

The Book of Daniel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Willful King and the Time of the End

Daniel 11:36–12:4

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this passage moves from the end of human pride to the dawn of the resurrection hope. The willful king who exalts himself above every god and trusts only in power is the very picture of human arrogance run to its limit, and his certain end “with none to help him” declares the doom of all pride that lifts itself against God. Help students see that self-exaltation is the essence of rebellion against the Lord, and that no fortress or strength can save those who set themselves against Him.

The heart of this lesson, and one of its formational peaks, is the clear Old Testament teaching on resurrection in Daniel 12:2–3. Centuries before the empty tomb, Daniel was told that many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt, and that the wise will shine like the stars forever. Teach students that this hope of resurrection and judgment is the real future of the people of God, confirmed and secured in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstfruits of those who sleep (1 Corinthians 15:20–22). This is the great hope toward which the whole book has been moving.

Handle the prophecy faithfully, keeping the focus on its central hope rather than on speculative end-times timetables. The passage moves from the historical horizon of tyrants like Antiochus to the universal hope of resurrection and judgment, fulfilled in Christ. Resist the newspaper exegesis that treats it as a coded map of modern events, and keep students fixed on what the text actually emphasizes: the doom of pride, the security of those whose names are in God's book, the certainty of resurrection, and the call to invest our lives in turning many to righteousness so as to shine like stars forever.

Question 1

Student Question:

The willful king “shall do as he wills” and “shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god,” speaking outrageous things against the true God (11:36). What does this portrait reveal about the nature and end of human pride that sets itself against God? Why does Scripture present self-exaltation as the essence of rebellion against the Lord (Isaiah 14:13–14; 2 Thessalonians 2:4)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the portrait of the willful king in verse 36: he “shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God

of gods.” Whatever the precise historical reference, the figure embodies human pride taken to its furthest extreme, a man who makes his own will the measure of all things and lifts himself against heaven itself.

Help students see that self-exaltation is the essence of rebellion against God. The same spirit appears in Isaiah’s portrait of the proud king who said in his heart, “I will ascend to heaven... I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13–14), and in Paul’s description of the man of lawlessness who “exalts himself against every so-called god... proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Pride, at its root, is the creature trying to take the place of the Creator.

Note what the willful king worships: only “the god of fortresses,” the worship of raw power (11:38). Having rejected every god, he bows to strength alone. This is the logical end of pride: when a person will acknowledge no authority above himself, he ends up worshiping power, because power is all that is left when God is denied.

Set up the lesson’s trajectory. This portrait of human pride at its peak is given precisely so that its certain fall, in the next verses, will land with full force. The willful king represents everything in the human heart and in the world that lifts itself against God, and the passage is about to declare its doom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-exaltation as the essence of rebellion against God (Isaiah 14:13–14; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- Pride as the creature trying to take the place of the Creator.
- The worship of raw power as the logical end of pride.
- The willful king as the embodiment of human arrogance against heaven.
- Pride that acknowledges no authority above itself.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the willful king reveal about the nature of human pride?
- Why is self-exaltation the essence of rebellion against God?
- Why does the denial of God end in the worship of power?

Question 2

Student Question:

Pride rarely announces itself as rebellion against God; it usually feels like simply wanting our own way. Where do you see the desire to “do as you will” asserting itself in your own heart? What would it mean to surrender your will to God rather than insisting on your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question brings the willful king's pride down to the ordinary human heart. Few of us would claim to exalt ourselves above God, yet the same root, the desire to "do as we will," lives in all of us. Pride rarely feels like rebellion; it usually feels like simply wanting our own way.

Help students recognize the everyday forms of self-will: insisting on our own preferences, resenting authority and accountability, treating our desires as non-negotiable, living as though our lives are our own to run. The willful king is an extreme portrait of an impulse that operates, in smaller ways, in every unsundered heart.

Point to the opposite spirit, supremely in Christ. Where the willful king said "I will do as I will," Jesus said in Gethsemane, "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). The whole of the Christian life is the slow surrender of our self-will to the will of God, learning to say with our Lord, "your will be done."

Move toward a concrete surrender. Encourage students to identify one area where self-will is asserting itself, a relationship, a decision, an attitude, and to surrender it deliberately to God this week. The aim is the daily dethroning of the little willful king within, in glad imitation of the surrendered Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-will as the everyday form of the willful king's pride.
- Pride felt not as rebellion but as wanting our own way.
- Christ's surrender, 'not my will, but yours' (Luke 22:42), as the opposite spirit.
- The Christian life as the slow surrender of self-will to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see the desire to 'do as you will' in your own heart?
- What would surrendering your will to God look like in a current situation?
- How does Christ's 'not my will but yours' reshape your prayers?

Question 3

Student Question:

Despite all his power, the king "shall come to his end, with none to help him" (11:45). What does the certain downfall of this proud ruler teach about the limits God sets on every arrogant power, and about the futility of opposing Him? Why can no fortress, army, or strength finally save those who set themselves against God (Psalm 2:1-6)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to the king's certain end: "he shall come to his end, with none to help him" (11:45). At the height of his ambition, with his royal tents pitched in triumph, the willful king simply comes to

his end, and no power, no army, no god can save him. This single phrase is the epitaph of all pride that lifts itself against God.

Help students see the limits God sets on every arrogant power. The willful king seemed unstoppable, doing as he willed, prospering for a season. But God had set a boundary he could not cross. “He shall come to his end” is not a threat God might or might not carry out; it is a settled certainty. Pride against God always ends the same way.

Connect this to the futility of opposing God. The nations rage and the rulers take counsel against the Lord, but “he who sits in the heavens laughs,” and sets His King on His holy hill (Psalm 2:1–6). No fortress is high enough, no army strong enough, to save those who set themselves against the Almighty. To oppose God is to choose a battle already lost.

Apply this with sober hope. The certain end of the willful king is a warning to every proud heart and a comfort to every oppressed believer. The proud powers that seem invincible will come to their end with none to help them, while the humble who trust in God will be raised to everlasting life. God’s verdict, not human power, has the last word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certain end of all pride that lifts itself against God (Daniel 11:45).
- The limits God sets on every arrogant power.
- The futility of opposing God, who laughs at the raging of the nations (Psalm 2:1–6).
- No fortress or strength able to save those who set themselves against God.
- God’s verdict, not human power, having the last word.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the king’s end teach about the limits God sets on the proud?
- Why can no fortress or strength save those who oppose God?
- How is the end of the willful king both a warning and a comfort?

Question 4

Student Question:

We are easily intimidated or impressed by the powerful figures and forces of our age. How does the certain end of every willful king change the way you view the proud and powerful of our own day? Where do you need to stop fearing them and start fearing God instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the certain end of the willful king to our fear of the powerful. We are easily intimidated by imposing figures and forces, political, cultural, financial, and we can live as though they hold the real power and will have the final say. The fall of the willful king corrects this fear.

Help students see how the fear of human power crowds out the fear of God. When the proud and powerful loom large in our minds, God shrinks, and we live in anxiety, intimidation, or resentment. But the powerful figures of every age, like the willful king, will come to their end with none to help them. They are not as ultimate as they appear.

Offer the corrective of the fear of God. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do... fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell” (Luke 12:4–5). The cure for the fear of man is not denial of human power but a greater reverence for the God before whom all human power is fleeting.

Move toward a concrete reorientation. Encourage students to identify a powerful figure or force they have been fearing or resenting, and to set it consciously under the God who brings every willful king to his end. The aim is freedom from intimidation, rooted in the fear of the God who alone is to be feared.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of human power crowding out the fear of God.
- The powerful of every age coming to their end like the willful king.
- The fear of God as the cure for the fear of man (Luke 12:4–5).
- Freedom from intimidation rooted in reverence for God.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the end of every willful king change how you view the powerful?
- Where do you need to stop fearing people and start fearing God?
- What powerful force have you been treating as more ultimate than God?

Question 5

Student Question:

The vision speaks of “a time of trouble, such as never has been,” yet promises that God’s people “shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book” (12:1). What does it mean that God’s deliverance of His people is tied to having one’s name written in His book? How does this assure believers of their security even in the worst of times (Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to the promise of deliverance in 12:1. Michael, the great prince who watches over God’s people, arises, and although there is “a time of trouble, such as never has been,” God’s people “shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” Deliverance is tied to having one’s name in God’s book.

Help students grasp the image of the book. Throughout Scripture, God is said to keep a book in which the names of His people are written (Exodus 32:32–33; Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12, 21:27). To have one's name in the book is to belong to God, to be known and claimed by Him. This is the ground of the believer's security, especially in times of trouble.

Connect this to Jesus' words to His disciples. When they rejoiced that even the demons were subject to them, He said, "do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The deepest cause for joy and security is not our successes but our belonging to God, our names written in His book.

Apply this as assurance. In a world of real trouble, the believer's security does not rest on circumstances, strength, or even survival, but on belonging to God. Whatever the time of trouble, those whose names are written in the book are safe in His hands, delivered finally into everlasting life. This is assurance that no earthly upheaval can shake.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's book and the names of His people written in it (Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 21:27).
- Deliverance tied to belonging to God, being known and claimed by Him.
- Security grounded in belonging to God rather than in circumstances.
- Rejoicing that our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).
- Assurance that no earthly trouble can shake those who are God's.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for your name to be written in God's book?
- How does belonging to God give security even in times of trouble?
- Why did Jesus say to rejoice that our names are written in heaven?

Question 6

Student Question:

In a world of real trouble and uncertainty, where do you look for assurance that you belong to God and are safe in His hands? How does knowing your name is written in God's book steady you against fear about the future, including the fear of death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the matter of assurance. In a world of real uncertainty, where do we look for the confidence that we belong to God and are safe in His hands? Many believers struggle with assurance, swinging between presumption and anxious doubt about their standing with God.

Help students locate assurance where Scripture places it. Our confidence rests not on our feelings or performance but on God's faithfulness and our belonging to Him in Christ. Those who have come to Christ in faith and obedience, and who walk with Him, may have real assurance that their names are written in His book (1 John 5:13). Assurance is grounded in God's promise, not our perfection.

Address the fear of death directly. The promise that our names are in God's book, and that His people are delivered into everlasting life, is meant to steady us against the deepest fear of all. For the believer, death is not annihilation or the end, but the doorway into the deliverance God has promised. Knowing we belong to God removes death's ultimate terror.

Move toward a concrete resting. Encourage students to bring their fears about the future and about death to the assurance of this passage, resting in the fact that those who belong to God are safe in His hands. The aim is a settled confidence, grounded in God's faithfulness, that frees us from anxious dread.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Assurance grounded in God's faithfulness and our belonging in Christ (1 John 5:13).
- Confidence resting on God's promise rather than our perfection.
- Death as the doorway into God's promised deliverance for the believer.
- Settled confidence freeing us from anxious dread of the future.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you look for assurance that you belong to God?
- How does knowing your name is in God's book steady you against fear?
- How does belonging to God change the way you face death?

Question 7

Student Question:

Daniel 12:2 declares that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." What does this remarkably clear Old Testament statement teach about the resurrection of the dead and the two destinies that await all people? How is this hope confirmed and secured in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinal high point: the clear Old Testament teaching on resurrection. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2). Centuries before the empty tomb, Daniel was given a

remarkably clear statement that death is not the end and that all will be raised to one of two destinies.

Help students appreciate how significant this is. The hope of bodily resurrection, often thought to be a New Testament idea, is taught plainly here in Daniel. Those who sleep in the dust, the dead, will awake. Two destinies await: everlasting life for the faithful, and shame and everlasting contempt for the wicked. The resurrection is universal; the destinies are not the same.

Show how Jesus confirms and secures this. He said, “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29), echoing Daniel almost exactly. And His own resurrection guarantees ours: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).

Draw out the weight of the two destinies. This passage will not allow a sentimental universalism in which all are saved regardless, nor a materialism in which death ends everything. There is a real resurrection, a real judgment, and two real and everlasting destinies. This sobering truth gives eternal weight to the choices and the faith of this life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The clear Old Testament teaching on bodily resurrection (Daniel 12:2).
- Two everlasting destinies: everlasting life and everlasting contempt.
- Jesus confirming the two resurrections (John 5:28–29).
- Christ’s resurrection as the firstfruits securing ours (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).
- The eternal weight given to the faith and choices of this life.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Daniel 12:2 teach about resurrection and the two destinies?
- How does Jesus confirm and secure this hope?
- Why does the certainty of resurrection give eternal weight to this life?

Question 8

Student Question:

The certainty of resurrection and judgment is meant to shape how we live now. How does the hope of being raised to everlasting life change the way you face death, suffering, and the daily choices of your life? What would you do differently if you truly lived in light of the resurrection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the resurrection hope to daily life. The certainty that we will be raised to everlasting life is not meant to be a distant doctrine but a present power, reshaping

how we face death, suffering, and our daily choices. The hope of resurrection changes everything about how we live now.

Help students see how resurrection hope transforms our view of death. For the believer, death is not the end but a sleep from which we will awake to everlasting life. This robs death of its ultimate terror and grief of its hopelessness; we do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The grave is not a destination but a doorway.

Show how it transforms our view of suffering. “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). When we know that resurrection and everlasting life await, present sufferings, though real, are set in the light of eternity, and become bearable, even meaningful, in a way they could never be otherwise.

Move toward concrete living. Encourage students to ask what they would do differently if they truly lived in light of the resurrection: how they would face a fear, invest their time, hold their possessions, or treat their bodies and their relationships. The aim is a life visibly shaped by the certainty that the best is yet to come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resurrection hope as a present power, not merely a distant doctrine.
- Death robbed of its terror and grief of its hopelessness (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- Present sufferings set in the light of eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).
- A life visibly shaped by the certainty of resurrection.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the hope of resurrection change the way you face death?
- How does it reframe the sufferings of this present life?
- What would you do differently if you truly lived in light of the resurrection?

Question 9

Student Question:

The passage promises that “those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky... and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (12:3). The whole vision has been read by some as a coded map of modern end-times events, yet its sweep moves from the historical horizon of tyrants like Antiochus to the universal hope of resurrection and judgment, the real future of God’s people fulfilled in Christ. How should we keep our focus on this central hope, the resurrection and the everlasting reward of the faithful, rather than on speculative timetables? And how does the promise that the wise will shine like stars forever call us to invest our lives in turning others to righteousness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This doctrinal capstone keeps the focus on the passage's central hope and guards against speculation. "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (12:3). The whole vision has moved from the historical horizon of tyrants like Antiochus to this universal and glorious hope: resurrection, judgment, and the everlasting reward of the faithful.

Teach students to keep the focus where the text puts it. Some have read these chapters as a coded map of modern end-times events, matching figures and timetables to current headlines. But the passage itself drives toward the resurrection and the shining of the wise, not toward a calendar of political events. The right use of this prophecy is to fix our hope on the resurrection and the everlasting reward, fulfilled in Christ, not to construct speculative schedules. Jesus said no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36), and the focus of the text is hope, not prediction.

Draw out the call embedded in the promise. Those who "turn many to righteousness" will shine like the stars forever. This is a summons to invest our lives in the eternal good of others, in leading people to God and His righteousness. The most lasting investment any person can make is in the souls of others, and it carries an everlasting reward: to shine like the stars forever and ever.

Lift students' eyes to Christ, the true and final hope. The resurrection promised in Daniel is secured forever in the risen Christ, the firstfruits of those who sleep, and the everlasting righteousness foretold throughout the book has been brought in through Him. We do not pore over newspapers to decode the future; we rest our hope in the risen Christ and pour out our lives turning many to the righteousness that is found in Him. That is the wisdom that shines like the stars forever.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The central hope of the passage: resurrection, judgment, and the everlasting reward of the faithful (Daniel 12:2-3).
- Keeping focus on the resurrection hope rather than speculative end-times timetables.
- Jesus' word that no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36).
- The call to turn many to righteousness, carrying an everlasting reward.
- The resurrection secured forever in the risen Christ, firstfruits of those who sleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).
- Investing our lives in the eternal good of others rather than decoding headlines.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we keep our focus on the resurrection hope rather than speculation?
- What does it mean to turn many to righteousness and shine like the stars?
- How does the risen Christ secure the hope this passage promises?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage, from the willful king who comes to his end to the wise who shine like stars forever. Name one specific way the truth that pride is doomed, that your name is written in God's book, and that resurrection awaits the faithful is reshaping how you will live, hope, and serve this coming week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question calls for a personal, concrete response. The aim is to move students from the sweep of the vision to a changed life in light of the doom of pride and the dawn of resurrection hope. Ask them to look back across the passage and name where the Spirit is pressing on them.

Help them gather the threads: the certain end of human pride, the surrender of self-will, the limits God sets on every power, the security of belonging to God, the certainty of resurrection and judgment, and the call to turn many to righteousness. Ask which thread is speaking most directly to them.

Refuse vagueness. "Live for eternity" is not a plan. "This week I will surrender this self-will, rest in my belonging to God, face this fear in light of the resurrection, or invest in leading this person toward God" is concrete and livable. The best answers will be specific and personal.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. The resurrection foretold in Daniel is guaranteed by the risen Jesus, who defeated the last enemy and will raise His people to everlasting life. We face the proud powers of this world and even death itself without fear, resting in the One who is the resurrection and the life and who is forming His own hope and faithfulness in us (John 11:25; Philippians 1:6).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of study as a life shaped by resurrection hope and surrender to God (Romans 8:29).
- Christ the resurrection and the life, who raises His people (John 11:25).
- Living without fear of the proud powers or of death itself.
- Concrete, named obedience as the fruit of genuine study.

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage is God pressing most on your heart?
- What is one specific way you will live in light of the resurrection this week?
- How does the risen Christ free you from the fear of death and of the powerful?