Gentiles through all their successive empires and conflicts to this final moment when the last of the enemies of Israel is removed. Everything before verse 45 is the outworking of the times of the Gentiles; what follows in chapter 12 is something morally different — what God is doing with and for His earthly people at the same time.

The True Counterfeit — A Note on the Antichrist's Identity

There is much speculation in popular Christianity about who the Antichrist might be. Systems are devised, names are numerologically analysed, current political figures are proposed. This misses what Scripture plainly teaches. The Antichrist is Jewish. He will be set up as a political leader in Israel. He is called variously the willful king, the man of sin, the son of perdition, and the second beast of Revelation 13 — different names bringing out different aspects of the same person.

John wrote in his epistles that the spirit of Antichrist was already at work in his day. The spirit that characterized those who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh — who set themselves up as an alternative to the true Christ — that is the spirit that will be fully embodied in this coming man. The moral class he represents was present when the Lord walked the earth: those who said it is through Beelzebub that he casts out demons, who said we have no king but Caesar, who said we will not have this man to reign over us. Characteristically, that class will receive the man who comes in his own name, and reject him who came in the Father's.

The illustration of the counterfeit coin is apt here. Banks do not train their tellers by showing them every variety of forgery. They train them on the genuine article until they know it so well that any counterfeit is immediately recognizable. The answer to all the confusion about end-times figures is not to catalogue the theories but to know the truth of Scripture thoroughly — to know who the true Christ is, what the true church is, what God's true purposes for Israel are — and then the counterfeits become obvious.

Chapter 12 — The Remnant in the Time of Distress

Chapter 12 is not a continuation of the Gentile history of chapter 11 in time; it is a parallel account of the same period from a different moral standpoint. Chapter 11 shows us what the Gentile powers are doing. Chapter 12 shows us what God is doing with His remnant in Israel at the same moment. Darby summarizes the chapter's purpose well: it is occupied with the condition of the remnant during the last period of the Gentile power, and with their deliverance.

At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people. Michael's involvement tells us something immediately. His operations throughout the book of Daniel have to do with Israel, not with the church. The angel who fights for Daniel's people in the heavenly conflict of

chapter 10 is the same one who, in Revelation 12, finally casts Satan out of heaven altogether. That he stands at this moment for Daniel's people is a signal that what follows in chapter 12 concerns Israel.

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people. And there shall be a time of distress such as never was since there was a nation until that time. — Daniel 12:1

There shall be a time of distress such as never was since there was a nation until that time. The Lord echoed these words in Matthew 24, quoting Daniel the prophet. Jeremiah calls it the time of Jacob's trouble. The name Jacob is significant — it is the name that pointed to the natural man, the supplanter, the man who wrestled in the flesh. It is the name Israel will bear in the flesh until it is finally and fully exchanged for the name of grace. That this time is called Jacob's trouble and not Israel's trouble tells us something about what God is doing in it: He is bringing His people through the furnace to emerge as Israel, His prince.

This time of distress is not for believers. The tribulation is not a period through which the church passes. Believers will have been taken home to the Lord before these things begin. What God is doing in the tribulation is His long-deferred work with His earthly people — the winnowing of the threshing floor, the separation of wheat from chaff, the purification of the remnant who will enter the kingdom.

The Two Classes — and the Shining of the Wise

Verse 2 is sometimes read as a reference to a literal resurrection, but the context and the rest of Scripture suggest it is better understood as an image of the regathering of Israel. Scattered throughout the earth — asleep in the dust, as it were — God's people will be gathered, and the judgment will manifest which among them are truly His. Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. All Israel shall be saved, but that salvation is not universal;

it is those whose names are written in the book, the elect among the people.

Verse 3 speaks of two groups: they that are wise, and the many. The wise are those to whom the Spirit of God has given understanding — not intellectual attainment, but the wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord, the obedience that comes from knowing God. In chapter 11:33 we saw these ones in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, instructing the many even while falling by the sword and flame. In the final tribulation they will do the same — faithful teachers who shine in the surrounding darkness, turning the many toward righteousness, not by their own power but because God has given them light to give.

Stars do not run to and fro to gather the capacity to shine. They shine because of what they are. These wise ones will be like that — not prominent through cleverness or strategy or alliance with the winning side, but shining in the darkness because the Spirit of God is in them. It is a great privilege to be given light in the time of greatest darkness, and a great cost — for some of them will fall. But they shall shine as the brightness of the expanse and as the stars, forever and ever.

And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse, and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. — Daniel 12:3

The Tribulation Is Not Ours — A Word for the Present

The time of Jacob's trouble is for Israel. The New Testament is equally plain that the gospel of grace, which is the present dispensation, ends when the Lord comes to take His own home to be with Himself. After that, the strong delusion of 2 Thessalonians 2 falls on those who would not love the truth. The popular notion that people can observe the rapture and then decide to believe — that the tribulation will serve as a second-chance period for those who declined the gospel — is contradicted directly by Scripture.

The right response to what Daniel reveals, and to what the New Testament adds, is not to speculate about timelines or identify the players. It is what Paul says: knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. The day is imminent when the Lord will come for His own. Those who are not His when He comes will face what Daniel foresaw. That is the urgency. Let us not be those who heard the gospel and set it aside for a more convenient time.

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