

# The Whole World's in His Hands

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, what a marathon. Thanks, Naomi. That was great. It would be excellent if you could keep your Bibles open because we are going to have a little flick through the different verses so we can check out some of that history.

But let's pray as we begin. Lord our God, we do thank you that you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Father, we thank you that you greatly desire for us to understand your word and you have sent your Holy Spirit to be amongst us tonight to enlighten our minds and hearts and to give us the strength to obey your will.

We pray that you would challenge us, teach us, admonish us, encourage us, comfort us for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

I was at a birthday party last night for a school friend. It's the year of 30th for me. And as usual, on a Saturday night, I was explaining that, I'm sorry, I have to leave early because I need to be at church at 8 o'clock in the morning.

And while I was explaining this, her dad came up and started joining in the conversation. And as dads do when they're trying to be cool, he said, oh, I can help you with your sermon for tomorrow.

[ 1 : 21 ] He said, I used to be an altar boy. And I laughed politely, as you do when your parents' friends are trying to be cool. And then he said something that made me think.

He said, oh, but actually I'm going through an atheist phase at the moment. And it was just a throwaway line for him and, you know, we kind of said our goodbyes. He didn't want to engage in a conversation about it.

But I thought about it all the way home, especially in the light of the preparation that I'd done for tonight's sermon. And I was thinking, I think that there are two main reasons why someone could go through an atheist phase.

And I think they are suffering or power. Suffering or power. See, on the one hand, the person might feel that God just doesn't exist because they feel so abandoned because of a time of personal suffering that they've gone through.

Or they look around the world and they see so much injustice, so much hurt, so much corruption, so much violence. They think, well, how could there be a good God who would let all this happen?

[ 2 : 45 ] Suffering. On the other hand, though, a person might feel that things are going so great, that they are so completely in control, so self-sufficient, that they can't accept anything but that humanity is in control of its own destiny.

They personally seem to have found that power or possessions or people have met every need that they have. And so they don't need a God in their life.

They have power. They are in control. Now, I don't know why my friend's dad has lost his faith in God.

I do know that he certainly is a powerful man. He has been the Australian CEO of several very large multinational corporations.

I know that he has experienced some family troubles in the past. But whatever it is, power or suffering.

[ 3 : 57 ] He was actually right. He did help me with my sermon because I think, funnily enough, Daniel chapter 11 teaches us a lot about both. Now, you could be forgiven for wondering how Daniel chapter 11, that marathon, can teach you anything but a ginormous history lesson.

But bear with me because the correlation between history and this chapter is key in understanding its role. So we'll cover that first.

So we'll cover that first. And as we do, I need you to hold on to your seats because it's going to be a very quick, fly-through, 400 years of human history in the company of an angel.

And there may be some turbulence. If you were here before Christmas, and I know a lot of you weren't, we've covered some of the chapters from 7 to 10.

And chapter 10, which was that kind of, well, chapter 11, verse 1 is really the end of chapter 10. So we're on page 728. And that's an angel speaking.

[ 5 : 04 ] That's why I say we're going to be flying through this history in the company of an angel. That's the last thing he talks about. And he has come to Daniel to give one final revelation.

And he's explaining before he gives this verbal revelation that what is behind all of history is a supernatural battle. So there are angels and evil spirits in the unseen realm that are battling it out for the people of God.

And they are waging war against each other. The evil ones are trying to stop the angels from bringing the word of the Lord to Daniel so that he can bring encouragement and wisdom to his people, both with him in the 6th century BC.

And for those who will be reading this in the centuries following, particularly in the 2nd century BC. And for us today. So that's the angel set the scene.

He says, Daniel, there is stuff going on that you know nothing about. But it should tell you that this is important. This is the truth. This is the book of truth that I am going to explain to you.

[ 6 : 12 ] And so then he says to him, now I will announce the truth to you. Now we're in verse 2. Three more kings shall arise in Persia. And these first couple of verses are about Cyrus and the following kings.

And there's a last one. It says, the fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. Now historically, so you've got a couple of names to the faces.

This could be Xerxes I, who was in the early to mid 400s BC. Or it could be Darius III, who was in the late 300s.

Now that seems like a bit of a gap. But that's kind of how prophecy is sometimes. We're not always sure exactly how it works out. But Xerxes set in motion a chain of events that led to conflict with Greece.

Kind of hundreds or so years before it actually started happening. So he invaded some parts of Greek territory and made them get mad.

[ 7 : 24 ] But Darius, he was the one that actually fell to the next one that's mentioned, the warrior king, Alexander the Great. And you've probably heard about him before.

Alexander is a fantastic warrior. Conquers heaps of territory. But he dies quite young. And instead of going to his posterity, his son or his brother, the kingdom actually gets divided between his four generals.

So it says, And not according to the dominion with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be uprooted and go to others besides these. So there's four of his commanders that take over all his territory. And two of those become particularly strong. And they're the two main houses, if you want to use a kind of Shakespearean term, that start to battle it out in the following verses.

The south, which is like Egypt. And that's the Ptolemies. Try saying that after you've, I don't know, eaten too much spaghetti. And the Seleucids.

[ 8 : 35 ] And they were north in Syria. And Syria had as its capital a place called Antioch. You might have heard about that as well. So some of the Seleucid kings also took the name Antiochus, which is like Antiochus.

We say Antiochus because it sounds cooler. So we got, Then the king of the south, we're in verse 5. Then the king of the south shall grow strong.

And that's Mr. Ptolemy number one. But then one of his officers shall grow stronger than he and shall rule a realm greater than his own realm. So the guy Seleucid was originally kind of under the protectorate of the Egyptian Ptolemy.

But he starts ruling in the north and then he gets very strong. Then they make an alliance. This is how it was done. Don't get the feminist in me started. They sell off a daughter and they make an alliance.

And this daughter, Berenice, this is about 250 BC now. Now, Berenice goes to the north and, yes, daughter of the king of the south will come to the king of the north.

[ 9 : 45 ] But the divorced wife of the king of the north ends up having her murdered. So she shall not retain her power.

His offspring shall not endure. She shall be given up. She and her attendants and her child and the one who supported her. So Laodice, the jilted first wife, gets her son to poison them all.

This is amazing kind of like dynasty or something. And then as the next kind of paragraphs go through, you would never remember it.

But it is like north versus south, south versus north, a guy called Ptolemy number two, then three, versus Seleucus number two, number three. And they go back and forth, back and forth.

And it matches up to the history that we have in just any old history book of that time. We get to about at the end of that next paragraph, verse nine.

[10:48] That's about 240 BC. And then there's a time of peace around after the north gets whipped, about verse 12.

But then the king of the north comes back and starts fighting again the king of the south. But then, verse 14, we see the lawless among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision.

You see, in the middle of Egypt and Syria is Judea, is Jerusalem, is the land of the people of God. And they are right in the middle of all of this. And they start to get a bit involved. And so here we see some of them lift themselves up.

They rise against the king of the south, probably in a bit of an alliance with the king of the north. But it doesn't work. The king of the north comes and throws up siege works and takes a well-fortified city.

[11:50] Goes on. By now we've got a guy whose name is Antiochus III or Antiochus the Great. Don't get him confused with the big Antiochus that we'll get to.

But he's got another name and you'll work that out. There's another marriage alliance. And this lady is called Cleopatra. And they think that it's going to work nicely.

The north gives his daughter to the south. And because the north are really into kind of intrigue and trickiness, he sends the daughter down and he thinks, she's going to be my kind of eyes and ears and I'll be in and we can overthrow them.

Even though he said, oh, let's make an alliance and you can marry this beautiful woman. But Cleopatra falls in love with her Egyptian husband. And she turns against her northern father and she helps her husband start to make an alliance with the Romans.

And they, of course, will be the empire that comes after all of this is over. So we're up to Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV.

[13:02] And then in verse 20, we get to Sir Lucas IV. And he only reigns for a little bit of time. He's in the north. And then we meet the contemptible person, the star of the show who has been mentioned in chapter 7, chapter 8 and chapter 9.

This Antiochus called Antiochus Epiphanes. Now, that name and Epiphanes, if he'd given his long name, it would be Theos Epiphanes.

I am God manifest among you. This is not a guy with a poor self-image. And he then becomes the quintessential ruler, villain, adversary for the people of God.

And as it goes through the next paragraphs, it says he will sweep armies away and he will sweep away the prince of the covenant.

That's in verse 22. Now, we see, and you might have heard when Naomi read this word, the covenant or the holy covenant. When he mentions, when the writer, when Daniel mentions that, he's talking about the people of God stuck in the middle.

[14:19] And so, first of all, we hear that this guy, Antiochus Epiphanes, replaces the prince of the covenant or gets rid of him. And what he does is he decides that the high priest of the temple, who is loyal to Egypt, is not going to help him one bit.

And so, he replaces him, his name is Onias, with a guy who's loyal to the north, Jason, and likes to make a bit of merging of church and state, if you will.

And so, he starts to infiltrate the temple. And he starts to, as you can see, infiltrate the loyalty of the people of God.

Some start to turn to him. But others, when he starts to do terrible things, like ban the morning and evening sacrifices in the temple, refuse to let the Jews worship as they want to, to start to take control of the temple altogether himself, some, of course, will stand firm against him and they will suffer.

Then we get down to verse 29. At the time appointed, he shall return and come into the south, but this time it shall not be as it was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him and he shall lose heart and withdraw.

[ 15 : 45 ] Here, the Romans, this is the ships of Kittim, are Roman ships and they've started to get in on this fight as well. So, they've come against him and apparently there was a Roman consulate guy who kind of, who drew a circle around Antiochus in the sand and said, I want your answer, whether you're going to go home or whether I'm going to cut off your head before you step out of that circle.

And you can imagine a guy who says, I am Theos Epiphanes, not being too happy about that. He's humiliated. He's enraged. And he goes back to Jerusalem and takes it out on the Jewish people. He says at the second half of verse 30, he shall be enraged and take action against the Holy Covenant. And he'll pay heed to those who forsake the Holy Covenant, those who forget their loyalty to God and give their loyalty to Antiochus Epiphanes.

Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate.

Now we're talking about 167 BC now, not too long before Jesus. And this abomination that causes desolation or that makes desolate, some of you would have heard me talk about that before.

[ 17 : 13 ] But for those of you who haven't heard about it, it's this kind of ultimate act of rebellion against God, of apostasy, if you like, or just arrogance.

He sets up in the Jewish temple a altar to Zeus or even puts an image of Zeus on the Jewish altar. And some histories even say that he sacrifices a pig in the Jewish temple, which you can imagine would, you know, this is just, it completely desolates the place of worship.

It is no longer for the Jewish people, their place where they meet with God. It has been completely profaned. Now it goes on and talks about how the wise among the people will be persecuted.

They'll fall by sword and flame. They'll suffer captivity and plunder. They'll receive a little help, says in verse 34. And that's talking about the Maccabean revolt.

That's, you can read about that in some historical books called One and Two Maccabees. A guy called Judas Maccabeus was a kind of tough guy for the Jews at that time and led a rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes.

[ 18 : 29 ] And so the religious people got a little help from their friends. But some of the wise shall fall or shall stumble. They might die or they might turn away for a bit.

We're not sure. And then it goes on and just describes the character of this man and finally goes through kind of some broad brushstrokes until at the end, verse 45, he shall come to his end with no one to help him.

Now, the fact that we have such a long, detailed, accurate prophecy claiming to be written hundreds of years before any of these events occurred and absolutely matching up as you've seen or as has bored you silly, this has made people ask, is this really a prophecy?

Could this really have been written in the 6th century and get so much of the facts perfectly right?

Couldn't it be perhaps that people in the 2nd century wrote it and kind of added it to fill out this book of Daniel as a bit of a secret way to encourage each other in the time of this awful persecution?

Is it really a prophecy? Well, I think the answers to that question lie within the book of Daniel itself.

[ 20 : 03 ] The book of Daniel tells us that to give such a detailed prophecy where, you know, everything is right is not beyond God's power at all.

Not one little bit. There is no reason why he couldn't reveal himself, reveal the future hundreds of years, thousands of years before it happened. Chapter 2 says, Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him. God knows everything.

He knows the sweep of history from its beginning to end. There is nothing that is outside his knowledge, nothing that is outside his power. And if God wanted Daniel to know events that would only make sense to readers who were kind of second century and beyond, he could do that.

[ 21 : 15 ] He gives wisdom. He reveals the deep things. No sweat. However, some then say, well, if God could give such a detailed revelation of the future to Daniel, doesn't that mean that all those

kings, those Ptolemies, and Seleucus, and Antiochus, great Epiphanes, whatever, doesn't that mean all of them are just puppets of God?

You know, if God could tell Daniel exactly what was going to happen, isn't God responsible for all that would go on in those hundreds of years, even the really awful stuff?

And those people that thought they were fighting, and winning, and marrying, and sieging, actually had no free will whatsoever. If God knew that it was all going to happen, if he was in control, weren't they just chess pieces moved around the board of Egypt and Syria, and all that was in between?

What happens to human responsibility, and free will, and real choices, if God knows exactly what's going to happen? Well, again, the book of Daniel gives us the answer.

Yes, God is in control of history. Absolutely. Chapter 4 says, For his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

[ 22 : 48 ] All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does what he wills with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can stay his hand or say to him, what are you doing?

He is in control. Absolutely. And yet, the book of Daniel also affirms that God never forces humans to act against their own wishes.

Everyone who is doing stuff in this book, in this history, every king, every faithful person, is doing it according to their own wishes.

When push comes to shove, we're always acting according to our own reasons, our own passions, our past histories, our emotions, our desires. And so in this sense, we are absolutely free to make choices according to our own desires, our own wishes.

And we are held responsible for those choices because we didn't want to do anything other. We've done what we wanted to do. When in chapter 5, Belshazzar throws this big party and drinks wine out of the vessels that he stole from the Jerusalem temple, with all his girlfriends around him acting really tough, he wanted to do that.

[ 24 : 14 ] He knew exactly what he was doing. And God holds him accountable for it, even though God is in control of everything that goes on. In the same way, all these Ptolemies and Seleucids were acting according to their own will when they sat at a table and lied to each other, when they acted so aggressively, when they decided, yep, more, more, more, I want more.

They were acting according to their own will, as well as being completely a part of God's will for history. They were power hungry, and God held them responsible.

They were warmongers, and God held them responsible. They betrayed, they murdered, and God held them responsible. But he never relinquished control of the history of his world or his creation.

There's one further trouble that commentators bring up with this chapter. We've looked at the history in a lot of detail, you might have noticed, until verse 35.

And there's a reason for that. From that point on, from 36 to the end, to 45, the correlation between prophecy and history actually starts to get a bit shaky, if you're looking at it in that time frame.

[ 25 : 40 ] You see, what, especially in verses 40 to 45, and what historians can tell, these verses, what it's described here, just didn't happen that way in the life of Antiochus Epiphanes.

He didn't storm and plunder Egypt. He didn't set his tent between the sea and the beautiful mountain. He didn't die in Palestine. Everything else in that chapter seems to be able to find its match one way or another, but not here.

What's going on? Well, was the angel that was telling Daniel all about it, kind of flying past a heavenly choir, so he, oh, I missed that bit.

I'll just make up what I thought I heard. Or did, was it really someone writing in the second century, who, writing happy history up until the present, you go, uh-oh, what now?

Antiochus Epiphanes is still alive in my lifetime. How's it going to end? No, I don't, I don't think either of those, uh, are the explanation for what's going on here.

[ 26 : 49 ] It actually seems here that we have, once again, one of, one of the famous telescoping of prophetic history.

Now, I've mentioned this before, but imagine you've got one of those kind of old school telescopes that can, um, extend out, and maybe it's in, uh, three sections.

And when you, uh, put it all together, it just looks like one short tube. And then you pull it out a bit, uh, and there's a second piece, and it's longer, and the end is a little further away.

And then you pull it out again, and there's a third section, and the end is even further away. But originally, when you looked at it, and you looked at the end, you thought, yeah, we're talking about, um, this period in history, and this prophecy is going to be fulfilled now.

There's the end. But actually, the end, yeah, it's still prophecy, but it's kind of been telescoped in the, uh, in the understanding of the prophet, and also what God was revealing at that time.

[ 27 : 54 ] So, here, we, uh, we're starting to see, I think, from verse 36 onwards, uh, an overlap, kind of like it's almost, it's half opened, an overlap between Antiochus Epiphanes, and then something or someone else in a time beyond the second century, and maybe even beyond, uh, the early church's life, maybe even around our lifetime.

It seems like we're actually looking at a type or a figure of the Antichrist. Now, I think there are good reasons from the text itself to see this as not in the second century, but now some way in the future. The end time, if you will. And in fact, that's the first clue that expression, the time of the end. If you see at the end of verse, um, 35, some of the wise shall fall so that they may be refined, purified, and cleansed until the time of the end, for there is still an interval until the time appointed.

Then we see it again in verse 40. At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him. And then finally, we see it again in chapter 12, verse 4.

But you, Daniel, keep the word secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Now, that's the biggest clue of all, and we'll talk about chapter 12 next week, but here, the time of the end, the first bit of chapter 12, is talking about the resurrection of the dead.

[ 30 : 00 ] And so clearly, we're not talking about the history of the life of Antiochus Epiphanes. We're talking about the time of the end, the end of human history, when Jesus will return.

And so, we can see that we're moving at the end of chapter 11 to describing a person or persons that will be active in the time of the end.

And we get another clue that this is the case when we see the language kind of become a bit more vague and a bit more mythical or symbolic. So, in verse 41, you can see that it's those ancient enemies of Israel, Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, that become aligned with the king that escape. The enemies of the people of God are rising up. In verse 43, it's this king rather than the Israelites when they did it in the Exodus that have suddenly got all the riches, all the plunder, all the gold and silver of Egypt.

The king is doing the opposite of what the people of God did. And then in verse 45, says he sets his tents up between the sea and the holy mountain.

[ 31 : 17 ] Now, again, if we were kind of reading all the way through the book of Daniel in one go, we'd have to drink a lot of coffee, but we would also notice that the sea is an important symbolic place from whence evil comes.

The beasts in chapter seven, the four beasts, you can read about that yourself sometime, don't do it before bed, it'll give you nightmares, but the four beasts, the evil kingdoms that oppose God and his kingdom come from the sea.

The sea is the symbolic place where the enemies of God arise. And the beautiful mountain, of course, is the Mount Zion, the place where God dwells.

This figure towards the time of the end is going to be someone that's coming from the place of evil and trying to attack the city of God, if you will.

You might recall in Revelation, the last book of the Bible, in chapter 13, the apostle John, who's getting this revelation, also sees a beast arise from the sea, and the description of this beast, which is a type of antichrist figure, is so much like the king described at the end of this chapter, it's uncanny.

[ 32 : 39 ] It says, the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words. It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it.

Now, did that last bit remind you of anything? I was really startled when I read that because I was just looking in Revelation for seas and beasts and then I read what happens.

The beast seems to have this echo and opposite of the words of Daniel chapter 7 about the true Messiah. He will be given dominion and glory and kingship and all peoples, nations and languages should serve him.

And this is exactly what the beast, the contemptible person, the king who does as he pleases, the antichrist is all about. Opposing and usurping the authority that should be Christ's.

Requiring allegiances from us that should only be given to Christ. That's why he's called antichrist because he opposes him at every level.

[ 34 : 02 ] in every sense. And so this figure that's kind of described in these symbolic and more broad terms at the end of this chapter, standing between the sea and the holy mountain of God, is a type of the antichrist.

And he's a pattern that's picked up in the New Testament to describe all those who oppose God and God's Messiah, Jesus. Jesus. And the first letter of John in the New Testament tells us that there will actually be lots of antichrists, that people can be antichrist, they can oppose God, they can try and usurp his authority.

But there seems that there will be one person or movement that will particularly arise before Jesus returns.

And I really don't know all the details of this and how best to explain it to you. But Paul says in 2 Thessalonians, let no one deceive you in any way, for the day of the Lord will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.

He opposes and exalts himself over every so-called God or object of worship, sound familiar? So that he takes his seat in the temple of God, sound familiar?

[ 35 : 27 ] Declaring himself to be God, sound familiar? The Lord Jesus Christ will destroy him with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.

clearly these words from Daniel, not just in chapter 11, but as I said, chapter 7, 8, 9, they were understood by the early church to have this future referent, to have a meaning that was beyond the second century.

And they had good reason to take those words that way, because Jesus did. Jesus himself said in Matthew 24, when you see the desolating sacrilege, or the abomination that makes desolate, standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.

Jesus understood about the telescoping of prophetic history. He knew that that was an event that was fulfilled in the second century, but then he, with the wisdom of God, knows that it can be drawn out.

Second section, it's the first century AD, it's the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem for the final time, 70 AD.

[ 36 : 55 ] And then, in that same chapter, he kind of pulls it out even more, and talks about his second coming, when he would come on the clouds with the angels.

So he knows that this prophecy, yes, had its fulfillment, will have its fulfillment in that generation, and then would have another fulfillment to come.

So, Daniel, in the sixth century, is given a revelation. It tells of the history of the period, and yet, it has a further fulfillment.

in the first century AD, and then a fulfillment that the apostles and we are still awaiting. And what is the essence of this revelation?

What is it to teach us? Well, it teaches us about two things, about power and about suffering. Yes, we're back, power and suffering.

[ 38 : 00 ] See, in every age, there will be those who oppose Christ and his people, and they, or those movements, will offer only two alternatives to me and you.

Follow or fear. Be bought and be on our side, or be bullied and lose. Be enticed, jump on board, get the power, be enticed, or be intimidated.

be seduced, or be slaughtered. This is what Antiochus did. He either purchased loyalty, or he persecuted faith.

This is what happened to the early Christians under the Roman Empire. Either they made their sacrifices to Caesar and had full bellies and fat wallets, or they took their stand on Jesus Christ and suffered extra taxes, deprivation, torture, martyrdom.

And around the world today, isn't it the same choice that Christians are making over and over again? Stay a Muslim, or a communist, or a Hindu, or a materialist, or suffer rejection, economic and educational hardship, imprisonment, torture, death.

[ 39 : 23 ] But actually, whether you choose to be on the side of the powerful, or to be with those and experience the suffering, the revelation that Daniel receives would give the same answer to both.

If you choose to live by human power and exalt yourself or align yourself with those who exalt themselves above God, then know this. God is still in control and it will all come to an end. But if you choose to live by God's ways, humble yourself to suffering for his name in whatever way, big or small, then know this.

God is still in control and it will all come to an end. God is still in control and it will all come to an end.

Now that would be a good and powerful place to end tonight. But I know that not everyone here will actually be connecting with one of those two options.

[ 40 : 50 ] Some of you might be just swimming along nicely, no big challenges, not too much temptation either, just okay. So what about you? When I was in Malaysia in 2006, I was at a conference and I heard a girl called Heather Mercer speak.

She's about my age, she's a Christian and she's a missionary. In 2001, she and another woman were working in Afghanistan amongst the poor, running programs to help them and they would share Jesus when they had the opportunity.

One day, when they were visiting the home of a Muslim woman, the Taliban knocked on the door, came into the house, arrested them and threw them in jail. They were in jail for four months in Afghanistan before the US Special Forces kind of rescued slash arranged for their release.

And as she told about this at the conference, shared her experience, there was no bitterness in her voice, no anger and she described how she and her fellow Christians that were in jail would sing songs together and pray together and tell each other the parts of the Bible that they remembered and they were just really trusting in God for his peace and for his deliverance.

peace. And when you're hearing something like this from someone who's very much the same age and stage as you, you can't help but ask the question of yourself, what would I be like in that situation?

[ 42 : 26 ] If I was thrown in jail, would I automatically become someone who could quote scripture and keep everyone's spirits up and sing songs and trust God in the darkness of my cell?

if I was under the oppression of Antiochus epiphanies, how would I stand up? How will I go when antichrists confront me to make a choice?

And then Heather Mercer said something that absolutely cut me to the heart. She said, yes, you know, we exercised our faith in jail, it sounds great, but we could only draw on what was already there.

If we didn't have that type of relationship with God before, it wasn't going to suddenly magically appear just because we were arrested. We could only draw on what was already there, what was already there in our faith, if you like, in our soul, in the bank account of our belief.

And that is the challenge for us who are swimming along nicely, thanks. We haven't chosen the antichrist way of human power and exaltation, but we haven't found ourselves in significant suffering.

[ 43 : 53 ] We have to know that if that suffering comes, we will only be able to draw on what is there. Now, of course, God gives you special grace, but he is asking us now to build up our reserves, to fill up our spiritual bank account, if you like, not in terms of earning stuff with God, but full of praise and scripture and trust and faith.

faith. So when those choices require us to write those hard checks, our soul can cash them. And you know what?

That's exactly what verse 32 in this chapter describes. And let me read it to you from the NIV, a little clearer here. with flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

The people who know their God will firmly resist him. You see, that is the antidote to the Antichrist that we need to be taking now and every day.

we must know our God. We must become wise in the ways of God. We must take our wisdom from God's revelation.

[ 45 : 25 ] We must share our understanding, instructing each other as they did back then, so each of us knows God better, more deeply.

We need to know our God. And even if we do stumble, if we know our God, we will be able to stand again because we know that God is gracious, God is forgiving, God is always good, and that God is still in control, and it will all come to an end.

Amen.