

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Unshaken_ Daniel Chapter 11 – Courage in Crisis
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Go ahead and open your Bible up to Daniel chapter 11. Now if you are a Bible highlighter, I'm gonna venture a guess that you don't have much highlighted in this area. I didn't. And I think it's because in western Christianity, we are often trained to search for the nugget of encouragement, for the devotional thought for the day, for the personal verse that I can put into application and this is why we don't know what to do with Daniel 11. It's why we skip over the genealogies because they're just full of the names of people that we don't know and we can't pronounce. It's why we skip over the division of land in the last half of the book of Joshua, because it's just a bunch of places that we can't identify on a map. And yet for the original audience of these texts, these passages would have been of utmost importance, not because it gave them a little shot of devotional encouragement for the day, not because they looked nice on a watercolor print hanging in the kitchen, but because it gave them a perspective. Because passages like this gave them a long view of history, gave them a high view of God and the work that he was doing in the world, and a deep understanding of the courage and the patience and the endurance that they were to model to the world around them. It was within the details of the grand narrative that they found their true identity that they found the resilience they needed for challenging circumstances that they found the hope they need to stand firm, that the promises of God would come to pass. You see, I think sometimes we come to the Bible, looking for platitudes and what we are given is perspective and posture.

Now, Daniel chapter 10, through 12 kind of operates as one unit. In Daniel 10 we have a messenger, a Heavenly Messenger that shows up to give Daniel a message. And last week, Pastor Joel, so brilliantly and gently challenged us to see that there is a spiritual battle going on around us. And then in Daniel chapter 11, we have the contents of that messenger's vision that are unpacked. And in that moment, the camera angle changes. It changes from the battle that's going on in the spiritual shows us what is going on in the struggle in the earthly realm. And then next week in Daniel chapter 12, we find the conclusion we find the response of God's people and we'll tie this series in a knot.

So Daniel 11 contains some of the most detailed prophetic writing that we find in all of Scripture. There is such specificity that is given here and what it does is it takes the previous visions that we saw in Daniel chapter two and seven and eight, and replaces these images of statues and goats and rams and winged lions, with references to actual literal, historical kings and kingdoms. It is written like prophecy, but it reads like history. So, let me try to run through these verses with us.

Daniel 11, verse two, this is the message from the messenger. *"Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise 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 of Greece."*

So, this angelic messenger is telling Daniel, look, the kingdom of Persia, where you're currently living is beginning to wane, it is coming to an end.

And then in Daniel 11, verse three, *"Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. 4 After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. 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."*

The mighty king referenced here is if we know from history, Alexander the Great. He meets an untimely death at the age of 32 and his empire is then divided out into four parts that go to his four generals. Now I brought a map so we can see what's going on with this land. So as you'll see, there's a general named Ptolemy, who took charge of the Empire to the south. In Egypt, a second general Seleucus takes control of the northern territory of Syria. And you can see how this is divided out in the map. And if you look right in the middle, if you look for where Jerusalem is located, you see the area of Judah of Israel, the land of the people of God. And as we will see, as we continue reading, this becomes a place of conflict for many years. They're right smack in the middle of a war zone.

Now, the next 30 verses give us such detail of history. That while Daniel doesn't even give us the actual names, he refers to them generically as the King of the North, not to be confused with Game of Thrones, and the King of the South. We can literally take this text and a history textbook and line up those kings with actual literal historical figures. Now, for those of you that love history, and you love charts, and you're kind of nerdy, I brought a chart for you so that we can use it today as we go through and talk about what's going to happen in these next 30 something verses. So again, we're going to show you that they're the kings of the north and the kings of the south and all of the verses that line up with their rule.

After his death, Alexander's four generals assume control of his empire. And again, as we'll see, there's the king of the South, Ptolemy in Egypt and the king of the North, Seleucus in Syria. In Daniel 11:6 Ptolemy is going to give his...Ptolemy II is going to give his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II to try to have a politically arranged marriage to bring peace. Here's the problem Antiochus II had to divorce his first wife in order to marry Bernice so the discarded first wife poisons Antiochus II, Bernice and their son. So that plan, that little backdoor deal didn't work out so great, the people of God still stuck right in the middle.

Verses seven and eight Ptolemy III, Berenice's brother, seeks revenge for her death by launching an attack on the northern kingdom. He's going to humiliate them by plundering their gold and their silver and their sacred objects, taking them back to Egypt. Eventually Seleucus is going to regain... Seleucus II is going to regain control of Syria and then try to attack Egypt but he's going to fail. Again, the people of God stuck right in the middle of these warring zones.

Now the next 10 years are going to outline the exploits of Antiochus III also known as Antiochus the Great. He is going to manage to dominate Near East politics for the next three decades. He's going to take control of Jerusalem. He's going to hope to gain control of Egypt. And in doing so he's going to try to arrange another political marriage by giving his daughter Cleopatra, not to be confused with Antony and Cleopatra that's going to come later, we won't get to that this weekend. He's going to try to give his daughter in marriage to the Ptolemaic king in Egypt in hopes that he can gain control. The problem is his daughter sides with her new husband, and she sides with Egypt and it comes to no avail.

In verse 18, we find that Antiochus becomes a little too greedy; he turns his eyes to the coastlands. And there he is defeated by a rising star on the world stage Thermopylae, the Roman army. And this is actually going to set the stage for the advance of the Roman Empire in the years to come. The youngest son of Antiochus III is going to be taken hostage to Rome.

After that, in verse 20, we see the brief reign of Seleucus IV, who will impose tremendous taxes on the people of God in Judah. And then in verse 21, we read this, *“He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue”*.

Enter Antiochus IV, this is the son of Antiochus the Great returning from hostage. This is Antiochus Epiphanes or as the Jewish people would nicknamed him, Antiochus Epimanes, a madman. We have encountered this guy before and he is bad news. He is going to desecrate the temple in Jerusalem. He's going to sacrifice a pig on the altar. He's going to raise an image of Zeus. He's going to outlaw circumcision, attack the Jewish people on the Sabbath and publicly burn their scriptures. This is the pivot point that is going to spark the Maccabean Revolt in 168 BC.

So Daniel is basically told by this messenger, the exile has come to an end, but things are going to get worse before they get better. So, if we think about the people that are living in this land between these two warring empires stuck in this conflict zone, their ancestors had lived in Babylon through exile. They've now been restored to the land, they're living in the land, but they are still suffering and it raises a lot of questions. And we find that the people of God are faced with a crisis. They're faced with a crisis of identity. They're faced with a crisis of faith, and they're faced with a crisis of hope.

Now, the crisis of identity begins at the very beginning of Daniel 11 because of the way they tie their identity to the land, their connection to the land. See, this land had been promised by Abraham. And when God promised it to Abraham, he said, I'm going to bless you, and I'm going to make you a blessing to all the nations. Now this unique spot that God put his people today, we may not understand the significance of it. But at that moment in time, it was a land bridge that connected the southern kingdom of the Nile River with the thriving civilizations of Mesopotamia to the north. God put his people at the crossroads of the ancient world. If you want to get your message out, if you want these people to be a blessing to all the nations, you put them at the crossroads. So here are the people are they're back at the

crossroads, but they're not free. They're tossed back and forth between these two kingdoms. And it raises the questions, who are we, and what is our role in the world. And as we'll see in history throughout this text, they oscillate back and forth and then they fracture. Some Jewish people support the Seleucid rulers and empires and others will break off and support the Ptolemy's and Egypt. In fact, at one point, there's a group of Jewish people that rise up to all offer their military strength to Antiochus III believing that his tyranny is preferable to that of the Ptolemy's. And then that backfires on them when Antiochus III turns his violence towards them. And in this crisis of identity, instead of recognizing their unique role and calling as the people of God, to partner with God, to show a different way to live, to partner with God to help tell his redemptive story on the human stage of history, they allow themselves to become puppets on a political string.

Now, this crisis of identity comes to a boiling point under the reign of Antiochus IV because he strips them of the very symbol that is important to their identity. When Antiochus IV outlaws circumcision he is removing the symbol that God gave to his people to remind them of their special identity as God's people. This crisis of identity also leads to a crisis of faith.

Now, this crisis of faith is not so much about what's going on in the world around them as it is what's going on between them and God. Because at this point in the story, it seems like God has left the building, their faith isn't working the way it should. God is not showing up the way that he could, or he should. See what the people of God were told in Deuteronomy was if you are obedient, you will be blessed and you will flourish. If you are disobedient, you're going to be exiled or you're going to be occupied. Now in Daniel three, we see that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are delivered from the fiery furnace because of their obedience. In Daniel six we see that Daniel is delivered from the lion's den because of his obedience, this merges well with that theology. When you are obedient, you will be blessed. But here we are, and they understand, they understand that from the writings of the prophets that they have been sent into exile because of their disobedience. So they get it. They go, they learn their lesson, and then they come back to the land. Zerubbabel rebuilds the temple, Ezra restores worship, Nehemiah restores vision and rebuilds the wall and the people are walking in obedience, but they are still suffering. God has restored them to the land but he has not restored their freedom. The people have returned to obedience, but God has not restored the blessing and this creates a tension in their faith.

Where is the reward for our obedience? Where has God gone? What has happened to the promises of God? And it comes to a boiling point again under the reign of Antiochus IV. Because in that situation, it's not just that they're being oppressed in spite of their obedience, they are being oppressed, specifically because of their obedience. And so the Prophet shows us this evolution of thought, this recognition that absolutely, there are moments when God delivers from but there are also times when God delivers through and this belief that perhaps he will deliver later.

We see the rise in the prophetic writings, even the book of Daniel two themes. One is the coming of the Son of Man. We talked about that a few weeks ago, this righteous judge who will show up and settle the

accounts of human history. And then we see the rise of this idea of the resurrection of the dead, that if we are not rewarded for our obedience in this life, that God will reward us in a resurrection in eternity.

Now, it's interesting, these two ideas, the Son of Man, and the resurrection of the dead, we find them in the book of Daniel, we find them in prophetic writings, and this is going to shape the theological landscape and the spiritual climate of the Jewish people, for the coming of Jesus. Because Jesus is going to grab on to these themes of Son of man and resurrection of the dead, he is going to identify himself with them, and he is going to fulfill them.

And then they have a crisis of hope, got a crisis of identity, who are we what is our role in the world? A crisis of faith, why are things not working the way they should. And then a crisis of hope, what is in store in the future? Where are we going? What is happening? And when will this Son of Man appear?

So let's just take a moment to kind of sum up. So messenger comes to Daniel says, hey, things are going to get worse before they get better. And then he recounts this cycle of history in which kings rise and kings fall and kingdoms emerge and kingdoms vanish. And yet with every single one of them finitude is written into their story, every single one of them comes to an end. Do not put your faith in earthly leaders because their time will come to a close. Meanwhile, God outlives and outlasts every king and every kingdom. They're called to be a people who partner with God and the redemptive story that he is writing in human history and to confront their crisis of identity they have got to root down in faithfulness, to be obedient, no matter what. They've got to recognize that they can't sell themselves to be pawns and puppets to any cultural or social or political power.

Now we're going to talk a little bit more about it in our after sermon Q & A, because look, many of you, like Daniel, are working in the political sphere, and we honor you. There is a difference between being a prophetic voice with a prophetic imagination to step into that God given calling like Daniel, and to succumb to this idea that we're just going to be a puppet on political strings. In order to confront their crisis of faith, they've got to walk in patience, not letting the circumstances around them change their dogged determination, to stand on the promises of God to recognize that sometimes God delivers from but he also delivers through. And he delivers later to look forward and to anchor themselves in the belief that the Son of Man is coming, and that the resurrection is our reward. And they have to confront their crisis of hope by being people who are very aware of the circumstances around them or not ignoring the circumstances around them. They see the news. They feel the tension. They see the pain, and yet they refuse to believe that the current circumstances are the end of the story. They put their trust in the story that God is writing. They put trust in the author of that story. They recognize that God outlives and outlasts every earthly kingdom that he is sovereign, that he holds the entirety of history and he is in the details. God sees you. He hears you, He knows you and He loves you.

Now, the next several verses are interesting 36 to 45. This is where the details of the text do not match the details of history. We find that that Antiochus IV, at least from what we know of history does not

launch another attack, a third attack on Egypt; he does not die in Palestine. And this has led many scholars to believe that at this point in the text, the vision pivots to an even future time in human history. That Antiochus IV is a type of a coming tyrant that we might call today, the Antichrist. Now, this is gonna merge into what we're talking about next weekend in Daniel chapter 12. So we'll pick it up there.

The brilliance of Daniel, the writing of Daniel the brilliance is that while it is so specific that we can tie it meticulously to details in history, it also transcends so that it provides hope to people living in every era. This writing gave hope to people that were living under the oppression of Antiochus IV. Jesus is going to pick up these themes and ideas and he's going to use them to give hope to people of his day living under Roman occupation. And then John in Revelation is going to grab these themes again, and use them to give people hope of his generation, that God is still sovereign, and not only in that time, but for times to come in the future.

Now, I think we face similar points of crisis today. Crisis of identity - who has God created to be? Who has God called us to be? Are we building resilience or are we simply seeking stability? Think about the prayers we're praying right now. I just want to ask you to consider the prayers that you are praying right now. Are those prayers primarily about seeking your comfort, seeking your stability, seeking certainty? I mean, pick a crisis, any crisis, COVID crisis, racial crisis coming into an election season crisis, our kids are going back to school, at home crisis. Are we praying primarily for our own comfort and stability? Or are we praying that we would partner with God in his story and be prophetic voices to our culture for the flourishing of not only our lives but of all of creation? Where do we root our identity crisis of faith? What do we believe? Do we allow the events going on around us to change how we understand the promises of God? Or do we stand with determination on the promises of God and let those give us perspective on how to view the circumstances that are around us? Crisis of hope - what is happening? Where are we going? Who is in control?

In sixth century Babylon, it looked like the Babylon's were in control. In the second century BC, it looked like Antiochus Epiphanes was in control. In the first century AD it looked like the Roman government was in control. And every single one of them are ancient history now, but God is still sovereign, and God is still on the throne and God is still writing his story.

I think we stand at a unique moment in the story of God. Because to go back to those themes of the Son of Man and the resurrection of the dead, we actually stand at a moment of history where the Son of Man is both past and future, where the resurrection of the dead is both past and future. The Son of Man has come, Jesus came and he walked on earth and he walked on water and he multiplied food and he healed the sick and he showed honor to the outcast. He was crucified because he was a threat to the establishment. He came out of the grave. He ascended into heaven. The coming of the Son of Man is a part of our history, but it is also a part of our future.

If we turn to the very last pages of this text in Revelation 22:20, it's the next to the last verse. It is the last words of Jesus, he says, *"Yes, I am coming soon"*. The coming of the Son of Man is in the past, it's also in the future. And not only that, the resurrection of the dead 1 Corinthians 15:20, *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man."* Jesus reversed the laws of creation that he created and stepped out of the grave. The resurrection is our reward. The reward for our obedience is not comfort. It is not an easy life. It is not stability. It is not a political agenda. It is resurrection. Jesus came to give us resurrection.

I want to invite our worship team to come back but I want to make a couple of invitations today. First, some of you need to make a commitment to Jesus today. You have served other kings and other kingdoms and it has not worked out. Jesus is here today. Wherever you are, wherever you are joining us today, I believe the presence of Christ is in that place and he is looking for partners in his story. And that begins by bowing the knee to his Lordship. Would you take that step today? Would you hit that raise hand button and let us walk with you?

And then some of you today, you need to hit that request prayer button. Well, our prayer team is standing by, they are prayed up, they are ready to pray with you. If you're facing a crisis of identity today, would you just go on and ask them to speak the promises of God over you, to bless you, to tell you who you are in Christ. If you're facing a crisis of faith, borrow some faith from them for a few moments today. And if you're facing a crisis of hope, let them speak encouragement and endurance and faithfulness and resilience over your life.

God, we come to you today and we recognize that you have history in your hands and you are in the details. Give us courage in crisis as we are rooting our identity in Christ. Give us courage in crisis, as we practice patience as we wait for your promises. Give us courage in crisis when we cling to hope and believe that the rest of the story is being written. God, today we recognize you've got it, you've got us, you've got the past, the present and the future. And we will look at our current circumstances from Heaven's perspective, and we will wait for your promises with faith and patience, and hope. Jesus name Amen.