

## FAITHFUL RESISTANCE



Daniel 11:2-45  
Twelfth Message  
Bernard Bell  
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SERIES: ONE KING TO RULE THEM ALL

The world admires and is inspired by the resistance of the Ukrainian people and their President, Volodymyr Zelensky. He has risen to the occasion, refusing to flee. He is providing a very different sort of leadership than Putin.

The world is showing its own resistance in many different ways. By flying the Ukrainian flag. By projecting the flag onto famous buildings: the Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House, the Empire State Building, and many more. By opening Saturday Night Live with a Ukrainian choir singing *Prayer for Ukraine*. And by many standing ovations: in Congress for the Ukrainian ambassador during the State of the Union Address in a rare moment of bipartisan unity; in the UK House of Commons for the ambassador—which is exceedingly rare; and in the EU Parliament for President Zelensky, speaking by video link.

These are relatively costless but effective expressions of solidarity with the people of Ukraine in their resistance to Russian aggression.

As I continue to follow the war in Ukraine through the lens of Daniel, I find that this week's chapter 11 is even more relevant than last week's chapter 10.

Chapters 10–12 contain the fourth and final vision given to Daniel. Chapter 10 is the lengthy introduction. The actual angelic message of the vision is in 11:2–12:4, after the angel's words, "Now then, I tell you the truth" (11:2a NIV). I will leave the last four verses of the message (12:1-4) for next week. The angel's message is very long: it took eight minutes to read just now.

Did you keep track of people and events during the reading? It sounds like a history book, and of a period of history that most people know nothing about. Most of the chapter can be mapped onto the history of the Ancient Near East over a period of 370 years, 536–166 BC. But this chapter does not serve well as a history text. Many kings are mentioned, but we are not given any names. What sort of text is it then? I find it helpful to think of this chapter as showing patterns of history. With patterns we don't need to know actual names. Some of you are data scientists: you anonymize data but are still able to discern patterns. Here in Daniel 11 we have anonymized kings, but the pattern is very clear. More important than names is the repeated vocabulary and themes. These clearly reveal the patterns. I want to highlight four groups of words.

The most obvious vocabulary is of kings, kingdoms and dominion. These kings are always on the move: they "rise up," they "come," and they "return." This is what most kings in the ancient world did: they rose up in succession to the previous king, they went into battle against another kingdom, and they returned home. We are being shown patterns of behavior.

Twice in v. 4 NIV translates the word "kingdom" as "empire." I wish this were done more frequently, and that other translations would also do so. What is the difference between a kingdom and an empire? A king rules over his own people; the kingdom and the people are one. As we saw last week, the Table of Nations (Gen 10) presents family clans, land, language and people as a quartet of fea-

tures defining each of the seventy peoples. An empire contains many peoples. All the kings in this chapter are rulers of empire, not merely kingdoms. Empires are insatiable: for land, people, power and wealth. Empires need other peoples and lands to supply their insatiable appetite. The empire supplies the capital city; the body nourishes the head.

The chapter features four empires. Verses 2-4 serve as a quick introduction, covering 200 years of history. The sequence of empires starts with the Persian Empire (2), in which more kings will arise. How many more kings? The familiar pattern of 3+1; three, yea a fourth. There were actually 13 kings of the Persian Empire beginning with Cyrus the Great. But in the imagery that we have seen again and again in this book, there are 3+1 where the fourth is the pinnacle of power, wealth, and fearsome strength. The Persian Empire was huge, and its kings lived in great splendor and wealth. But empire is never satisfied, so two of the kings attempted to conquer Greece to make their empire still bigger.

Next a mighty king arises (3). This is Alexander the Great who rapidly conquered the Persian Empire. Ominously, he does as he pleases, which is a recurring theme, first used of the Persian kings (8:4). But Alexander's empire does not last long. As soon as he arises, it is broken up and divided to the four points of the compass (4). After his early death, his generals squabbled over the empire, carving out their own mini-empires.

This has all been covered in an earlier vision, chapter 8, where the two-horned ram was Persia, the one-horned goat was Alexander, and the four horns were the successor empires.

Now the pace slows down for the kings of the North and the South (5-20). These are the rulers of the Seleucid Empire to the north in Syria and the Ptolemaic Empire to the south in Egypt. These are the two most successful empires to emerge from the pieces of Alexander's massive empire. They are north and south from Jerusalem. These verses cover about 130 years, so there are actually numerous kings. They spend most of the time invading each other—because that is what empires do.

The pace slows further still for a "contemptible person" (21). The text does not initially identify him as king, because he "has not been given the honor of royalty." Nevertheless, he seizes the crown and behaves like a king. It is unclear if this usurper king is the subject all the way through the end of the chapter—that is a matter of debate.

So, this chapter is about kings and kingdoms. It is about dueling empires. First an east–west duel between Persia and Greece. Next a north-south duel. New rulers regularly arise, and attempt to get dominance over the other empire. If you want to know details of which kings are fighting which kings, you can consult a detailed commentary. But I am not going to give you that information, because I do not think the angelic message is really about the actual history of these kings. I am going to treat this as anonymized data because this is ultimately about patterns.

Jerusalem is caught in between these two empires of North and

South. But Jerusalem is used to being in between. Previously it was in between the ram that charged from east to west, and the goat that charged from west to east. Not much changed when Jerusalem's occupier transitioned from the Persian Empire to Alexander's Greek Empire. Now, with the kings of the North and the South, the conflict is closer to home, since the capital cities of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Empires are much closer, and the routes along which the dueling armies pass are through the land of Israel. But Jerusalem is not yet directly impacted during the first few rounds of dueling.

The second set of repeated language is military language. There are armies and fortresses; there are siege ramps to capture the fortresses of the other side. There are numerous words for strength and power. These empires are always fighting one another. Sometimes one army is so powerful that it sweeps the other side away like a flood. This is clearest in vv. 10-13 which describes an escalating arms race. There is rarely a moment of peace in the entire chapter.

The third set of language concerns deceit. Three times there is an attempt to make an alliance between the empires. On two occasions, one king gives his daughter in marriage to the other king. That was the way it worked back then. Love had nothing to do with it. This was the same of Vladimir of Kiev in 988: the Byzantine Emperor gave his sister in marriage in return for military support, on condition that Vladimir convert to Christianity. In v. 6 it is the king of the South who gives his daughter; in v. 17 it is the king of the North. But these are not honest deals. The father of the bride is not seriously seeking peace. Instead he is using his daughter as a means to infiltrate the enemy court. When the king of the South gave his daughter to the king of the North (6), there was a betrayal. The king of the North abandoned his new wife, the other king's daughter, and went back to his first wife whom he had been forced to put away. Everyone felt betrayed, resulting in much bloodshed. In v. 17 the king of the North gave his daughter "in order to overthrow the kingdom." But she frustrated her father's deceitful design by actually being loyal to her husband.

The deception continues. In v. 27 the two kings, of North and South, "sit at the same table and lie to each other." It is impossible for rulers of two empires to sit at the same table and be honest with each other. By definition, empire does not allow the presence of another empire in the vicinity.

A final set of words concerns arrogance. This, too, is of the nature of empire. In 8:4 we read that the ram, that is Persia, did as it pleases. Now we read the same thing three more times: of Alexander the Great of Greece (3), of the king of the North (16), and of the final king (36). The king of the South was filled with pride (12). The final king exalts and magnifies himself above every god (36-37). This is the goal of every emperor, whether Babylonian, Persian, Greek or Roman. The delusion of thinking himself god. We have seen this theme throughout the entire book of Daniel.

Empire, power, deceit and arrogance. This vocabulary is repeated throughout the chapter because this is true of all empire. This comes through loud and clear throughout the anonymized list of kings. The individual king may change, but the patterns of history remain the same. Some rulers are such effective empire-builders, using these four means, that they are called Great: Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great of the Persian Empire; Alexander the Great; Antiochus III the Great of the Seleucid Empire; Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of the Russian Empire. But others are given a less noble moniker: Ivan the Terrible, the first Tsar of Russia.

Empire, power, deceit and arrogance. These are true of Putin. He is not leading Russia as a President, as one who cares for the people. He is functioning as an absolute monarch, as the Tsar. How will he be known: Putin the Great or Putin the Terrible? Will his name live on in fame or in infamy? Or will his name be blotted out?

This is all very different from the way Israel's king was supposed to behave. He was to lead the people in righteousness and justice. He was to shepherd the people so that all flourish, especially the weak: the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant.

As the kings of the North and South fight each other for dominance, the conflict does eventually come to Jerusalem. The king of the North establishes himself in the Beautiful Land (16). Jerusalem and the Land of Israel passes from the Ptolemaic Empire of the South to the Seleucid Empire of the North. This happened under Antiochus III, Antiochus the Great. But the angel does not call this king of the North "Great." Instead, this king does as he pleases (16), just like the Persian kings, just like Alexander. This is never a compliment. Instead it indicates a coming fall.

How does this "great" king fall? He overstepped himself and came to ruin. His devious plan to gain control of the South by marrying off his daughter was frustrated when she proved loyal to her husband (17). So he turned his attention elsewhere, to capture territory—because this is what empires do. But he ran into a new, rising power—the "commander" (18) led the Roman army. Rome inflicted a devastating defeat then imposed an enormous financial penalty. The king was killed on his way home. Swift was his fall. He was succeeded by one son then another. The first was killed (20).

The second son is the "contemptible person" (21). This is Antiochus IV. He was of royal blood, since his father had been king, but he was not in the line of succession. He seized the throne "through intrigue" (21) and by acting deceitfully (22). He attacked the king of the South—again because this is what kings do. But then the two kings "sit at the same table and lie to each other" (27). He returned home, with his heart set against the holy covenant (28), that is, against God's people in Jerusalem. Now the behavior of these kings directly impacts Jerusalem through this one king. He is the particular focus of the rest of the chapter. After invading the South again he is opposed by ships of the western coastlands, again the Romans, who tell him to go home. Thwarted in his imperial ambitions, he looks elsewhere.

Now the pace slows further still. We will pay particular attention to vv. 30-39.

**Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. (11:30)**

He is on his way home from Egypt after Rome had blocked his plans. He is in an angry rage, so he vented his fury on Jerusalem and the Jews. It seems that he raided the temple treasury. He returned to Jerusalem where he lavished gifts upon Jews who took his side.

**His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. (11:31-32)**

Antiochus IV desecrated God's sacred sanctuary, the temple in Jerusalem. He abolished the daily sacrifice, that is, the lamb that went up as a "continual" burnt offering every morning and every evening, every day of the year, as had been done for a thousand years.

He set up the abomination of desolation. He put up a statue of Zeus in the temple. He sacrificed a pig on the altar. He acted against all the symbols of Judaism.

God's people were now faced with a choice: how to respond to this brutality and religious oppression. They responded in three different ways. Now we are getting to the heart of the chapter.

Some Jews sided with the king: to save their skin, or because they could profit from association with the king, or because they supported his hellenistic policies of promoting Greek culture. These are "those who forsake...and have violated the covenant" (30, 32). The king flatters them. He rewards them. But they are corrupted by him. One notable way in which they are corrupted is that they outbid one another to purchase from the king the office of high priest. In those days without their own king, the leader of the Jewish people in Jerusalem and the Land was the high priest. The last legitimate high priest, the "prince of the covenant" was killed (22). The office of high priest would be for sale for the next 250 years. This is the first response, to cooperate with the regime in return for material reward.

Others chose to resist. These are "the people who know their God." They acknowledge God as the one true God. They remain true to him, loyal and devoted. They firmly resist the king. They are strong and they take action. Some responded with active resistance. One family of Jews killed a soldier then fled to the hills where they launched a rebellion, the Maccabean Revolt. They took up arms. The leader, Judah, earned the nickname ha-Maccabee, the Hammer. This active resistance proved successful, and after three years they recaptured the temple and rededicated it, an event commemorated ever since as Hanukkah. But there is a danger in active resistance such as this. The rebels kept going in their attacks on the Seleucid forces. Eventually they drove the Seleucids completely out of the Land. Israel became an independent nation again. It needed a king. The leader of the revolt declared himself king, even though he was of the line of Levi not the line of Judah. The kingdom proved successful militarily. It expanded to be as large as it ever was under David and Solomon. But it was corrupt. The active resistance used the same methods as the oppressor, thereby corrupting itself. Eventually it became the oppressor, killing many faithful Jews. This second response is active resistance, which runs the risk of responding to evil with evil.

There is another form of resistance:

**Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time. (11:33-35)**

The wise did not take up arms. Instead they taught: they gave instruction on how to understand the times. Who are these wise people? They are the spiritual successors of Daniel and his three friends. One of their qualifications to enter training for the Babylonian king's service was "showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand" (1:4). The word translated "showing aptitude" is the same word translated here as "the wise." Daniel and his friends were trained in Babylonian language and literature so that they could serve the king. But they also had wisdom and knowledge and understanding to be able to remain faithful to God while in such service. They walked the fine line of serving both the king and their God. When loyalty to the king conflicted with loyalty to God, they were not afraid to refuse the king. They did so

at great peril. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. His three friends were thrown into the super-heated blazing, fiery furnace. God did deliver them, but they did not count on that deliverance when they were thrown in to meet their death.

These stories of Daniel in the first half of the book would help these wise people at the time of Antiochus IV 350 years later. They resisted passively. They did not take up arms. Like Daniel and his friends, they risked death. But unlike Daniel and his friends, God did not deliver them from death. They fell by the sword or the flame, by captivity or plunder. They were martyrs. But in their martyrdom they were "refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end."

So, three responses to oppression. Join the oppressor out of fear or for reward. Active resistance, responding in kind. Or passive resistance, quietly teaching people how to understand the times, and unmasking evil.

This pattern persisted in the time of Jesus. The Sadducees were the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They acted in cooperation with the Roman government, from whom they purchased the office of high priest. In return they were rewarded with power and wealth. Secondly, there were Zealots who were willing to use violence against the Roman oppressor. Among Jesus's own disciples was Simon the Zealot, and perhaps Judas Iscariot. Jesus followed the third way of passive resistance.

The contemptible person, Antiochus IV, continued his imperial ambitions. He did as he pleased. This is now the fourth ruler to be so described, after the Persians, including Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great, Alexander the Great, Antiochus the Great. But, as we've seen, "doing as you please" does not mark one out as great. It marks one out for a fall.

Antiochus IV exalted and magnified himself above every god (36). The word "god" occurs eight times in vv. 36-39. He exalted himself above them all (37). Antiochus proclaimed himself to the world as *Theos Epiphanes*, God made manifest. He presented himself as God on earth. So he is known to history as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This is the pinnacle for empire-builders: to be god, as we have seen throughout the book. But he was resisted by those who changed his moniker from *Epiphanes*, God made manifest, to *Epimanes*, madman.

Somewhere in the last part of this chapter it seems that the angel is no longer describing Antiochus IV but someone even greater than he. Christians consider this to be Antichrist. Certainly Antiochus is a model for Antichrist, as shown by Paul's description of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:1-12).

Looking back later, Jews see the figure of Antiochus and his abomination of desolation fulfilled again in Pompey who captured Jerusalem in 63 BC and marched into the Holy of Holies, and again in Titus who destroyed the temple in AD 70, and again in Hadrian who turned Jerusalem into a Roman city in AD 135. But these three were Roman generals who had no delusions of divinity. But there were Roman emperors who had exactly these delusions, seeing themselves as god.

The last paragraph of the chapter (40-45) is dark. It suggests some final battle. The darkest and coldest hour is the hour before dawn. We have seen this before in chapters 7 and 8. But this last battle is not the final word. The last battle does not even happen. The last king "will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many...Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him" (44-45). But many faithful people have been killed.

While it may seem that these earthly rulers are in control, there are little indications that this is not so. There is a fifth set of words. There is an “appointed time” and a “time of the end.” Behind the activities of the human rulers, the sovereign Lord has set an appointed time. There is a final end when God will resolve all things.

In the Book of Revelation, which our women are studying, the churches face the challenge of living in a world controlled by the beast—at that time, the Roman Emperor. The seven prophetic messages to the churches indicate a variety of responses to living under beastly empire. The churches in Pergamum and Thyatira have compromised, whether out of fear or for advancement. The church in Laodicea has been so co-opted by the world that it is indistinguishable from Babylon. It says, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (Rev 3:17). It doesn’t even need Jesus, whom it has shut outside the door. The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia have remained loyal to Jesus in passive resistance, and, as a result, are facing death in martyrdom.

In the book of Revelation there are four prophetic calls to wisdom and endurance, two each. Two calls for a mind with wisdom (13:18; 17:19), to see that the beast is not worthy of worship, that his empire is built upon sand. And two calls for endurance (13:10; 14:12), to be faithful to the Lamb even under threat of death; to be faithful in loyalty and devotion to the Lamb when everyone else is giving their loyalty and devotion to the beastly empire. Daniel and Revelation are both written to enable God’s people to resist faithfully; to be wise and thus able to endure.

We are not facing death. But we all face the challenge of living in the world while being faithful to Jesus. What do we faithfully resist and how do we faithfully resist? This calls for wisdom, which is what Daniel and Revelation can give us.

We resist being co-opted by the world. We resist responding to evil with evil, but instead overcome evil with good. We resist using the world’s methods, seeking power. We resist with integrity by remaining true. We resist by not using those four sets of words: empire, power, deceit and arrogance. We remain true to Jesus, whom

we follow.

Putin is a religious man, but his religion is a virulent religious nationalism. The Russian Orthodox church, combined with the Russian state and the Russian people is a potent combination. The Russian church has been co-opted; the Patriarch is very much under Putin’s thumb.

When Ukraine became an independent nation thirty years ago, the Orthodox church in Ukraine broke away to form the Ukrainian Orthodox Church within the Orthodox umbrella, much to the displeasure of the Russian Orthodox Church.

I am struck by some of the words in *Prayer for Ukraine*, written in 1885, that was sung on Saturday Night Live: “With learning and knowledge enlighten us...in love pure and everlasting let us grow... grant our people and country all your kindness and grace... bless us with wisdom, guide us into a kind world.”

The Lord Jesus gathered a motley crew to be his disciples. There was a collaborator with the Roman occupier: Matthew the tax collector. There were one or two who favored armed resistance against the occupier. He gathered them together to be a new family. And he gathered them together for a final meal. He started by washing their feet, demonstrating a radically different type of leadership. His idea of leadership was that the head nourish the body, not that the body nourish the head. His idea of leadership was that the leader lay down his life for the flourishing of his people, not use the people for his own promotion.

We are called to follow a very different type of leader, to be in a very different type of empire, one that does not follow the pattern of human empire. Our King has given himself for us so that we flourish and live wholesome lives. May God give us the grace to follow the Lamb as we seek to live in this world while also being loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. One of our actions of faithful resistance is to engage in the subversive act of taking communion together.

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