

THE UNFOLDING DRAMA OF PRE-HISTORY (Pt. 2).

Theme: Daniel 11:21-35 tells us the story of the events of history--given to him before they occurred--from the time the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes to the close of Old Testament prophetic history.

The career of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) is given to us in the middle section of Daniel 11. He is the "little horn" mentioned in Daniel 8:9-12 and 23-25. He does not figure significantly in world history; but he figures very significantly in the history of the Jewish people. The reason so much attention is given to him is because he serves as a biblical prefigurement of the Antichrist (who is described in the latter half of Daniel 11; in verses 36-45).

I. HIS APPEARANCE ON THE SCENE (v. 21).

He comes in the place of his brother Seleucus IV Philopater (187-176 B.C.; see v. 20), the son of Antiochus the Great.

He took the name "Epiphanes" (which means, "the illustrious" or "manifest one"); but his contemporaries referred to him as "Epimanes" behind his back (which means "the madman"). He is unique in that, even given all the atrocities of those who preceded him, he alone is introduced in Daniel's prophecy as "a contemptible" or "vile person"--that is, a person to be despised.

The honor of royalty was not his by right. Rather, he seized the kingdom illegitimately from his younger nephew Demetrius Soter (son of Seleucus Philopater). Apparently, the assassination of the southern king's brother by Heliodorus (see v. 20) brought about a false sense of security in Syria (the northern kingdom); and Antiochus Epiphanes took the opportunity to seize the kingdom by winning the support of the surrounding rulers through flattery and empty promises. Even Rome gave its aid to Antiochus at this time.

II. THE SEIZING OF POWER (vv. 22-23).

The armies of those who would have 'overflowed' Syria at this time--particularly Egypt--were, in fact, 'overflowed' by Antiochus. (The "force" of arms can be translated "flood of arms".) They would be "broken" in the sense that they would be made incapable of standing against him.

Particular reference is made in these verses to "the Prince of the Covenant"; which scholars believe was Onias III, the high priest at Jerusalem (the "covenant" being God's covenant relationship with Israel that the high priest would be charged with overseeing). Onias was killed in the fourth year of Antiochus' rise to power (171 B.C.). He first lost the high priestly position through the treachery of his wicked brother Jason. Jason had bribed Antiochus for the position of high priest; and then, another brother named Menelaus succeeded in gaining the position from Jason through offering an even greater bribe to Antiochus. Menelaus murdered Onias--resulting in the anger of the Jews being directed toward him. The anger of the Jews, in turn, resulted in the anger of Antiochus being directed against them. From that point on, Antiochus became increasingly hostile and oppressive toward the Jews.

A "league" or a "joining together" is made with Antiochus--most probably on the part of Egypt, since Egypt weighs in heavily in the context of what follows. Antiochus' sister Cleopatra I (see last session's notes; III.G.) still reigned there with her husband Ptolemy V Epiphanes. Apparently, Antiochus deceitfully entered into a relationship with Egypt--making promises to foster a feigned friendship. Historically, he demonstrated his deceit by the fact that he marched into Egypt in 170 B.C. (see v. 25). His own nation began "small" in respect to what it had been before--a "small number of people" or "small people"; but by deceit, he "shall come up and become strong" (cf. 8:25).

III. THE SUDDEN CHANGE (vv. 24-26).

The kingdoms over which Antiochus had been weaving his deceits had been lulled into a false sense of peace. It's then that the true nature of Antiochus begins to show itself.

First, with respect to his own kingdom, Syria, he enters into a program of consolidation of forces. He will enter "peaceably" or "without warning"--that is, in the midst of the supposed security of peace and prosperity--even into the richest parts of his land. He then engages in a program that was unprecedented, and that neither his father or any of his predecessors had engaged in. It will involve three things: (1) He would seize the finest products and richest parts of his kingdom for his own use; (2) he would distribute the "plunder, spoil, and riches" among the poorer parts of his kingdom in order to win universal favor; and (3) he would "devise his plans against the strongholds" of his own nation in order to weaken them and eliminate any internal resistance. The prophecy tells us that, though he seems to act "sovereignly"; his power is "but only for a time". When the time is right, he would be cut off (8:25).

Having secured his own base, he sets his sights toward conquest of the South. He would "stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south" (at that time, Ptolemy Philometer [181-145 B.C.]; the son of Antiochus' sister Cleopatra I), "with a great army". Ptolemy responded with a great army as well; but he did not "stand". He lost at Pelusium--just east of the Nile Delta. He fell because "those who eat of his [that is, Ptolemy's] portion of his delicacies shall destroy him" (v. 26). Even his own brother Ptolemy VII Euergetes (later nicknamed Physkon ["The Bladder"], because of his pot-bellied appearance) conspired against him with the result that Antiochus was victorious over Egypt.

VI. SCOUNDRLS FOR SUPPER (vv. 27-28).

"Both of these kings" refers to Antiochus and Ptolemy Philometer. They appear to eat at the same table as friends--but harbor evil intent toward one another the whole while long.

After capturing Ptolemy Philometer, Antiochus pretends to befriend him. After his defeat at Pelusium, the Egyptians put his brother Ptolemy VII Euergetes on the throne in his place. Antiochus--who, after all, was his relative--made promises to Philometer that he would aid him in the overthrow of his brother and the restoration of his throne. In reality, Philometer was seeking to unite with his brother against Antiochus and overthrow him; and Antiochus was meanwhile seeking to overthrow them both and take Egypt for himself. (In Oriental cultures, deceit at the table of hospitality was considered an act of the lowest possible morality.) In time, Antiochus took control of Memphis and installed Philometer as its king--but Philometer never succeeded in gaining control of all Egypt. Philometer worked out a joint rule with his brother after Antiochus left to go back to Syria--and Philometer even married his and Euergetes' sister Cleopatra (daughter of Cleopatra I). They made plans; but they did not prosper in them, "for the end will still be at the appointed time". God still ruled--even over the intrigues of men.

Antiochus returned to Syria with a wounded pride--but with much booty (according to the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees. 1:19). It is then that his heart was moved against "the holy covenant". The Jews had had enough of the wickedness of the usurper to the priesthood that Antiochus had installed. Menelaus had murdered his priestly brother Onias (see II. A); and the Jews sought to rise up to defend the integrity of the temple. It was at this time that rumors began to spread that Antiochus had been killed; and the Jews rejoiced at the news of this rumor. Antiochus was outraged over the fact that the Jews would dare to celebrate the rumors of his death; and he marched against the Jews on his way to Syria. "Over 40,000 persons were slain in three days, and an equal number of torn from their homes and led away as captives" (H. Ironside, *The Four Hundred Silent Years*, p. 40). In 1 Maccabees 1:21-23 we're told, "He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures which he found" (RSV). Even these desecrations of the temple, though, were not as dreadful as what he was yet to do!

V. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (vv. 29-31).

Here, we find the act that most marked Antiochus as the prophetic type of the Antichrist--who is yet to come, and whose story begins in verse 36.

Antiochus returned to Egypt in 168 B.C. to break up the alliance that had been formed by Philometer and Philometer's brother and sister--feeling that he had been betrayed by them. This occurs "at the appointed time"--indicating that God's sovereign control over events prevailed even at the most horrific of times. Antiochus will not, however, succeed as he once did. Literally, "it shall not be as the former, so the latter." Antiochus' attempted invasion led the Ptolemies to appeal to Rome for aid. ("Ships from Cyprus" or "Kittim" suggest the western lands of Rome.) He arrived just a short distance from Alexandria to find that the fleets of Rome were waiting for him. His army never even fought; and the Roman representative--Popilius Laenas--gave him a letter from the Roman senate that ordered him to leave Egypt and cease from his planned attack. Antiochus hesitated; but Laenas drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and ordered him to give an answer before stepping out of the circle. Antiochus--unwilling to enter into a conflict with Rome--reluctantly agreed and left.

Antiochus' humiliation turned to rage; and he directed that rage at the people of God whom he deeply resented and despised. As he returned to Syria, he poured out his insane fury on the Jews. He would make use of Jews who had rebelled against the covenant of God, and who would join him in his effort to stamp out the Mosaic law and ceremonies. Antiochus gathered an army of Greeks and of renegade Jews who had "Hellenized" (that is, embraced Greek culture); and (1) polluted the holy altar in the temple by offering up a sow on it, (2) forbidding the daily sacrifices, (3) ordering the Jews to cease the worship of God, and (4) erecting an image of Zeus in the temple (cf. Daniel 8:23-25; Matthew 24:15).

VI. THE HAMMER SWINGS (vv. 32-33).

The events were set into motion for the rise of one of the greatest resistance movements in history.

Antiochus used further flatteries to persuade many in Judah to "corrupt" or "pollute" the covenant. But it was at this time that "the people who knew their God" became strong and carried out "great exploits". Many chose to die rather than to defile the covenant of God. Others organized to resist and overthrow Antiochus--the principle of these being the family of the Maccabees (a name that means "The Hammer"); who established the Hasmonean dynasty and established Jewish independence. It began when Mattathias Maccabeus--the father of five sons--refused to offer sacrifices to the gods of Greece. Instead, he slew the representative of Antiochus. Then, he and his sons--the most famous being Judas; along with others who joined the brothers--fled to the mountains and began a revolt against the rule of the Gentiles over them.

A class of Jews "who understood" arose at this time who taught the people the promises of Scriptures regarding the Messiah. Many of the faithful Jews of this time died; but in time, since Antiochus found it convenient to attack them on the Sabbath when they would not fight back (1 Maccabees. 2:38). But in time, they were successful in throwing off the oppressions of Antiochus, and restoring Mosaic laws.

VII. EVEN TO THE TIME OF THE END (vv. 34-35).

These verses bring us to the close of the intermediary period between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Verses 35-36 are separated by an unknown number of centuries; and lead to the rise of the Antichrist--"the king" who shall "do according to his own will" (v. 36).

The resistance movement of the Maccabees would suffer times of failure. They (literally) would "stumble". But at such times, there would be many who would join themselves to them; and they would thus receive "a little help". Some, however, joined them by flattery and intrigue--perhaps out of a false motive to be attached to a winner; perhaps to avoid the wrath of the Maccabees toward those who aided the Syrians against them (1 Maccabees 2:44; 3:3-8).

Throughout this time, Antiochus would have times of apparent victory. But these times of struggle and failure for the Jews would prove to be times of refinement in the providential care of God. Some with understanding would fall; but it would "purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end;

because it is still for the appointed time."

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Antiochus came and went. Future times of trial would come. A "week" was left in God's prophetic program for the Jews (9:24). And in all of it, God reigned--and still reigns--over the affairs of men.