REFINED AND PURIFIED

Daniel 11:1-35

Key Verse: 35

“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.”

Daniel’s fourth and last vision covers chapters 10-12. In chapter 10, we could see Daniel who prayed in mourning and fasting for three weeks, and God’s comfort to him with the glory of the preincarnate Christ and the revelation of the reality of angelic warfare. In chapter 11, we see the detailed description of the future tribulation of Israel. Their Babylonian captivity was just the beginning. It would continue until the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom for the purpose of refining and purifying his people. Today’s passage, verses 1-35, are the far future events happening more than 200 years after Daniel’s time. The word “will”, a future auxiliary verb, appears around 100 times. From our perspective, these are past events. We are amazed by the accurate fulfillment of the prophecy written by Daniel that we can only say it is indeed the prophecy of God. So, this passage is unique, with a very detailed description of these future historical events. God is in complete control of all human history. People who are truly blessed are those who put their trust in the words of the Scriptures. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “…that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” We see that “according to the Scriptures” means 100% reliable. May we be truly blessed people as we put our full trust in the words of the Scriptures. And may we have the right attitude before any hardships in life for us to be refined and purified. .

In chapter 11, we are to pay attention to five kings: Ahasuerus, Alexander, Antiochus the Great, Antiochus Ephimenes, and the Antichrist, all starting with “A.” Today we will think of four of these kings.

Verse 1 says, “And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.” An angel in chapter 10 speaks continually, after saying in 10:21, “No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.” In these two verses, it seems that the angel speaking and the angel Michael support each other in serving the work of God. Then what happened in the first year of Darius the Mede, that is, Cyrus? The angel goes back to the time two years ago. It was when the king proclaimed the decree to let the Israelites return to their land. Surely at that point, the prince of Persia wanted to prevent it; and it was then that Michael was working and this angel went to assist him, and finally the decree was proclaimed. So we get a little bit of an insight into how God’s holy angels are busy preserving the people of God and carrying out God’s will for his people in spite of demonic activity.

In verse 2, the angel says, “Now then, I tell you the truth: Three kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom/realm of Greece.” History tells us that these three additional kings were Cambyses, who was the son of Cyrus and the current king at that time, Pseudo-Smerdis, who looked so much like Cambyses that he claimed to be Cambyses and usurped the throne through all kinds of deception, and Darius Hystaspes. And the fourth king was named Xerxes. But he had another name, Ahasuerus. He is the king mentioned in the book of Esther. He is one of the greatest Oriental rulers of all time. He had great wealth. He commanded the largest army in the Ancient World. And he decided that he wanted to attack Greece. The interest of the other three kings was shifting that way; and in fact that third king, Hystaspes, made a sort of a small attack on Greece. But this fourth king really stirred up all he had against the realm of Greece. But he was defeated by the power of Greece. And the Greeks never forgot about it.

The angel says in verse 3 says, “Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases.” 150 years later, a mighty king appeared. He is Alexander the Great of Greece. He retaliated for what had happened earlier to Greece. He seized the entire Persian Empire. He changed the course of history more than any other ruler. He was the son of Philip of Macedonia. He was an absolute monarch doing as he pleased. He was an absolute sovereign who had not only the power of personality and leadership, but the power of military might. And of course, both the Persian Empire and Alexander overran the nation of Israel. The Persians possessed and controlled it. The Greeks under Alexander possessed and controlled it. But you remember that he died at 33.

The angel seems to mention this in verse. “After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven.” It seems that no later than when he stood up to gain his kingdom, it shattered. “It will be divided toward the four winds of heaven.” The angel continues. “It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.” It would not go to his posterity. Alexander had a half-brother who was mentally retarded. He had an illegitimate son, and he had a baby born posthumously. All three were murdered, and he had no posterity. The angel was exactly right. The kingdom did not go to his posterity. Remember that this is all before the man was even born, a couple hundred years before.

A great battle ensued for who was going to rule, and the battle was won by four generals. The kingdom was divided into four parts: Cassander took Macedonia, Lysimachus took Thrace and Asia Minor, Ptolemy took Egypt, and Seleucus took Syria. Egypt is south of Israel. Syria is North of Israel. Those two became the ones the angel focused on in the remaining of the chapter, because they are the ones that are right around Israel. And in Egypt, a Ptolemaic dynasty was established; in Syria, a Seleucid dynasty. Through the centuries, those two dynasties warred with each other, and they fought most of their wars on the soil of Israel. So Israel became the pawn in this. From here on to verse 20, we cover about 200 years when these wars waged on the borders and throughout the land of Israel.

In the following verses we are to know that in this passage the king of the South refers to the king in the Ptolemaic dynasty and the king of the North, the king in the Seleucid dynasty, whoever ruling at that time. The Ptolemaic dynasty in the south starts out a little more powerful, but it didn’t take very long until the north becomes more powerful. Finally, the two realized the tension between them, so they decided to make an alliance. How do they do it? This was the old way to make an alliance: the king’s daughter of the south came to the king of the north to make a deal. Look at verses 5 and 6. “The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be handed over together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her.”

The king of Egypt was a man named Ptolemy Philadelphus, and the king of Syria, Antiochus Theos. At that time, Antiochus was already married. In order to make a treaty with Egypt, he divorced his wife and married the daughter of the southern king. However, the divorced wife was not a woman easily handled. She murdered his new wife, Berenice, and all her attendants too. Then she poisoned her husband, Antiochus Theos, to death.

Then the angel says in verse 7, “One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortresses; he will fight against them and be victorious.” One of her family line who arose was Ptolemy Euergetes. And after the death of Antiochus Theos, the northern king was a man named Callinicus. The southern king defeated the northern king. The result is written in verse 8, “He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt.” Now history tells us that the king of the south took 40,000 talents of silver, 2,500 idol statues. And even the king of the north Callinicus died, falling off his horse. Verse 8b and 9 says in KJV, “…he shall continue more years than the king of the north. So the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land.”

Let’s pay attention to verse 10: “His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.” In KJV, “But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces: and one shall certainly come, and overflow, and pass through: then shall he return, and be stirred up, even to his fortress.”

One of Callinicus’ sons died, the other one became the king of the north. He is Antiochus the Great. And he came. And it says he would come with a multitude of great forces. History tells us he had 75,000 soldiers. And he came to attack Egypt, and he stomped right through the land of Israel.

The angels says in verses 11, “Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated.” Now the king of the south is Ptolemy Philometor. He has 73,000 men, history tells us, 5,000 cavalry, and he also had 73 elephants. They used elephants like battering rams, to carry things and so forth. And so this tremendous war went on. Verse 12 says, “When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain victorious.” The king of the south was very effective in the battle. History says that they caused the north, Antiochus the Great, to lose 10,000 footmen, 300 cavalry, and five of their elephants. This we know from the historian Polybius. But this didn’t really strengthen the king of the south, it just made the king of the north more angry. So in verse 13 it says, “For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped.” Amazingly, thirteen years later, the king of the North came back, exactly as the angel had said, with a great army, and great riches, to get his revenge.

Verse 14 says, “In those times many will rise against the king of the South. The violent men among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.” The violent men are men of violence who break the law. They are strong-willed, apostate Jews who are revolutionaries. They are like mercenary soldiers and they join the cause of the king of the north, aiding him in his attack. Most historians see that these mercenaries, these apostate Jewish revolutionaries, wanted Judean independence. They thought that by war, if they could get in with Antiochus the Great and knock off Egypt, maybe Antiochus would give them freedom for their assistance. But at the end of verse 14, it says, “without success.” They shall fail. They didn’t attain their reward, what they had hoped to get.

In verse 15, the angels says, “Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand.” In this long battle between the king of the South and the king of the North, the north would win. The north literally routed the south.

What is written further? Verse 16 says, “The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it.” This verse is directly related to the Jews. There was no independence for them. All they got was domination by Syrian power from the north, the Seleucids. Antiochus the Great took a lasting dominion over Palestine. The land of Palestine had been under the control of the Ptolemies. But Antiochus the great took Palestine into the possession of the Seleucids. It was around 195 BC. Because some of the Jews had assisted him in the battle with the south, he gave them some money, treating them with some favor, but he was basically their captor.

Then verse 17 says, “He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him.” Antiochus the Great decides to strengthen his power, and to keep Egypt on his side. So he does something that the king of the South had tried to do, yet miserably failed. He gave his daughter Cleopatra, a lovely woman, to the Ptolemy king. What he really wanted was to plant a spy in the palace. But she loved her husband more than her father, and the whole thing failed. Again, this shows us how absolutely God knows history before it ever happens. Everything is in God’s control. History is indeed “His story.”

What does the king of the North do? Verse 18 says, “Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back upon him.” Once Antiochus the Great had conquered that part of the world, he decided to go to the coastlands, the Mediterranean Islands and the borders of Greece. He was going to get Greece. However, Rome had the power out there at that time. And so as he turned his face to the coast and took many, it brought him into conflict with Rome, the prince/commander, and Rome utterly routed him. In 190 B.C. he was routed by Roman soldiers.

Verse 19 says, “After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more.” After being beaten by Rome, he was so distressed, he went back to his own land; and one time, he tried to plunder the temple in his own land and steal all the treasure there; but the people got so mad they murdered him on the spot. He was seen no more as the angel said, “…to be seen no more.” That is the end of Antiochus the Great.

Verse 20 says, “His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendour. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle.” In KJV, “Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.” One man who stood up in his estate, in the estate of Antiochus the Great, was a raiser of taxes. When Rome defeated him, they put a pressure on them to pay a thousand talents periodically to the Roman power. Therefore, the next king had to be a raiser of taxes.

Now Antiochus Epimenes appears. Then the angel says in verse 21, “He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honour of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.” In ESV, “In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.” He will stand up in the place of Antiochus the Great. He comes in a sneaky way, and obtains it by flattery. He had no legitimate claim to the throne. He had absolutely no right at all. But he gained it by intrigue, and by flattery, and by buying off certain individuals; and he got in there.

And verse 22 says, “Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed.” This is the army of the south. He literally devastated the Egyptians and the king. And in verse 23, “After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power.” He tried to adopt a policy of friendship with Egypt, but he violated it, and broke it, and he did everything he could. He plotted; he worked out all kinds of things.

And then the angel says in verse 24, “When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time.” It is very interesting that he entered peaceably upon the fattest provinces, even throwing flowers. He was wily and smart, and he gained greater acceptance. And then when he got spoil, he scattered it among the people, and he made it all look so good. And then at the end of verse 24, “He will plot the overthrow of the fortress.” Whenever he saw a strong village or a strong group, he would plot their destruction. So on the one hand, he looks like Robin Hood. On the other hand, anything that began to move in his kingdom he put it down fast. He was building an incredible power base.

In verses 25 and 26 the angel says, “With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised again him. Those who eat from the king’s provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle.” Antiochus Epimenes had another war with Egypt. Egypt lost, because the counselors of the Egyptian king himself betrayed and turned away from him, plotting against him.

In verses 27 and 28 the angel continues, “The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then returns to his own country.” After Antiochus Epiphanes had this deceitful meeting in the south, he came back into the land of Israel, and did cruel things against the holy covenant, desecrating the land. He marched on Jerusalem and sacked the city. He cruelly slaughtered people, bringing about horrible suffering.

The angel continues to say in verse 29 and 30, “At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart.” The ships of western coastlands would be the Roman fleet. By now the Ptolemies are so sick of Antiochus Epiphanes, that they ask help for Rome to send them a fleet. The Roman fleet comes against Antiochus. He is grieved and returns, because he cannot do anything against Egypt because of the Roman navy that he fears.

Verse 30b says, “Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favour to those who forsake the holy covenant.” He allied again with the apostate Jews. He began to raise support from them, showing favour to them. And in verse 31, “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.” In coming back to Jerusalem in his frustration by the Romans, he first put guards all around the temple so that nobody could worship. He halted all worship, stopping the sacrifice. And then on a given Sabbath, he sent his soldiers into the city, and he slaughtered all the children he could find. And then he slaughtered all the women. Consequently he made heathen idolatry mandatory. He had nakedness flaunted/paraded by supposed athletes in full view of the temple ground. He enforced Greek culture upon the Jews. He erected a statue of the main god of the Greeks, Zeus, on the very altar in the temple. He slayed a pig on the altar in the temple, and made the priests eat pork. This is the abomination of desolations. He abominated the temple to make it desolate.

In verse 32 the angel continues, “With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.” Some apostate Jews even agreed to get involved. However, the people who know their God will stand firm and take action in resistance against the evil power. And in ESV, “And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder.”

In verse 34, “When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them.” It was the time of horrible persecution, mass slaughter of the Jews in their land by Antiochus Epiphanes. During this time there arose a group of Jews who were known as Hasideans. This group of Hasideans stood for the law. They had a leader, Judas Maccabeus. He was able to lead a successful revolt, and he is the one who helped with a little help. It was just temporary relief from persecution. Judas Maccabeus got all those apostate Jews and he treated them with bloody severity. But like many revolutions, there were a lot of folks hanging on just for what they could gain. Some people went along with the revolution to gain their own ends.

In verse 35 the angel says, “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.” Here we clearly see the divine purpose for all the sufferings of God’s people. It is to test, to purge and to make them white. God gave to Daniel through this angel the most incredible layout of the suffering of the Jews through the reign of the Persians and the reign of the Greeks. It will be till the time of the end. God’s purpose was very clear. It is to refine and purify his people and make them spotless, fit for his final kingdom.

At this point we are reminded of what Paul said in Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” We are to believe this word of God absolutely whoever difficult our situation becomes. And the good is especially to be conformed to the likeness of his Son Jesus (Ro 8:29). Also James said to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations in James 1:2-4: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete…” Apostle Peter also said to the suffering Christians in the fiery persecution in 1 Peter 1:6-7, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Again, we thank and praise God for his amazingly accurate prophecy. He is in control for the whole for his purpose of refining and purifying his people fit to the coming kingdom of Christ. He is also in control of each one’s life, in this direction. May we really trust in him, putting our hope in his kingdom, not in this world and live as the wise who can instruct many one by one to come to Christ and his kingdom.