

## Sermon – 16/12/2007 am

### A Vile Person

Study Text: Daniel 11:21–35

*Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (Matthew 24:15).* Jesus spoke these words to his disciples in answer to their question about the time and manner of his coming again at the end of the age. What did Jesus mean by these words?

Clearly he expected his disciples to know about the ‘abomination of desolation’ in Daniel, and to have some understanding of its significance. If we are to understand what Jesus was talking about then we also need to know what Jesus was talking about, and to do this we need to know what Daniel wrote. Those who ignore the Old Testament will have trouble understanding this reference, and many portions of the New Testament.

### Rise

The glorious man whom Daniel saw in this his final vision continues to tell him about future kingdoms on the earth. He has covered some 350 years with kings of the north (Seleucids in Syria) jostling for power with kings of the south (Ptolemy’s in Egypt). The glorious land or holy land was in the middle of this jostling, but there was no concerted effort to attack Jerusalem and destroy it over this time – apart from attempts to rob the temple of its treasure.

Remember this is history from God’s perspective. The focus is upon the kingdom of God, upon his people and his dwelling place. Whereas Alexander the Great was given only one verse (11:3), Antiochus Epiphanies is the focus of the 15 verses we are looking at today.

*In his place shall arise a vile person (11:21).* This is none other than Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanies (illustrious one). He was commonly known as Antiochus Epimanes (the mad man). He was not in direct line to the throne of the north, but seized it by intrigue from his young nephew. Hence he was not given the honour of royalty (11:21).

Antiochus Epiphanies was a smooth talker, he was cunning and deceptive, but also a man of violence. We have come across him in a previous vision of Daniels; he was the ‘little horn’ which grew exceedingly great towards the east and towards the glorious land (8:9). In this vision Daniel is given more detail of this vile and violent person, the enemy of all that is true and righteous.

Antiochus Epiphanies started sweeping across the land taking local provinces, and breaking long-standing agreements if expedient. With further expediency, since he had only *a small number of people* (11:23) he made an alliance with Egypt. *He shall enter peaceably* (11:24), gaining access and making alliances. He distributed plunder and spoils of battle to further his alliances – but only for a time. This man was only concerned about himself and his power. Relationships and alliances meant nothing to this man of ever-increasing wickedness.

By 170BC Antiochus Epiphanies had become powerful and attacked Egypt with a great army (11:25). The king of the south had an even greater army but was weakened by internal dissent

– *those who eat of the portion of his delicacies shall destroy him and his army shall be swept away* (11:26). Eventually the two kings met around the table making a sham agreement. Antiochus Epiphanies pretended he would share power with Philometer who in turn pretended to believe him. They departed in mutual deception – but it would not be the last time they met for God’s appointed time had not yet come (11:27).

On his return from Egypt Antiochus Epiphanies, who hated anything and anyone with any semblance of holiness, paused to attack Jerusalem. He killed thousands of Jews, profaned the temple and robbed it of its wealth.

Antiochus launched another invasion on Egypt not long afterwards – it was at the appointed or divinely ordained time (11:29). He was still bent on world domination. But things did not go as he planned. Ships from Kittim/Cyprus shall come against him (11:30). The Romans got news of this attack and came to the defence of Egypt. The Roman commander Popilius Laenas met Antiochus Epiphanies with a letter from the Roman senate demanding he leave or face the armies of Rome. Antiochus was humiliated. He returned in rage, rage which he vented upon the holy city and its people in 167BC.

## Rage

Antiochus Epiphanies had a special, devil-inspired hatred for *the holy covenant*, the Jews and their religion. He found some apostate Jews and gained their confidence. And so he came to the holy city ‘in peace’ as it were. He came on the Sabbath day. But his deception soon gave way to violent attack upon all at the temple, including women and children. He entered the sanctuary defiling it with a pigs head. He removed the altar and set up an idol, the idol of Zeus – or the *abomination of desolation* (11:31). Sacrifices were effectively ended, and he also banned circumcision.

These were very dark days for the people of God. With this ‘abomination of desolation’ in the most holy place, their place of worship place remained desecrated. Some of their own people had been taken in by flattery and joined the forces of evil. They did not know who they could trust for *many shall join them by intrigue/slipperiness* (11:34).

It is hard for us to imagine worshipping in secret for fear of being arrested or killed – although it is the case in parts of the world today. As part of this opposition evil regimes send spies into meetings. People pretend to be believers to gain access to meetings and spy on the worshippers. Living in such hard times has a cleansing effect upon the fellowship of God’s people. There are no half-hearted believers in such meetings. There are no ‘Christmas and Easter Christians’ in such meetings.

Antiochus Epiphanies wanted the Jews and their religion exterminated – as have other rulers even in recent times. Men like Stalin and Mao Tse Tung wanted Christians and their religion exterminated. But there will be those of God’s people who *will be strong and carry out great exploits* (11:32). They shall find strength and take action to resist evil. While ever they had breath they continued to worship God and gave special instruction (11:33).

The Jews could not attend to rituals but they could attend to the word of God. No one could stop them from instructing their children or their neighbours. The enemy knows the importance of doctrine to the people of God and seeks to undermine the truth of God’s word. Antiochus was ready to use the sword, but also ready to use deception and any other means to

undermine and destroy the faith of God's people. Again, many rulers have followed these methods in an effort to destroy the church.

## **Fall**

Antiochus Epiphanies did eventually fall. He died suddenly through illness or some non-human means. But this vision does not refer to his fall – although we find mention of *the appointed time* once again (11:35). This is an encouraging word. In a sense he continues on, being transformed into the antichrist in the next section.

The fall that is spoken of in this passage is of the people of God. The time of persecution will be one of severe testing. Some will fall by the wayside and some will fall by the sword – very different ways of falling! As Jesus indicated in the parable of the soils, some seed fell on stony ground and soon ran out of sustenance and some seed fell among the weeds which choked it. This was a time of purifying and pruning among the Jews in Jerusalem.

Pruning of course has the effect of strengthening and bringing better fruit. Though the number of faithful may fall, the depth of the faith of those who stand grows deeper. How deep is the faith of those who are ready to die by the sword or the flame? They died rather than deny the God of their fathers. They died knowing that death is not the end. The end is judgment day.

You have been hearing a lot about the end times as we have looked at this book of Daniel together. You probably want to hear more about the present and how you can have a better life today. But a Christian who does not know what death holds for him, a Christian who does not understand the promise of eternal life, will not be able to stand in days of testing. And such days may come sooner than we think. Will you be one who falls by the wayside or one ready to fall by the sword?

To conclude we see here a lot about Antiochus Epiphanies because he is an antichrist figure pointing to the antichrist spoken of in the next section and in the New Testament. What have we learned from this prototype antichrist? We have seen unbridled hatred for the things of God. Jerusalem was a small city, insignificant in the days of Antiochus. He attacked not because it was a threat to his regime but because it was a reminder of his wickedness. He could not stand the sight of truth and righteousness. Maybe you know such people today.

Antiochus found a weakness in the defence of the holy city. He could get some to cross over to his side. We in the church must be on guard against any doctrinal, moral, or spiritual weakness. We are engaged in a spiritual battle, no less so than the people of Jerusalem in the time of Antiochus. Teach yourself and your children the word of God so they can stand firm in this battle. Hold on till Jesus comes again – it will not be long and you can do it in his strength.

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