

**Daniel 11:36-45, No. 17**  
**“The Approaching End”**

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We return to Daniel after missing a Lord’s Day, so let me remind you that chapter 11 contains the content of the vision that had been given to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus, that is, 535 B.C. The vision covered the years and the political developments in the near eastern world from that time through the fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the division of Alexander’s conquests between four of his generals, and the subsequent history of two of those smaller kingdoms, the Ptolemaic (Egyptian) and Seleucid (Syrian). But all of that was prelude to the prophecy of a twelve year period in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. (175-164). During those years the Jews would find themselves caught in the pincers of those two empires, fall prey to the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who would make a concerted effort to destroy the Jews as a distinct religious community, and finally, through the heroic resistance of the Maccabees, would win back their freedom and restore the true worship of God. By the way, the term “Maccabees,” originally attached to a particular family, a father and his five sons. The third son had the surname or perhaps nickname “Maccabeus.” Each son had a different such name. In this case don’t think of it as a last name or family name but as some distinctive personal characteristic belonging to each man. The name “Maccabeus” derived from the Hebrew word for “hammer,” apparently because Judas and his brothers delivered hammer blows to the enemies of Israel. Then the term was extended to refer to their followers, the Jews who fought the Seleucids and eventually drove them from the Holy Land.

**Text Comment**

Now the whole difficulty of the passage we are about to read is to determine who is the person being described in vv. 36-45. Is this a continuation of the description of Antiochus or are these verses about someone else entirely? There is no obvious transitional statement separating v. 35 from v. 36, but have we, in fact, moved to a different historical horizon? We will take up that question tonight, but first let’s read the text.

- v.36 The pride of this king together with his fall will be epic. They are described here in words similar to those found in Isaiah 14:12-14, a text widely thought to describe events at the end of history, even though the prophecy of that chapter originated in an oracle forecasting the judgment of Babylon. The indignation could be the defilement of the temple or could be the wrath of God against his own people and so the cause of their persecution. Or it could be this figure’s indignation or hatred of the people of God.
- v.37 This ruler is a figure who will reject the religion of his people because he imagines himself a god greater than all the others. “The god loved by women” was a description of Tammuz, the Mesopotamian fertility god, also mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14, where it is said that women wept for him as he died, only, of course, to rise again as any good fertility god would do every spring. His indifference to women sounds right in any case. Great men seeking great power rarely treasure the lives and gifts of women or show them proper respect. Calvin, in reference to this statement about women, said, with what I

think is a fine insight, this ruler will cultivate neither piety nor humanity. A mark of true humanity is the way women are treated by men. This man will be a brute like so many great men before him.

If this statement is made in reference to Antiochus it must refer to this effort to replace the middle eastern pantheon with the Greek in his pursuit of his larger policy of Hellenization. Antiochus, remember, was a devotee of all things Greek. His effort to wipe out Jewish religion was part of a larger effort to Hellenize the Levant, to make it Greek. It was his effort to transform the temple in Jerusalem into a temple to Zeus that was the proximate cause of the Maccabean rebellion. But in Hellenizing his kingdom he was, of course, rejecting the gods of the ancient near eastern pantheon. Further, like any king of that time and place, religion was practiced in the service of politics. Kings generally, like most human beings of every time and place, thought themselves more important than any god. [cf. Goldingay, 304]

- v.38 What is this “god of fortresses”? It seems to be simply another way of saying that he trusted to his own military might and prowess and his desire for conquest. Antiochus had a lifelong lust for power and this either refers to him or uses Antiochus as a model for a still greater figure that would come after him. In any case, power was his god and he devoted all his resources to the service of that god.
- v.39 He will accumulate power the old fashioned way: by buying the loyalty of people who can help him. In Antiochus’ case, the foreign god would, again, be Zeus. The foreign god who helps him is difficult. Perhaps it is most simply a reference to the idol of power and conquest referred to in the previous verse as the “god of fortresses.”
- v.40 “The time of the end” could refer to the end of Antiochus’ pride and power, true enough. But the language that follows and, in particular, the fact that chapter 12, in reference to *that time*, describes the Last Judgment, have led many to think that the end being referred to is the end of world history itself.
- v.45 None of this material in vv. 40-45 can be squared with what is known of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. He did not extend his power over many countries such as is said in vv. 42-43. Nor did he die, as we read in v. 45, between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea. Antiochus died suddenly on a military expedition to the east in 164 B.C., not in Palestine.

The final sentence of the chapter is a masterpiece of narrative art. This great king, this mighty force in the world, this ruler before whom multitudes trembled in fear, is dismissed with a wave of the hand.

So we begin our consideration of this text by asking: “Who is this king who does what he pleases?” Surely it is natural to suppose that he is the same king that Daniel has been describing in the previous verses. There is no indication in the text itself that Daniel was moving from one subject to another, now to describe another person than Antiochus Epiphanes and his reign in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. On the other hand, the last sentence of v. 35 has been taken to have

concluded the vision's description of Antiochus and his reign: "...until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time." Such general statements are difficult and have to be carefully considered in their context. [Davis, 156] After all, the vision is concerned with the Jews and their history. It does not seem to be particularly interested in Antiochus other than as an enemy of the Jews. When the Jews were delivered from his persecutions it is natural to suppose that the vision might move on to someone else. That point is accepted by many scholars, but that leads them to suppose that what we have in vv. 36-45 is *a recapitulation* of Antiochus' reign, the whole story in a nutshell repeated for emphasis.

That vv. 40-45 don't seem to fit what we know of Antiochus' life, military conquests, and death is widely explained in some biblical scholarship in this way. Up to that point in the prophecy the author, whoever he was, was describing events that had already happened, even if he was writing them under the guise of predictive prophecy. That's why he is so accurate. He's simply telling what had already happened. But when Daniel was written Antiochus was still alive and kicking and so at this point the author took a stab at predicting what was to come and, because he wasn't actually a prophet, he simply missed by a country mile. He guessed at what Antiochus' later career would look like and, like most people who attempt to predict the future, he got it wrong. In other words, in the one place in Daniel where there is actual prediction of future events, the prediction proved wholly inaccurate. That is what you are left with if you hold that Daniel was written in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and does not, in fact, contain prophesies first given in the later 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

However, what is certainly clear is that the Jews who accepted Daniel as the Word of God *believed that these verses at the end of chapter 11 were divine prophecy*. They did not reject them because they were obviously an inaccurate account of Antiochus' later reign. That suggests that the Jews in fact did not think that Daniel was actually a book of history written under the guise of prophecy, as has been suggested by those who have argued that the Jews would have known that Daniel was written in the mid-160s B.C., that the events described in it had already happened, but that they understood "prophecy after the fact" as an acceptable literary device. If this is what Daniel is, a prophecy of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the end of chapter 11 is a serious problem, because it bungles the history in a way any Jew would have immediately recognized. They knew, for example, that Antiochus hadn't died in Palestine. Both 1 and 2 Maccabees relate Antiochus' death on campaign in Persia. [Lucas, 290-291] Another problem is that, as the Jews well knew, Antiochus *couldn't and didn't* do as he pleased. The Romans had sent him packing from Egypt with his tail between his legs. The Jews knew that. They knew that by the end of his reign he was struggling to pay the tribute demanded by the Romans. We already read something of that in verse 30. *That suggests rather plainly that the original readers did not think these verses were about Antiochus!* They knew he didn't match this description.

So, we are left with this: either the Jews didn't in fact accept prophecy after the fact as a legitimate literary device – there are other very good reasons to think they wouldn't have and didn't – or they were hoodwinked into thinking this was real prophecy, despite the historical errors, which makes Daniel more a fraud than sacred Scripture and makes the Jews dupes. *Remember, the Jews had been taught from Moses's day to distinguish a true prophet from a false precisely by whether his prophecy came true!* [Duguid, 195] I say again, the idea that the Jews would have received Daniel as Holy Scripture virtually as soon as it was written in the 2<sup>nd</sup>

century B.C. – there is no dispute that Daniel is considered Holy Scripture by the Jews long before Christ and is found among the books of the Bible at Qumran – is very, very unlikely. Most Jews did not believe any book of the Bible was written after Malachi, written in the mid- to later 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. They thought the contents of Daniel 11 were delivered to the prophet in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

So, should we believe that vv. 36-45 are actually describing a different person than Antiochus, a person who lived later than him, perhaps much later? The Jews thought so and so have most Christians. This ruler who does what he pleases has, through the ages been identified with a number of figures:

1. The Jewish rabbi Ibn Ezra took to be a reference to Constantine the Great who recognized Christianity in the Roman Empire of the early 4<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Calvin took it to be a prophecy of the Roman Empire.
3. Many at the time of the Reformation and after saw these verses as a reference to the Pope.
4. Some have taken it to refer to the house of King Herod. Thus the time of the end would be the time of the end of the Jews as a nation located in Palestine with a temple in Jerusalem.
5. And, of course, at least since Jerome a great many have seen these verses as predicting the reign of the Antichrist at the end of history. [Young, 246-247]

I think most of those interpretations are very unpersuasive – and they're held by few today – but the standard Christian interpretation, since Jerome, who wrote his famous commentary in the early years of the fifth century (c. 407), is that these verses describe the person and career of the figure we know as the Antichrist. This is the figure, also described in the New Testament as the Man of Lawlessness or as the Beast, who will precipitate and lead the final rebellion of the wicked against the kingdom of God that will precede the Second Coming. I think this identification of the king who does what he pleases is far and away the most likely and the arguments for it the most persuasive.

The first thing to remember is that this practice of telescoping the future or foreshortening the future is a characteristic feature of biblical prophecy. We find it everywhere and, characteristically, as here, between vv. 35 and 36, the biblical author does not tell us that he is moving from a nearer historical horizon to a more distant one. Indeed, we've already encountered this in Daniel. We argued that the fourth beast in chapters 7-8 is not simply the next empire in turn after the first three, but a power at the end of history. But the author doesn't tell us that. He moves seamlessly from one horizon to the other. Other features indicate the change in his horizon. In the same way the seventieth week in chapter 9 refers to a time in the far distant future. In each case, the nearer thing or things – empires or periods of history or judgments or individuals – serve as models or anticipations of that which is to come at the end of history. History, in other words, culminates with a figure who is Antiochus Epiphanes to the nth degree. In all three of these prophecies in Daniel the forecast of the future stretches from Daniel's own time to the end of history, but each recognizes an organic connection between the beginning and the end; the consummation at the end of history is simply the evil, the violence, stemming from the repudiation of God of which human history has always been full but on a far larger scale,

indeed a cosmic scale. This is Antiochus *redivivus* (*reborn*), Antiochus' effort to destroy the faith of God's people but in a measure, on a scale, and with a virulence that Antiochus could never have imagined.

Take, for example, the Lord's Olivette discourse, the one apocalyptic prophecy that comes directly from his lips. He began talking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple but somewhere in the middle he seems to have turned to talk not about events in A.D. 70 but the end of the world and his Second Coming. Remember, he also spoke of the "abomination of desolation, mentioned earlier in this chapter 11, and saw it as a foretaste, an anticipation, a fulfillment of the abomination that Antiochus had placed in the temple in Jerusalem. Historical events are often descriptive of the pattern of final events at the end of history. You remember, for example, that Noah's flood is used as a pattern or a picture or a foretaste or an anticipation of the destruction of the world at the Second Coming. As here in Daniel 11 there have long been arguments about the reference of the Lord's remarks in Matthew 24. Some have held that throughout his discourse he spoke only of the destruction of Jerusalem; others that he spoke only of his Second Coming; but most have thought – and I certainly think they have the better of the argument – that he is speaking about both, the one – the destruction of the temple – being a model for or an anticipation of the judgment of the world at the Second Coming.

Well, there are the same sort of features in this prophecy, the last ten verses of Daniel 11, that we find in these other apocalypses as well, features that seem to me rather clearly to shift our horizon from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century to that of the end of the world.

1. As I said already, the fact that chapter 12, in referring to *that time*, that is the time that had just been described in the last verses of the previous chapter, speaks clearly of the end of history and the Last Judgment is certainly a strong reason to take 11:36-45 as referring to that final confrontation between unbelieving man and the kingdom of God that will presage the end of history and the final judgment of men and nations. The opening verses of chapter 12 and their connection to what has come before them certainly provides a reason for taking the phrase "the time of the end" in v. 40 as meaning "the time of *the* end," that is, the end of history.

2. But there is more than that. A second argument for seeing the Antichrist in this description is that the language of these verses is "bigger-than-life" or "over-the-top." [Longman, 281] The greatness of this man's power, the arrogance that he demonstrates, his many conquests, and so on, all suggest a scope that is cosmic and absolute. "He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god." "He shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods." Compare those statements to what Paul says about the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2.

"Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." [2:3-4]

It is the striking similarity of description between this personage in Daniel 11 and that of the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians, the Beast in Revelation 17, and the Antichrist in 1 John

that has confirmed most Christian commentators in their conclusion that all of these passages are prophesying the coming of the same figure who will arise near the end of history.

That identification is further confirmed by the similarity of the description of this person's eventual fall and destruction here in Daniel and elsewhere. For example, compare the last verse of chapter 11 with 2 Thessalonians 2:8:

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, who the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.”

This man will rise to extraordinary, unprecedented power and then, poof, he's gone. Add one striking similarity to another and it has proved hard for most of the church's wisest scholars to avoid the conclusion that Daniel and Paul are talking about the same person and the same moment in history

Now some of this perspective depends on appreciating the apocalyptic genre. We have said before that many if not most of our disagreements about end-time scenarios result from the difficulty we have appreciating apocalyptic prophecy, strange and alien as it is to us, and heavily laden with symbols as it is. A well-known Tacoma pastor, coming to the end of his long ministry when I arrived in Tacoma in the late 1970s, wrote a book on the end times in which he explained the reference in v.40 to a battle fought with chariots and horsemen as an indication that by the end of the world the oil would have run out and wars would once again be fought with more primitive weapons. But that kind of literalism completely mistakes the genre, taking images of warfare common to the ancient near east and so familiar to the original readers as literal predictions of the distant future.

Consider this. In these verses we read of the king of the south and the king of the north, we read of Edom and Moab and the Ammonites, of Egypt, the Libyans and the Cushites. What are we to do with this? Once again, an appreciation of the genre in which this prophecy is cast is crucial. It makes all the difference to your interpretation of these verses. It is a failure to respect the nature of apocalyptic prophecy that has resulted in so much fanciful interpretation through the ages and in our own time. Many have thought, for example, that the king of the north must be Russia. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century this accounted for the excited speculation among many Christians that the Crimean War heralded the end of history. Apparently not. These nations seem clearly to be symbols. At the time of Antiochus Moab, for example, no longer existed as a nation and never would again. “Edom, Moab, and Ammon, related with Israel by descent, are the old hereditary and chief enemies of this people, who have become by name representatives of all the...enemies of the people of God.” [Keil in Young, 252]

Israel's enemies, the church's enemies, in other words, at least at first will escape the oppression of the Antichrist, the same oppression that will fall with terrible weight on the people of God. The whole world won't go over to him, at least not at once. It is that competition for power that will engulf the world in violence as it has engulfed the world in violence so many times before, and as it will till the very end of history. But most of the world will go over to him, and so the reference to Egypt, Libya, and Cush, much larger nations than Moab or Edom ever were. The kings of north and south, familiar to Israel from the vision and, later, from her history, typify a

great striving to conquer the world in which striving the people of God will find themselves victims. In other words, the terrible conflict that will engulf the world at the end of time, the same lust for power that will catch the church in its maw, is described in terms familiar to the Jews from their own history, their past history and the history predicted in the vision. In other words, what we have in this description, rather than a recapitulation of the career of Antiochus Epiphanes from 175 to 164 B.C., is a person and are events on a much larger scale of which Antiochus was but a mini-model or a foretaste. Ralph Davis, wittily describes the entire chapter 11 as “The Case of Mr. Hyde and Mr. Hyde.” Remember Dr. Jekyll is the normal persona, Mr. Hyde is the evil twin, or the evil alter ego of Dr. Jekyll. But in Ralph Davis’s account, chapter 11 should be described as “The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde and Mr. Hyde.” That is, not *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but two Mr. Hydes. As he puts it:

“Antiochus and the coming opponent are of the same ilk, only Antiochus is like Hyde and his antitype like a highly more hideous Hyde. One might say Antiochus is a lower-case ‘hyde’, and his ultimate successor is an upper-case ‘Hyde.’” [158]

What the prophecy does not give us, what no biblical prophecy gives us, a fact we ought all by now to accept after being wrong so many times through the last 2,000 years – and, remember, most of the prophecies we argue about are apocalyptic in form – is a timeline, a chronology, an account of unfolding events sufficiently specific that we can identify the who, what, where, and when of the end of history. That knowledge the Lord has kept to himself.

Taken this way, the prophecy trades in familiar biblical motifs and reminds us, as so many biblical prophesies do, that the conflict that already exists in the world between the Devil and the kingdom of God, between the world and God’s people, and between human beings and other human beings, when greatly intensified, will be the stuff that will finally bring history to its end as the Lord will come to put a stop to man’s rebellion of which he will have finally had his fill.

If someone is inclined to say that no one would believe a man who claimed to be god, no one in our modern world would swallow that, all we need to do is point him or her to the idolatries that already consume so much of the world’s attention, of the worship of celebrities now so much a part of modern life, and, more important, to the worldwide longing for someone to rescue the world from itself. Ralph Davis reminds us that worshipping men is hardly something new and worshipping great men as virtual gods has been a staple of human life from the beginning. He recalls Douglas MacArthur’s final appearance before the U.S. Congress in joint session in April 1951. MacArthur had been dismissed from his role as Commander of U.S. forces in Korea by President Truman for insubordination and for his public criticism of U.S. policy. But MacArthur was much more popular than Truman. He came home to a tumultuous welcome. His address to the Congress was watched by millions on television in the very early days of television. He had always been an orator and he kept both the congress and the nationwide audience spellbound for half an hour. You may remember his famous peroration. Alluding to the adage, “Old soldiers never die – they just fade away,” his final word, spoken in a whisper to his hushed audience was simply, “Goodbye.” Pandemonium erupted. People weeping his praise pressed in to touch his sleeve. One Missouri congressman shouted, “We heard God speak here today, God in the flesh, the voice of God!” So don’t let anyone tell you that men will not worship another man as a god or follow him blindly as worthy of their worship and obedience.

But whether that end, that final and ultimate rebellion against god should come to pass in our time, in our children's day, or thousands of years from now, what is crucial to remember, and what is the emphasis of all these prophecies, is that it will come to nothing. He shall be swept away with none to help him, the vast multitudes of human beings who have joined that open rebellion against God will call on the rocks to cover them as the Lord makes his appearance in the clouds.

One of the most famous poems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* and its final lines are some of the most quoted lines of any 20<sup>th</sup> century poem.

This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Well that isn't exactly right, of course. The Second Coming is surely more bang than whimper. But the rebellion of man, so vaunted, so seemingly irresistible at one point, so great a threat to the very life of the church of God, as Antiochus Epiphanes had been in his own day, very soon, more rapidly than the Antichrist's meteoric rise to power, will end in a whimper. [Ferguson, 238-239] Whenever a believer lives, wherever he lives, under whatever circumstances he or she lives, *that* is crucial to know and to remember. One side wins and the other loses and great will be the fall of those who contend against God.