



FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, PT2

As we read ch11 of Daniel, let's play a game of Daniel Bingo. Can you identify the following human deeds / misdeeds?

*Ambition. Invasion. Resistance. Pride. Revenge.
Anger. Threats. Discernment. Enslavement. Deceit.
Idolatry. Blasphemy. Greed. Desecration. Persecution.
Robbery. Bribery. Perseverance. Murder. Betrayal.
Slaughter. Revolt. Anticipation. Plots. Corruption.*

If you think you've got them all, shout out "Daniel!" (I know it's 6 letters, but in Hebrew it's 5, so it works). Let's go!

Daniel 11:2-45

What on earth is this chapter about? In this final vision we have an expansion of chs7-8. It reads like a historical soap-opera, covering 400 years and 4 time-periods:

- **The Persian period.** After Cyrus, 3 more kings arise (Cambyses II, Bardiya, and Darius the Great), then a fourth – Xerxes I (the king of the book of Esther), who starts to antagonise the Greeks and fights them at the battles of Thermopylae and Salamis. After Xerxes, Persian power begins to wane, until you get:
- **The Alexandrian period.** Come the 4th century BC, Alexander the Great takes revenge on the Persians, invades the empire, and defeats the

1-million-man army of Darius III at Gaugamela. He continues on to India, but is forced to turn back to Babylon and dies at a mere 33 years of age, at which point you get:

- **The Successor period.** Alexander's empire is carved up between his top generals – Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus and Ptolemy – 2 of which start the Seleucid dynasty in Syria (the King of the North) and the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt (the King of the South). There's war for nigh on 200 years, until you get:
- **The Antiochian period.** The Syrian king Antiochus IV launches 2 invasions of Egypt – and might have succeeded had the Roman Republic not told him to back off. At the same time, he receives news of a revolt in Parthia. Furious, he returns to Syria, but enroute takes his frustration out on? The Jews.

Some have interpreted vs40-45 as referring to the whole of Antiochus' reign; some, to the Roman takeover of the Eastern Med; others, to events prior to the end of the world. One thing's for certain: at the end of it all, God wins!

But thinking back to those deeds / misdeeds, there are 4 that stand out: the responses of God's people to the evils around them. Responses which Jesus also taught us:

1) Resistance. "The people who know their God will firmly resist him", i.e. Antiochus IV. Like Daniel and his friends, the Jews of later centuries would be faced with a choice: give in to pagan authorities and a pagan culture, or say "No" to them. And while some gave in to threats and bribes, many did not – and paid the price for it.

But resistance is more than saying "No" to this leader or this culture. It's "denying yourself", as Jesus put it (Luke 9:23-24): saying "No" to the paganism inside of us; to the desire to turn our backs on God. Evil doesn't start with pagan authorities or cultures; it starts with the heart.

Know how to resist that, you'll know how to resist anything.

2) Discernment. "Those who are wise will instruct many." In what? Chariot maintenance? Matza-baking? Israelite martial arts? The word for 'wise', *maskil*, means discerning; understanding; having a grasp of what is going on, and why. And that comes from one place: scripture.

It's a generalisation, but strong Bible knowledge = strong Christians; weak Bible knowledge = weak ones. You talk to the average consumer-driven western Christian, you'll find that 1) their faith is pretty self-oriented, and 2) their Bible knowledge is pretty poor. Which means that, first sign of trouble, that faith begins to wobble / deconstruct!

Jesus made it clear that a lasting faith will be built on what He says (Luke 6:46-48). Because *that's* what makes you wise.

3) Perseverance. "When they fall, they will be helped with a little help." Or *etzter*, 'strength.' Strength for what? For all the aggro Antiochus was going to put them through.

Now, there have been plenty of Antiochuses over time, and sadly, they're still around today. You might even work / live with them! Until Jesus returns, the inclination of this world-system is going to be rebellion against God – and that will inevitably lead to persecution, in some form. But Jesus also promised His followers that He would equip them for the hardships to come (Luke 21:12-15). He doesn't promise to take the hardships away; but He does promise to be there, strengthen us, and speak through us.

Because, praise God, we stand not in *our* strength, but in *His*.

4) Anticipation. Gabriel says, "So that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come, at the appointed time."

When God allows His people to go through hardship, it is to prepare us for His kingdom. To reveal what's really going on inside of us; to help us grasp what really matters to Him. Like the rich young ruler in Luke 18:22-24, we can allow lesser things to take the place of God. The loss of those things can open our eyes to who we *really* are.

But there's also the carrot on the stick: the promise of future victory. And as Gabriel tells Daniel, it (God's kingdom) will come. In God's time, yes. But it will.

Light The Menorah

So, in the midst of this 400-year-long litany of terrible misdeeds on the part of God's enemies, there are these 4 inspiring responses – on the part of God's friends.

Historically, this vision was fulfilled in the victory achieved by the Maccabees, when Y'hudah Ha-Makabi and his brothers pushed Antiochus' forces out of the Promised Land. But. There's a part of the story not revealed to Daniel. According to tradition, when the Jews came to restore the temple, they discovered that they had only 1-days' worth of oil for the menorah lampstand – and sacred oil would take a week to prepare and transport from Tekoa to Jerusalem. They lit it anyway, and a miracle took place: that 1-day supply of oil lasted not 1 day, but 8. And for the past 2000+ years Jews have remembered this event with the 8-day feast of Hanukkah (in December time), and the lighting of a special 9-lamp menorah.

I.e. God's presence can never be extinguished. And if we resist, discern, persevere, and anticipate – if we "shine like stars" (Daniel 12:3) – He will be a light, to us.