

Antiochus Epiphanes and Antichrist: The Arch Enemies of God's People

Daniel 11:21-45

Introduction: 1) He goes by many names and has had many forerunners throughout history. In the Bible he is called the “little horn” (Dan. 7:8), “coming prince” (Dan. 9:26), “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3), “son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3) and the “beast” (Rev. 13:1-10). We know him most popularly as the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:2-3; 2 John 7). He is the spirit of this present evil age, and he is an eschatological, apocalyptic figure who will build a global empire and “exalt and magnify himself above every god and say outrageous things against the God of gods” (Dan. 11:36). He is a self-centered, arrogant, prideful, ego-maniacal individual who epitomizes the depravity of man and our longing to be like God (Gen. 3).

2) Now, what people think about the Antichrist varies. Not surprising, the more educated you are (I did not say smarter!) the less likely you are to believe he is coming. In a Lifeway research article entitled, “Pastors: The End of the World is Complicated” (4-26-16), it was reported: “Most Protestant pastors believe Jesus will return in the future. But few agree about the details of the apocalypse. A third of America’s Protestant pastors expect Christians to be raptured – or taken up in the sky to meet Jesus – as the end times begin. About half think a false messiah known as the Antichrist will appear sometime in the future. A surprising number

think the Antichrist has already been here or isn't on his way at all... About half (49 percent) say the Antichrist is a figure who will arise in the future. Others say there is no individual Antichrist (12 percent); that, he is a personification of evil (14 percent) or an institution (7 percent). Six percent say the Antichrist has already been here. Baptists (75 percent) and Pentecostals (83 percent) are most likely to see a future Antichrist. Lutherans (29 percent), Methodists (28 percent), and Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (31 percent) are more likely to see the Antichrist as a personification of evil. Education also played a role in how pastors see the Antichrist. Two-thirds of those with no college degree (68 percent) or a bachelor's (63 percent) believe in a future Antichrist figure. Fewer than half of those with a master's (39 percent) or a doctorate (49 percent) hold that view."

3) We see these findings played out, to some degree, in how people interpret the closing verses of Daniel 11. All scholars without exception, liberal and conservative, see verses 21-36 as referring to the evil reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) and his vicious persecution of the Hebrews and Israel. But, what about verses 36-45? All scholars without exception, liberal and conservative agree the events here described cannot line up with what we know of Antiochus. So, liberal scholars say the pseudo 2nd century author of Daniel nailed 11:1-20 because he was writing prophesy after the fact. Now, however, for some unknown reason, he got sloppy and made a number of historical blunders in 11:36-45. Evangelicals,

in contrast, believe this is an example again (cf. Is. 61:1-2b; Dan. 9:24-27 and the gap between vs. 26 and 27) of what is called “prophetic foreshortening” where there is a significant time interval between two verses, between two persons or events. The classic example is how the prophets saw the coming of Christ. The prophets, gazing at two prophetic mountain peaks in a straight line, did not see the gap (e.g. “the valley”) between the two comings. I am convinced this is what we have between Antiochus (a type of Antichrist) in verses 21-35 and Antichrist (the antitype) in verses 36-45. Note, and I believe this is important and even decisive, you have the language of “the appointed time” in reference to Antiochus in verses 27, 29 and 33. In contrast, the time phrase “at the end of time” appears in verse 40 and dominates chapter 12. This tips us off that we are in a different time period in verses 36-45. Further, Paul uses Daniel 11:36 in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 when talking about the end time Antichrist (“the man of lawlessness”). Sinclair Ferguson notes this perspective, “is also consistent with the way in which Jesus seems to have seen the description of Antiochus’ activity as foreshadowing the future. Jesus speaks of an “abomination of desolation” (v. 31) that was yet to come (Mark 13:14)” (*Daniel*, 219). So, our text divides into two sections: 1) Antiochus: the type of the coming Antichrist (11:20-35) and 2) Antichrist: the final eschatological earthly enemy of God and his people (11:36-45).

I. God raised up a contemptible person to refine, purify and sanctify His people **11:21-35**

Anti-Semitism and opposition to Israel, which seems to be growing in our day, is not new. It is as old as the Bible and began all the way back in the book of Exodus. However, in the Old Testament, no one epitomizes this evil like the Syria general and king Antiochus Epiphanes. While there are history lessons here to be sure, significant theological and spiritual truth is embedded throughout for our edification.

1) Beware of using flattery and deceit 11:21-24

- The despised person (*ESV*, “contemptible person”) of verse 21 is Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) who replaced Seleucus IV who died from poisoning (v. 20). This is an adept description of him, “because from the Jewish vantage point he was a monster” (Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, 298). “Royal honors” rightly belonged to a man named Demetrius I Soter, the son of Seleucus IV. However, Antiochus slithered in “during a time of peace and seized the kingdom by intrigue” (*ESV*, “flatteries”). Political skills wedded to an evil heart are a dangerous combination!
- The Egyptian Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-146 B.C.) attacked Antiochus with “a flood of forces” (v. 22), a large army, but he was soundly defeated (“shattered”) and taken captive. It was during this time that Antiochus also

deposed Onias III, the rightful high priest in Jerusalem. Here he is called the “covenant prince.” Onias was assassinated in 171 B.C. (Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC, 192).

- Verses 23-24 summarize Antiochus’s consolidation of power as he continues to use the political and sinful device of deception. He negotiated an alliance with Egypt that he had no intention of honoring (vs. 25 ff). With a peace agreement intact, he invaded “the richest parts of the province (including Egypt and Judea) and did what his fathers and predecessors never did” (v. 24). He will build his kingdom to greater heights by “lavishing plunder, loot and wealth on his followers.” He will buy allegiance. And, he would make plans for further conquest (“plans against fortified cities”), but that would only last “for a [short] time.” God is raising up mighty Rome, and Antiochus would be no match for this beast that is “frightening and dreadful, and incredibly strong, with large iron teeth” (Dan. 7:7).
- Flattery and deceit only get you so far. They are sinful characteristics that God will not bless. They also are no match for the plans of a sovereign God! They are wicked devices His children should avoid at all cost.

2) Guard your heart and tongue

11:25-28

These verses appear to refer back to Antiochus's first campaign against Egypt in verse 22 (169 B.C.). He defeated the king of the South, in part, because "plots were made against him" (v. 25). Evil men engaged in evil deeds. Miller notes these plots, "seem to include Antiochus's plans against him, the activities of disloyal subjects in Egypt, and the poor counsel of his advisers" (Daniel, 306). The later observation is confirmed by verse 26.

Egypt and Syria sit down at the negotiating table in verse 27 but as is so often the case in political conversations, they do so with "hearts bent on evil," speaking lies to one another "at the same table." Evil hearts speaking evil words (Jam. 3:5-8). The talks fail, they come to "no avail." Why? Because "the end will come at the appointed time" set by God. Things will move forward on God's timetable not mere humans. Antiochus would return home to Syria "with great wealth" after plundering Egypt in 169 B.C. Finding a Jewish insurrection in progress, his heart was set against the holy covenant" (Israel) and he took action (v. 28). Miller writes, "He put down the rebellion, massacring eighty thousand men, women, and children (2 Macc. 5:12-14) and then looted the temple with the help of the evil high priest, Menelaus (cf. 2 Macc. 5:15-21). The persecution of the Jews by this evil tyrant had now escalated to calamitous proportions." (p. 300). Humans out of wicked heart

may lie, intimidate and negotiate all they want. They may plot, rebel, murder and pillage. Still, the final outcome is in God's hands. God controls history. We should watch after our hearts and guard our tongues while trusting that God is at work even in the midst of an evil world out of control.

3) Embrace God's work in spite of difficulty and suffering 11:29-35

We now arrive at the main point and purpose of verses 21-35. It is without question "at the appointed time" (v. 29) in many ways as the God of history orchestrates his plan for his people (v. 35). Antiochus's once again launches a campaign against Egypt (the South) but this time things are different. "It will not be like the first." My friend Stephen Miller again is very helpful in the historical details, and I acknowledge my heavy dependence on him in this section (*Daniel*, 301-304).

Antiochus encountered opposition from the "Ships," of *Kittim* (Cyprus), a Roman fleet that had come to Alexandria at the request of the Ptolemies (v. 30). The Roman commander Gaius Popilius Laenas met Antiochus and handed him a letter from the Roman Senate ordering him to leave Egypt or deal with Rome. The Roman commander famously drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and told him that he must give an answer before stepping out of the circle. Antiochus wisely (!) withdrew from Egypt and headed back to Antioch humiliated (v. 30).

Antiochus turned his embarrassment into anger against the Jewish people (“the holy covenant”) once more. He sent Apollonius (2 Macc. 5:23-26), the head of his mercenaries and the “chief collector of tribute” (1 Macc. 1:29), to Jerusalem. Apollonius pretended to come in peace, but on the Sabbath Day he suddenly attacked the Jews, massacring many people and plundering the city (cf. 1 Macc. 1:30-32; cf. 2 Macc. 5:25-26). But he rewarded those apostate Jews (“those who abandon the holy covenant”) like the high priest Menelaus, who supported his Hellenizing policies (cf. 1 Macc. 1:30-32; 2 Macc. 4:7-17) (Miller, 301).

In 167 B.C., the persecution of the Jewish religion reached a climax (1 Macc. 1:41-50; 2 Macc. 6:1-6). All Jewish religious practices such as circumcision, possessing the Scriptures, sacrifices, and feast days were forbidden on penalty of death (1 Macc. 1:50, 63); and the imperial cult was introduced. Desecration of the Jewish religion reached a crescendo on December 15, 167 B.C. (1 Macc. 1:54) when an altar or idol-statue devoted to Zeus was erected in the temple (“the abomination that causes desolation”). On December 25, sacrifices including swine (cf. 1 Macc. 1:47; 2 Macc. 6:4-5), were offered on the altar (cf. 1 Macc. 1:54, 59). The temple was desecrated. “The abomination of desolation” is a historical reality.

Antiochus used “flattery” in order to entice people to support his policies (cf. 1 Macc. 2:18; 2 Macc. 7:24). This would further “corrupt” the apostate Jews who “act wickedly” (v. 32).

Still, even in this dark period there were faithful believers (“the people who know their God”). First Maccabees 1:62-63 speaks of them: “Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die” (Miller, 302).

Miller further informs us, “Foremost among those who resisted the oppressive measures of Antiochus were the Maccabees. A certain priest named Mattathias refused to forsake his God (cf. 1 Macc. 2:1-14). He had five sons, three of whom (Judas, Jonathan, and Simon) became known as the Maccabees, although the term Maccabeus (“hammer”) originally was given only to Judas (1 Macc. 2:4). The Maccabees successfully overthrew the Syrian yoke through a series of brilliant military victories (apparently predicted in Zech. 9:13-17) against Antiochus’s military commanders, Apollonius, Seron, Grogias, Lysias (cf. 1 Macc. 3:10-4:35) between 166 [or 165] and 164 B.C.; as a result the temple was rededicated (Hanukkah) to Yahweh on 25 Chislev (December 14) 164 B.C. (1 Macc. 4:52).” (Miller, 302).

“Those who are wise” (v. 33) are Israelites who have spiritual discernment, true believers. They would remain true to Yahweh during Antiochus’s persecution and instruct others (“give understanding to many”). Because of their stand many of the Jewish faithful would be killed. Tens of thousands were slaughtered in these persecutions, and many others died during the fighting. Others were “captured” for slaves or had their property confiscated (“plundered”). Though intense, this persecution would last only for a short while. Some of these faithful heroes seem to be noted in Heb. 11:34 (Miller, 303).

During this period of oppressions, when they are “defeated”, those faithful to Yahweh “will be helped by some”, presumably a small number of forces who at the first fought against Antiochus. The rest of verse 34 appears to refer to the fact that as the strength of the Maccabean revolt grew, nominally committed Jews joined with the rebels out of expediency, particularly when the Maccabean forces, now joined by the Hasidim, began to put to death those who had collaborated with the Seleucids (cf. 1 Macc. 2:42-48).

“Some of the wise will fall” expresses the same idea as verse 33 – true believers will suffer persecution and even martyrdom for their faith. The purpose: to “refine, purify and cleanse individuals and the nation as a whole of sinful practices and to strengthen their faith.

In this context the “time of the end” that has been “appointed” by the Lord speaks to the termination of Antiochus’s persecutions, not the eschatological end. Those suffering in the second century B.C. would have been greatly comforted by the promise of an end to their suffering. (Miller, 303).

Miller notes, “Antiochus IV died in 163 B.C. during an expedition in Persia, bringing to a conclusion both his wicked life and his atrocities against God’s people. Antiochus died a horrible death. Polybius relates that according to some the king died insane” (Miller, 304). The despised king was and is no more.

II. God will raise up Antichrist who will exalt and magnify himself as god

11:36-45

There is a gap of undetermined time between verse 35 and 36. We have moved from “appointed times” (v. 27, 29, 35) in the past (from our perspective) to the “time of the end” (v. 40; also 12:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13) and the future. The events described in these verses cannot refer to Antiochus Epiphanes. As arrogant as he was, he never did “exalt and magnify himself above every god” (v. 36). He remained a devoted follower of Zeus until his death. No, the man described here is an “end time” personality. He is the Antichrist. Daniel highlights two truths for our careful consideration of this arch-enemy of God.

1) He will deify himself 11:36-37

- Antichrist is a self-willed man. “He will do whatever he wants.” He is egomaniacal. Second, “he will exalt and magnify himself above every god.” He sees himself as a divine man. Third, “he will say outrageous things against the God of gods.” He is a gross blasphemer. Fourth, “He will be successful until the time of wrath (God’s judgment) is completed” (*ESV*, “accomplished”). This is a signed and settled reality because what has been decreed [by God] will be accomplished. Sinclair Ferguson is spot on when he says, “We have already seen this spirit emerge in various figures in Daniel (cf. 3:15; 4:30; 8:25; 11:3, 12, 16). It will emerge in full-blown form at the end in the final conflict between the kingdoms. It does so inevitably because it is the crux of the conflict. Its foundations run back into the origins of history and beyond into the mists to eternity. The tempting words “you will be like God” echo through the ages from a whisper in the Garden of Eden to a clamor at the end of time.” (*Daniel*, 220).
- Verse 37 continues the evil parade of virtue that will characterize this anti-God menace. The phrase is, if anything, unclear. First, “he will not show regard for the god of his fathers, the god longed for by women, or any other god...” The first sentence is easier to understand. Antichrist

will have no respect for his religious heritage whatever it might be. But, what of this phrase “the god longed for by women, translated in the *ESV*, “the one beloved by women”, in the *NIV*, “the one desired by women?” I find the insights of Andrew Steinmann helpful and persuasive as to what the vision at this point is getting at. He writes, “The king will not favor normal marital relations nor any god because he will make himself greater than all (11:37). His arrogance renders him incapable of the loving devotion that is required by both marriage and true piety. He personally is not married and does not rightly honor the one true God, and as a king, he imposes this disdain for marriage and this dishonorable view of God upon his subject.” (*Daniel*, Concordia Comm., 542).

Antichrist has no desire for God or humanity because he serves a different god in addition to himself, “the god of fortresses” or the god of war (v.38). On this “might makes right” deity, one that even his evil forefathers did not know or worship, he will shower, “gold, silver, precious stones and riches.” He will honor the might and power that war can give him. And, “with the help of this foreign god” (v.39), the god even his fathers did not know (v. 38), “he will deal with the strongest fortresses.” With power he will crush power, and in the process he will reward those who join his expanding coalition. He will “greatly honor

them making them rulers over many and distributing land as a reward” (v. 40). This is a Neitzchian world come to full fruition. The vision of an Adolf Hitler and his Nietzschean Nazism will arrive in all of its infamy and the world will be able to do nothing to stop it.

2) He will be a man of unbridled conquest 11:40-44

Sinclair Ferguson wisely instructs us that, “the vision of the future is presented in terms of the experience, knowledge, and events of the present” (*Daniel*, 221). This is certainly true for verses 40-44. What is described here, in the language and perspective of Daniel’s day, is the final struggle or battle “at the end of time” (v. 40). One battle may be in view, or more likely, a final campaign is what is being described here. Giving us precise details is not the vision’s goal. The character of Antichrist and those like him who would rule this temporal and fading world is. Let’s summarize these verse broadly by outline:

- 1) At the end of this age Antichrist, now identified as “the king of the north” will be attacked by “the king of the south”, but he will win a resounding victory (v.40). This will allow him to advance into other countries and “sweep through them like a flood.”

- 2) He will invade Israel, “the beautiful land” and many will die though some surrounding nations will be spared (v. 41).
- 3) Antichrist “will extend his power” against other countries and be on the verge of a complete and overwhelming victory (vs. 42-43). Revelation 13 informs us for a time he will rule the world.
- 4) Something will alarm him (“terrify him”) as he received “reports from the east and the north” (v. 44).
- 5) He will again pursue his enemies “with great fury to annihilate and completely destroy” them (cf. Rev. 9:13-19; 16:12).
- 6) He will set up camp in Israel but with a mere whimper “he will meet his end with no one to help him” (v. 45). Turn out the lights. His show is over.

I again appreciate Stephen Miller’s concluding words on all of this:

“Antichrist will meet these attacking forces in Palestine and make his headquarters (“pitch his royal tents”) “between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain.” “Seas” denotes the two bodies of water on either side of Israel, the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the Dead Sea on the east. The “beautiful holy mountain” is Mount Zion, where the temple stood,

rendering the mountain “beautiful” and “holy.” Antichrist will use the Jerusalem temple for his headquarters (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4; possible Matt. 24:15), though the brunt of the battle will be elsewhere. Daniel was here reporting that the final war will be fought in Israel, a fact set forth elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Ezek 39:2-29; Joel 3:2-16; Zech 12:2-9; 14:1-21). The Book of Revelation indicates more specifically that the valley of Megiddo will be the setting of this final conflict—the Battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev. 16:16).

Finally, the career of the most evil man in history will be terminated. Earlier in the book Daniel revealed that “the little horn” will be judged when the Lord comes to set up his kingdom (7:1, 26-27); Paul said this “man of lawlessness” will be destroyed “by the splendor of his [Christ’s] coming” (2 Thess. 2:8); and John teaches that the “beast” will be captured and thrown into the lake of fire at Christ’s return (Rev. 19:20). This chapter closes with the pronouncement that there will be no escape (no “help” from any source) for Antichrist when the judgment of God falls upon him and his evil empire.” (312). This puny human despot meets the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-21). It is no contest!

Conclusion

The Lord Jesus is so easily seen in this text by way of contrast with both Antiochus and Antichrist. His goodness in opposition to their evilness is a bright and radiant light that shines with the glory of God on full display. A simple comparative chart makes plain what we have in the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the Anointed Prince of Daniel 9.

Antiochus/Antichrist	King Jesus
Despised (v.20)	Desired
Deceitful (v.23)	Truthful
Hates the holy covenant (v.28)	Lovers God's holy covenant
Desecrates the temple (v.31)	Cleanses the temple
Abolished sacrifices (v.31)	Made sacrifice once for all
Persecutes and murders God's people (v. 32, 33)	Refines and purifies God's people
Willful (v.36)	Submissive
Exalts himself (v. 36)	Humbles Himself
Magnifies himself as god (v. 36)	Incarnated Himself as God
Blasphemes God (v. 36)	Glorifies God
Worships the god of war (v.38)	Is the God of Peace
His kingdom will end (v.45)	His Kingdom endures forever