

## Sermon – 09/12/2007 pm

### History Is His Story

Study Text: Daniel 11:2–20

I have borrowed today's title from a book on 'Daniel' by Stuart Olyott. It reminds us that God is in control of this world, of kings and kingdoms, so that history is actually the ~~out~~working of God's eternal purposes. 'Whatever happens in history does so because it is written in God's book'.

What would you say if I told you that in 400 years time Kenya will be the major world power? 'Not very likely' you might say. Besides how do I know and how does anyone know what the world will be like in 400 years. In this chapter Daniel writes of the rise and fall of world powers for the next 400 years, and does so with considerable detail.

What Daniel wrote is so accurate that many doubt he wrote this when he did. Liberal theologians have argued that this was not written by Daniel in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, but by someone else in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. They, like unbelievers, do not believe in the supernatural, so seek to discount that this is prophecy. They do not believe in a God who is omniscient and who reveals himself to man if he so chooses.

Daniel was no 'star gazer' but an ordinary man who gave himself to prayer (2:28, 30). The pre-incarnate Jesus appeared to Daniel and told him this history long before it became human history.

In the Bible you will be aware of a large gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament – a gap of over 400 years. The Old Testament closes with Nehemiah returning with the last of the exiles around 430BC and Malachi prophesying at this same time. What happened during this inter-testamental period? Some Bibles include the apocryphal books like Maccabees which tell of the Jewish revolt against Antiochus Epiphanies in 168BC. There is also a secular history of this period. But here in this chapter we have a Biblical history, albeit in a condensed form but amazingly written years before hand. The Bible truly is a book like no other.

### Persia and Greece

In a previous vision Daniel, one when Belshazzar was still king of Babylon (8:1), Daniel saw a powerful ram get crushed by a more powerful goat. The ram symbolised Persia and the goat symbolised Greece. The focus of that vision was the 'little horn' arising from the goat and making threats towards the glorious land (8:9). The focus is the same in this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter but with much more detail.

*Now I will tell you the truth* (11:2). The 'glorious man' Daniel saw by the river tells him of coming kingdoms that will dominate the world. Cyrus the Persian was on the throne at the time as the leader of the world superpower. After him would come three more Persian kings and then the Persian Empire would fall. Xerxes was the 4<sup>th</sup> Persian ruler. He became very rich and with his wealth built a large, well equipped army. He went and attacked Greece. And

what happened? A mighty king arose, namely Alexander the Great who swiftly crushed the Persians and many other nations before him (11:3).

Alexander's exploits were so amazing that history books are filled with the story of this great conqueror. But here in the Bible is history recorded from God's perspective. Divine history is His story as we have said. It focuses on the kingdom of God as it interacts with and indeed confronts the kingdoms of this world. Consequently Alexander passes with just one verse (11:3).

Alexander was dead by the age of 32. The kingdom of Greece was divided among his generals. Eventually four kingdoms emerged as prophesied here in 11:4 – and also back in 8:8. From these four, two became more prominent as they jostled for power over the next 400 years. Syria became the realm of the Seleucids, while Egypt became the realm of the Ptolemy's. These are the kings of the North and the South respectively. In between these two competing nations was the glorious land, the home of the Jews, the people of God.

### **North and South**

The rest of the passage before us tells of the political intrigues and battles of these two kingdoms. We see the pendulum swing from one to the other as pride leads kings to overstep the mark, or fall through internal strife. We see royal marriages aimed at settling disputes but failing to do so.

The king of the south, namely Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246BC) gave his daughter Berenice to the king of the north – in a bigamous marriage. After Ptolemy died the marriage was broken. The former wife however poisoned her husband Antiochus, and got her sons to murder Berenice and her child so they could inherit the throne (11:6). But Berenice's brother became the next king in Egypt. He attacked the north and killed those who had murdered his sister and her children.

The secular history of this period is detailed and interesting, according to historians. But the amazing thing is that it fits very neatly with this prophecy in Daniel. We will not go through all this in detail today but will try to get an overview of this history. It is good to view history on a time line. These two Hellenistic or Greek kingdoms ruled from 330BC through to 63BC when the Romans came to power. There will be special focus upon the years 175-164BC when Antiochus Epiphanies ruled. He attacked Jerusalem and the temple as we have seen before and will see again later in this chapter.

### **The Glorious Land**

In the middle of this ongoing struggle between north and south was the glorious land. As the kingdoms of men rise and fall the kingdom of God remains. Daniel's main concern, like that of God's, was for the kingdom of God. He prayed for the restoration of the temple and the holy city. He wanted worship to start again and for God to be glorified. God revealed to Daniel what his people would experience over the coming centuries – indeed until Messiah comes.

When one king of the north became powerful he made a *stand in the glorious land with destruction in his power* (11:16). This king was Antiochus the Great who became almost invincible although it is not clear what was the nature or outcome of this stand that he took.

The next Seleucid king was called Seleucis Philopater (187-175BC). He sent his chief minister to rob the temple of its treasures, but according to 2 Maccabees he was put off by an apparition. Philopater disappeared shortly after this. It is generally believed that this chief minister poisoned him – *he shall be destroyed but no in anger or in battle* (11:20).

Reading this chapter is hard going when we are not familiar with this history. But is helpful to our Christian life to get a better understanding of history, especially the history of the people of God. The Jews taught their children their history and we have it written in our Bibles. We must teach ourselves and our children this history.

History reminds us of Gods working in this world. Many times down through the ages attempts have been made to exterminate the people of God, to get rid of these people who insist that God created the world and that he is still alive and powerful to save. You do not have to look back very far to see that the world has not changed a great deal. In fact you can look around today and see the same struggle going on between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

Let us be discerning as we read secular history and even as we read the news today. There will be little mention of God in such histories, but God is never separated from the events of this world. There is no mention of God in this prophecy we have just read, but it is the word of God nevertheless. It is like the book of Esther.

The world may not see the hand of God but all that happens is written in his book before it happens. The Bible teaches us to view history and current events also from God's perspective. What is God doing in the world today? Is this the way that you think?

God not only rules over the nations he rules over economies and over the environment. God knew what nations would rise and fall in the next 400 years – he told Daniel. We can be confident that God has such knowledge today. We can be confident that God knows about our economy and our environment. Let us not therefore get caught up in all the speculation and 'disaster scenarios' that come out of summits going on in the world. Remember God is on the throne and he will remain there even when this world and all that is in it passes away.

Isaiah said

*God sits above the circle of the earth  
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers  
He stretches out the heavens like a curtain  
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in  
He brings the princes to nothing  
He makes the judges of the earth useless* (Isaiah 40:22f)

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