

Daniel: The Great War

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[0 : 0 0] Thursday evening, April the 22nd, 1915.

We had just fought our first big action in the fight for Hill 60. We had had a gruelling time and left many of our comrades on the slopes.

Some of us now were stretched out asleep on the grass. As the sun was beginning to sink, this peaceful atmosphere was shattered by the noise of heavy shellfire coming from the northwest.

Fall in! We expected that cry, and soon we moved across the fields in the direction of the line for about a mile. Shrieks of agony and groans all around me.

Colonel Shipley stands in the centre of the road, blood streaming down his face. The gallant Fleming lies at his feet.

[1 : 0 6] This way, follow me through the gate. As we dash through the gate, I catch a glimpse of our medical officer working in an empty gun pit like a butcher in his shop.

Once through the gate, we charge madly across a field of young corn. Shrapnel and machine gun bullets are cracking and hissing everywhere.

That was the testimony of one brave soldier. Listening to that, I don't think any of us would ever want to go to war.

But that's exactly what Daniel chapter 10 and 11 is all about. It's about a war. But not the kind of war we would expect.

And it's there to prepare us for this war. Look at chapter 10, verse 1. In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia.

[2 : 1 0] So remember, the Babylonian Empire has now been taken over by the Persian Empire. So this little note about Cyrus, king of Persia, is there to remind us that the 70 years of exile are now over for God's people.

Cyrus has given them permission to return home to their own land. So the expectation for God's people at this time is that the future is going to be bright.

They've lived in captivity for 70 years. Now they're going home. It's going to be a life of peace, prosperity and security. A happy, everlasting life.

But that's not the future. As Daniel's vision will make clear. We are told what will happen in all its terrifying reality.

So that we can be prepared and ready for the fights. So first of all, the promise of war. A frightening vision. Let's read verse 1 again.

[3 : 1 4] In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel, who was also called Belshazzar. Its message was true. And it concerned a great war.

An unimaginable conflict is going to take place. A war that is so frightening, it leaves Daniel in absolute fear. Look at verse 2.

At that time, I, Daniel mourned for three weeks. He couldn't sleep. I ate no choice food. No meat or wine touched my lips.

He couldn't even eat. And I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. He hadn't even got the energy to get up and wash himself.

But what makes this vision so frightening is this great war that he sees in the vision is a war that is against the people of God.

[4 : 15] Look at verse 14. Now I have come to explain to you. So this is the man he sees in the vision. I have come to explain to you, Daniel, what will happen to your people, that is, God's people, in the future.

For the vision concerns a time yet to come. No wonder Daniel is terrified. Let's read verse 15.

While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face towards the ground and was speechless. Then the one who looks like a man touched my lips. I opened my mouth and began to speak.

And I said to the one standing before me, I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my Lord. And I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my Lord?

My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe. Don't show me anything anymore. I can't bear to look into this vision. It's as if what he has seen has knocked him flat.

[5 : 22] He is completely overwhelmed. Helpless, breathless, speechless. A great war is on the horizon and it's coming against God's people.

And it is frightening. But we are not to fear. We are not to fear.

Look at the man who speaks to Daniel in the vision. Back in verse 5. I looked up, verse 5, And there before me was a man dressed in linen, With a belt of the finest gold around his waist.

His body was like chrysolite. His face like lightning. His eyes like flaming torches. His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze.

His voice like the sound of a multitude. The description of this man speaks of beauty, Absolute power and supreme authority.

[6 : 34] But who is this man speaking to Daniel? Well, and there's no need to turn to it, But in Revelation, the last book in the Bible, chapter 1, The Apostle Paul has a vision, Just like Daniel has had a vision.

And in his vision he sees a similar figure, With the same description. The man has eyes like fire, Gold around his waist, Feet of bronze, A thunderous voice, And then the man speaks, Revealing his identity.

And here's what the man says. You can read it on the screen. Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one.

I was dead. And behold, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades, Or hell itself. So this man that is seen in the vision, Is the risen Lord Jesus.

And this is the same man who appears to Daniel in his vision. What theologians call a pre-incarnate Jesus. The person of Jesus appearing to Daniel in a vision.

[7 : 53] And look what he says to Daniel in his vision. Daniel in his vision. Verse 18. Chapter 10. Again the one who looked like a man, Touched me, And gave me strength.

Do not be afraid, O man, Highly esteemed, That is one who is treasured and loved by God. Peace. Be strong now.

Be strong. When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, Speak, my Lord, Since you have given me strength. Daniel moves from a place of absolute fear and terror To a place of peace.

From weakness to strength. There may be a great war that is on the horizon And it's frightening and it's terrifying. But in the presence of Jesus, And in the words that Jesus is speaking to him through the vision, There is absolutely nothing to fear.

Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I have existed from before time began, And I exist into all eternity.

[9 : 16] I was dead, But behold, I am alive forever and forever. I face the greatest war of death and hell itself, And I have risen victoriously, To give life for all eternity.

Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Says Jesus. But what is this war?

What kind of war are God's people going to face? Well, number two, The kind of war is a spiritual battle.

It's not the kind of war that we imagine. Look at chapter 10, Verse 12. Then he continued, That is the man in the vision speaking to Daniel, And he says, Do not be afraid, Daniel.

Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding, To humble yourself before God, Your words were heard, And I have come in response to them. But, The prince of the Persian kingdom, Resisted me, 21 days.

[10 : 30] This resistance, Is a conflict. It's a battle. Look at the rest of verse 13. Then Michael, One of the chief princes, Came to help me, Because I was detained there, With the king of Persia.

So there's a battle. I want us to get this in our minds. There's a battle taking place, Between the man in Daniel's vision, And the prince of Persia.

They're in a conflict. He's resisting against the other. Now we know the man in Daniel's vision is from God, But who is this prince of Persia?

Well, Well, This prince is not Cyrus, Or any other earthly ruler, But an evil, Demonic power, Who is in opposition.

He is resisting, The man from God. In other words, What we've got here in verses 12 and 13, Is a spiritual battle.

[11 : 36] A battle that Daniel can't see taking place, But one that he's being told about. And this battle seems to continue.

Verse 20, He said, Do you know why I have come to you, Daniel? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia.

And when I go, The prince of Greece will come. Another dark power is going to take its place. You see, Behind the earthly rulers of the Persian and Greek empires, Lie dark, evil forces.

The words of the Apostle Paul come to mind. You can read it on the screen. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, But against the rulers, Against the authorities, Against the powers of this dark world, And against the spiritual forces of evil In the heavenly realms.

So it's a battle, Not against flesh and blood, Against human people, But against the dark powers, The spiritual forces of evil, In our world.

[13 : 03] One commentator describes it as the invisible war, An unseen battle, Satanic forces that are in our world, Influencing rulers and governments, That inflict harm and havoc on God's people, All over the place.

Let me give you some examples. Our friends, You know them, Kevin and Julia, Who've been working on the China-North Korean border, Have been detained now for four months.

The Chinese authorities recently gave a statement, And here's what they said, They will not be released. I received a newsletter last week from friends, Whose brother-in-law lives in Iran.

He had recently become a Christian, But relatives are threatening to turn him into the authorities. If reported to the authorities, He faces imprisonment, And torture.

You may have read the horrific news, About a young Christian married couple in Pakistan. Shabazz was 26, His wife Shema, Only 24.

[14 : 24] They were accused of speaking against the Quran. They were attacked, Beaten, And burnt alive, In a brick kiln.

Now here's the question, Why do these things happen to God's people? Why are people detained? Why are followers of Jesus imprisoned?

Why are Christians murdered? Because of their faith. Well, yes, You read the newspapers, And they say about culture, Politics, They'll talk about people, But behind it all, Lies evil, Spiritual forces, Dark powers, Influencing and inflicting harm and havoc, On God's people.

We are in, A spiritual battle. Does that mean God has lost control? Does that mean that God is somehow powerless to intervene?

Has Satan and his forces won the battle? Well, let's read on. Number three, The reality of life.

[15 : 47] The spiritual battle is real and intense. We cannot see it, But it is going on all around us. And like any war, It will involve a lot of suffering.

And that's what we have mapped out for us, In chapters 11. As history moves along, The suffering gets worse. And in chapter 11, We see this in three big pictures.

We're not going to read it, We're not going to get into all the detail, You can read it at home yourself. But let me just sketch it out to you, In three broad pictures. First, First, In verses 5 to 20, We have an ongoing battle, Between a king of the south, And a king of the north.

So the period of history this is, Is just after Alexander the Great has died, Which is about 323 BC, You can check all this up yourself, In the history books.

And the kingdom of Greece was split into four, Two of those regions became more powerful than the others. In the north, There were what called the Seleucids of Syria, And in the south, Were the Ptolemies of Egypt.

[17 : 06] So Syria in the north, That's all you need to remember, Syria in the north, Egypt in the south, Around 323 BC. They fought six major wars against each other, Over 150 years.

Six wars, Over 150 years. And that's what's crammed in, Between verses 5 and 20. One battle after another. What's the point of all of that?

Well, Stuck in the middle, On the main road between Egypt and Syria, Was, Jerusalem, The city of God's people.

So year after year, For 150 years, God's people are stuck in this intense war, Facing hardship and struggle, As they're squeezed between these fighting nations.

Look at verse 15, We're told what happened. Verse 15, 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.

[18 : 14] Even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. The invader will do as he pleases. No one will be able to stand against him.

He will establish himself in the beautiful land. That's a reference to the place of God's people. And he will have the power to destroy it.

Read up your history books and see what happens. So that's the first big picture. The second big picture moves on in time.

It's around 176 BC. And this is from verses 21 through to 35. Here we have the rise of another ruler. And he's going to inflict even more suffering on God's people.

We already met this ruler back in chapter 8. He was called Antiochus Epiphanes. And at one point in his rulership, He's ruler of one of these regions.

[19 : 20] He attacks the southern king. Only to discover he's on a hiding to nothing. And he's so frustrated that he got nowhere. On his way back home again, He takes out all his frustration on God's people.

It's recorded for us here in verse 29. At the appointed time, He, that's Antiochus Epiphanes, Will invade the south again.

But this time, the outcome will be different From what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands. So for you historians, That was the Romans. They will oppose him.

And he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury Against the holy covenant.

Against God's people. He will return and show favour To those who forsake the holy covenant. So he will show favour to any who turn their back on God's.

[20 : 29] History records for us that Antiochus enforced pagan worship. Religious observance was prohibited on pain of death. Anyone who was found with a portion of scripture was put to death.

This happened over an intense period of ten years. And on top of it all, He destroyed the place of sacrifice. Look at verse 31. His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress And abolish the daily sacrifice.

They will set up the abomination that causes desolation. Which is actually a reference to where he sacrificed pigs to the pagan god Zeus.

Look at verse 33. Those who are wise will instruct many, Though for a time they will fall by the sword, Or be burned, Or captured, Or plundered.

This ruler, And you can check it out in history, Inflicted great suffering On the followers of God. Thus the second picture, The third picture, From verses 36 to the very end of the chapter, Introduces us to an earthly king That the world has never ever seen before.

[21 : 54] He's going to be like Antiochus, Hating Christians, But only worse. Verse 36. The king will do as he pleases.

He will exalt and magnify himself over every god, And will say unheard of things against the god of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed.

That is, until God's or Christ's return. For what has been determined must take place. So here's Daniel's vision.

Takes a look way into the future. Even to a time beyond our present time. So at the end of the vision, It looks way into the future.

To a time just before God's final judgment. Just before the Lord Jesus returns. And it's telling us what will happen. Verse 37.

[22 : 54] He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers, Or for the one, for that is, for the gods desired by women. Whatever anybody followed, he didn't. Nor will he regard for the gods, nor will he regard any gods, But will exalt himself above them all.

Instead of them, he will honour a god of fortresses. Now the god of fortresses is a god of war.

In other words, this ruler will worship war. He will thrive on war. He will use war to gain power and control.

Look at verse 39. He will attack the mightiest fortress with the help of a foreign god, And will greatly honour those who acknowledge him.

He will make them rulers over many people, And will distribute the land or reward people with land, Who follow his way. And in his hunger for war, Look what he will do.

[24 : 04] Verse 41. He will also invade the beautiful land. In other words, He is going to be against the people of God.

He is going to be against the church. God's people. And will do all that he can To destroy them. So who is this king?

How will we be able to identify him? Well, we might think of the many rulers there are in the world today. Authorities and governments who ban the worship of God.

Who seem intent on getting rid of God's people. That happens. It might happen in this country. But in the vast majority of countries around the world, It's not allowed.

People like Kim Jong-un of North Korea, Has over 50,000 believers, Christians, Crammed into their notorious prison camps.

[25 : 09] Or governments of Iraq or Eritrea, Qatar, Laos, Algeria, Indonesia. The list goes on and on and on and on. Where it's against the law to be a Christian.

And you face imprisonment and torture and beatings. Or you might look to the leader of ISIS, Who violently rapes and beheads those who follow Jesus.

But with all that's going on in our world right now, We still can't put a name on this king. All we know is that it will happen, And it will get worse.

And it will all happen Before the end of time. You think I'm making it up? Well, the Apostle Paul actually warned us About this ruler or king to come.

Look at what he says here. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come. That is the day of Christ's return. Will not come until the rebellion occurs, And the man of lawlessness is revealed.

[26 : 20] That's the one that Daniel sees in his vision. A man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself Over everything that is called God or worshipped, So that he sets himself up, Proclaiming himself to be God.

So Daniel's vision is very clear. God's people are to be prepared To face great hostility. We're in a war. It will involve suffering.

But does that mean God has lost control? Has Satan and his forces won the battle? No. Victory is on our side.

Look at how these three periods of history Were finished. In chapter 11. These three sections we looked at. What happened to the kings of the north and the south?

Well look at verse 20. The last line of verse 20. Speaking of the kings, In a few years however, He will be destroyed.

[27 : 32] Yet not in anger Or in battle. God will make sure their end comes. What about Antiochus and his rule?

Well he will do as he pleases Until, look at the very end of verse 35. Until the time of the end.

For it will still come At the appointed time. So even he would come to an end And he did. Or what about this king, This ruler who is to come That Daniel sees in the future?

What about him? Well look at the very last line of verse 45. Yes, he will come to his end.

And no one will help him. Yes, there's the promise of war Against God's people. Yes, it will be spiritual. It will be dark and evil.

[28 : 33] Yes, it will involve much suffering For many of God's people Over the course of time. No wonder Daniel was frightened. No wonder he couldn't eat or sleep.

It was terrifying. But yet at the very end of the vision God says he will bring it all to an end. He will destroy those who stand against him.

And he will destroy those Who stand against his people. How do we know? How do we know he'll do that? Because 2,000 years ago on the cross The forces of evil Unleashed all their power And went to war Against the Lord Jesus Christ.

A cosmic battle took place. An unseen battle In the heavenly realms Between Satan and God's son. And it seemed like The dark evil forces had won As Jesus was left Bloody, beaten, dead On a cross.

But three days later Jesus rose from the grave Destroying death Disarming the powers Of this dark world Defeating Satan Reigning as the glorious Risen King Yes, the war will go on Yes, we are in a spiritual battle But the war has already been won The war has been won We are on the victory side How do we stand?

[30 : 20] Well, listen to these words As we close From Ephesians chapter 6 Ephesians chapter 6 Verse 10 Finally Be strong in the Lord And in his mighty power Put on the full armour of God So that you can take your stand Against the devil's schemes So that when the day of evil comes You may be able to stand your ground And after you have done everything To stand Stand strong In the mighty victory of God Put on his armour As we live as God's people In this difficult world Let's pray together Our Father God

We thank you for the risen Lord Jesus Who has destroyed Disarmed and defeated All the darkness Satan himself And so we stand in the victory Of the risen Lord Jesus Please help us as we live in this world And please help our many brothers and sisters Around the world Who face such terrible opposition and persecution To stand strong in Jesus To be able to be faithful To be faithful When they face death To stand strong in their witness When imprisoned To go on following the Lord Jesus When they are detained

We pray for us That you would strengthen us in our lives In all the difficulties and struggles that we face That we would go in your power The power of the risen Jesus We pray this in his name Amen Amen Amen Amen