

The Last Wars

On the 6th of September 2007, the world came very close to World War III. That night Israeli jets took off after dark and proceeded north toward the north-east corner of Syria, toward a bleak, barely inhabited stretch of land near the Euphrates. Electronic countermeasures (ECMs) were used by the Israelis to blind Syrian radar and anti-aircraft weapons as the planes crossed the border and approached their target. They reached a nuclear installation and destroyed it.

Technology has come along way since 1973, when the Soviet Union warned America that if Israel did not stop its attack on Egypt, it would use nuclear weapons. That was 1973. So you can be sure that in 2007, satellite imagery, real-time imagery and other technology made sure that the major nuclear nations were aware of what was going on very soon, with warnings and counter-warnings flying through the airwaves and internet. A senior British ministerial official was quoted as saying, "If people had known how close we came to world war three that day there'd have been mass panic. Never mind the floods or foot-and-mouth [disease] — [Prime Minister] Gordon [Brown] really would have been dealing with the ***** Book of Revelation and Armageddon." ("We Came So Close to World War Three That Day", James Forsyth and Douglas Davis, *The Spectator*, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/essays/all/222736/we-came-so-close-to-world-war-three-that-day.html>

That's not the first time that Israel has been at the centre of a possible third world war. Similar nuclear danger took place in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. It's also not the last time. Secular futurists put Israel at the centre of scenarios for possible future wars. And more reliably, the Bible describes that in the last days, wars will take place which will have Israel caught in the middle. In fact, the last section of Daniel 11 describes just that: future wars which will centre on Israel, and set the stage for the last 3 ½ years of human self-rule before the return of Christ. Once again, in amazing detail, Daniel tells us what will happen to his people and his city before Messiah returns to give Israel, and the world, peace.

There are several reasons why we should care about what happens to Israel.

- 1) God's faithfulness to Israel reveals His faithfulness to His people. God's trustworthiness is tied to several promises He has made to keep Israel as a nation for as long as this earth rotates on its axis. If God has abandoned Israel, we New Testament believers are on shaky ground regarding our security.
- 2) Romans 9 to 11 teaches us that we as the church are part of a larger plan. We are really a stop-gap people – a people composed of all nations, that are grafted on to the Olive tree of Israel, until such time as the natural tree of Israel comes back to God in national repentance. When it does, it will mean even more salvation blessings for the whole world. We should care about what happens to Israel, what happens to the Jewish people, because their fate is tied to ours.
- 3) We are told to be watchful and sober regarding the return of the Lord, so that it does not catch us unaware. If we understand what lies in wait for Israel at the end, we can be better prepared if we see possible pointers in that direction.

Matthew 24:32-33 " Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. ³³ "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near -- at the doors!

Now before we look at the details of these verses, let me again explain why I think verses 36 through to chapter 12 deal with the future: Once again, like chapter 2, chapter 7, and chapter 9, Daniel 11 has a historical fulfilment, but also a future fulfilment. Daniel sees the mountain peaks of history, as they concern Israel, the Messiah and Jerusalem, so they are often spoken of in one

breath. But as we look closely, we see that there are often valleys of time between these key events. That happens again here in Daniel 11, things that are yet to come. Why do I say that? Four reasons.

1. There is a natural, chronological break in the text

Notice how verse 35 ends, with a reference to a time of trial which will last to the end times. This mention obviously directs us beyond the time of Greece or 1st century Rome, to the very end times, the times spoken of in Daniel 9:27, when the Roman prince appears.

2. The events of verses 36-45 did not occur in history.

The events recorded in vv 2-35 are very clearly tied to specific historical events in the era of the wars between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, no one agrees on what events in history verses 36-45 refer to. All kinds of historical suggestions are put forward, some trying to make Antiochus Epiphanes fit, some making it about Julius Caesar, some making it about Herod. But the interpretations are strained, and when you read them, inevitably, there is some verse which doesn't fit at all, and the interpreters end up saying things like, "We are not aware of this having happened," or "we're not sure in what way this happened", and once again, it feels like people making a prophecy fit by sheer force. Why? vv36-45 have not happened yet.

3. There is a new person discussed

In vv 5-35, the persons under discussion are the "King of the North" and the "King of the South." In v 36, the reader is introduced to "The King," a new player who is subsequently attacked by "the King of the South" and "the King of the North" (v 40). This new person suggests we are in a different time period to that of the historical wars between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids.

4. The descriptions of this king fit other passages about the Roman prince.

What we have already seen regarding the final ruler from chapter 7 and chapter 9, as well as passages from 2 Thessalonians and Revelation, fits the description here in Daniel 11. You'll notice that Daniel's other visions all conclude with some reference, either directly or typically to this man. Chapter 7 has the little horn. Chapter 8 deals with Antiochus, but he is a type of the final man of lawlessness. Chapter 9 finishes with the abomination of desolation. So here again, the prophecy ends with a reference to Israel's worst persecutor, the final man of lawlessness.

As we look at this passage, we'll see three markers of Israel's end-time history – the false king, the furious conflicts and the final consummation.

I. The False King

Daniel 11:36-45 ³⁶ "Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.

³⁷ "He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all. ³⁸ "But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things.

³⁹ "Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.

As we said, we are here catapulted into the future to meet someone, who is simply called *the king*. Not the king of the North, or the king of the South, but the king. As we look at his description, it

becomes clear who this is.

First, he is a proud man. Verse 36 says he does according to his own will. He does what he pleases. Not only so, but he magnifies himself above all gods. In fact, he is so proud, that he speaks blasphemously against God. He challenges God.

We remember Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 *ay will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Verse 37 tells us more. He does not regard the God of his fathers. That could mean that he is Jewish, or it could mean that he comes from a western tradition, which believes in the true God of the Bible. He rejects God. Even more so, it says that he does regard the desire of women. This could mean that he does not desire women as a natural man does. However, desire of women can be a term which refers to the Messiah – Messiah is the seed of the woman. Either way, he is self-loving. Verse 37 sums it up... *nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all.*

Second, he is a powerful man, Verse 38 shows that he places his hope in a god of fortresses. That is, he places his hope in military might and muscle. He builds a military force second to none. No one can match him in terms of weapons, armies, soldiers, air, sea and land power. This god of military might he spends huge amounts of money on – he honours it with gold and silver and precious stones.

With this powerful military might, what does he do?

³⁹ *"Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.*

He uses his power to defeat enemies, overcome fortresses with this god foreign to any of his forefathers, of pure, atheistic faith in force. He will conquer, and like Antiochus before him, give puppet positions and the spoils of war to those who support him. It may be here that he has those other ten kings who seem to rule like equals. He gives them puppet positions so long as they are loyal to him.

And with this kind of military might, is it any surprise that he makes that seven-year covenant with Israel? Remember when we looked at that, we saw that the word in Daniel 9:27 can actually mean 'force a covenant'. With this kind of power behind him, he can make Israel and its neighbours sign on the dotted line.

But Daniel's prophecies see some trouble that comes to this man, and it may be the trouble that catapults him into being world ruler.

II. The Furious Conflicts

⁴⁰ *" At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through.*

So here we have some of the last wars in human history. Verse 40 tells us when this happens: at the time of the end. What will happen? Someone called the king of the South will come against him. Who is the 'him'? It is the king referred to in the last few verses. The Roman prince, the man of

lawlessness, the Antichrist. Some military ruler called the king of the South attacks him and simultaneously, someone called the king of the North also attacks him.

Now when we went through Daniel 11 we saw that the king of the North was almost always a ruler from the Syrian empire, and the king of the South was a ruler from the Egyptian Ptolemaic empire. And these two forces kept attacking each other for centuries. What bridge of land came between the king of the North and the king of the South? Israel. That's why this prophecy was given to Daniel in the first place – because these wars affected Israel.

Here in the last times, you have twist. The king of the South is not attacking the king of the North. Rather, this person is attacking the king, the Roman king. Joined with him, in some kind of alliance is the king of the North. And they attack like a pincer, converging on their enemy from the North and the South.

Well, if we take the South to be Africa – perhaps countries like Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and if we take the North to be countries like Syria, and perhaps even countries to the north of it, what country would they converge on if they were doing a co-ordinate pincer attack? Israel.

It seems that some anti-Israel alliance will agree to attack Israel from the North and South. Since we learned in chapter 9 that the Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel for seven years, he is supposed to be the protector of Israel. By attacking Israel, these nations are attacking him.

Verses 41-43 describe what this northern alliance does:

⁴¹ *"He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon.*

⁴² *"He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. ⁴³ "He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels.*

This northern power floods into Israel, but ignores the countries east of the Jordan, heads south in Egypt, plundering them too. Either the king of the South does not include Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, or he betrays his ally.

And just when he seems unstoppable, something changes:

⁴⁴ *"But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵ "And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.*

He hears some news from the north and east. If he is sitting in Egypt or Ethiopia, what country lies to the north-east? Israel. He hears news of something in Israel that troubles him. More than likely, the Roman prince, the Antichrist, the one who had made the covenant with Israel, has arrived. So he heads back to Israel and plants his tent between the seas and Jerusalem. He is about to enter into final combat with the Antichrist. What happens to him? The Bible simply says – he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.

What happens to him? Ezekiel 38 and 39 have the answer. Those chapters describe a mighty horde from the South and the North that come against Israel to destroy it. But before they can, God supernaturally destroys them. He wipes out whatever remains of the armies of the king of the North and the king of the South. Ezekiel says that Israel will be burying the dead for seven months.

Now, who do you think will take the credit for destroying these aggressors on Israel? Who had arrived just before that, which caused the king of the North to return? The Roman prince, the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. And once he claims to be the power behind the destruction of those armies, what does it allow him to do? It catapults him to the place he has been seeking – the place of worship. That's the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

III. The Final Consummation

Daniel 12:1 *"At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book."*

Notice – at that time. Which time? At the time when this king of the North is destroyed, that is when a time of trouble that has not been experienced in history up until that time begins. Those words are almost identical to Christ's, when he said:

Matthew 24:21 ²¹ *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."*

Revelation 12:1-9 *Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. ² Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. ⁵ She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. ⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. ⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸ but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."*

Here Israel is pictured as a woman. She brings forth the Messiah. Jesus was of the seed of Israel. Satan tried to destroy Israel before Messiah could be born. But even after Christ's ascension, Satan was still furious with Israel and sought to destroy it. And in verse 6 we find that familiar number again – 1260 days. For three and a half years, a vicious persecution breaks out against Israel. Michael, the archangel, the prince of Israel, stands up at this point.

For three and a half years, there is a titanic struggle between good and evil, between belief and unbelief, between Satan and God. God pours out His wrath on the world, while Satan spews His wrath on Israel.

The human agent of this Satanic persecution of Israel will of course be the Roman ruler, the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness. With the king of the North destroyed, he has no opponents militarily. Whoever the other 10 kings were, at this point they give all their authority to him. This is the point at which he goes into the Jewish temple, stops the sacrifices, declares himself to be the object or perhaps the symbol of all worship.

Revelation 13:1-8 *Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. ² Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. ³ And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. ⁴ So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast,*

saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" ⁵ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. ⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

However, the good news is that this is the time of Israel's revival.

And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.

Another word for 'delivered' is 'saved'. Perhaps from when they see the miraculous destruction of enemy forces by God, they will begin to turn back to him. Perhaps it will be because of the preaching of the two witnesses in Jerusalem. Perhaps it will be through other witnesses. But the final return of Israel to their Messiah will take place during this terrible time of trouble.

Romans 11:24-26 ²⁴ For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

So as we saw – God's faithfulness to Israel underlines His faithfulness to us. When we read these prophecies, we can rest in the faithfulness of God. God rules over the world, and delivers his faithful ones. We also see our blessed hope approaching. The return of the Lord could be at any time, but the last sixty years have set the stage for the kinds of things predicted in Daniel in a remarkable way. We also desire with anticipation the in gathering of Israel. Israel's hope is actually the world's hope.

Romans 11:15 ¹⁵ For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

And what concludes this time of terrible trouble? The returning Christ, who sets up His kingdom, saving Israel both physically and spiritually. That's how Daniel ends, and that's what we'll look at next week.