

The Book of Daniel

Lesson 11: The Willful King and the Time of the End -- Daniel 11:36–12:4

The prophecy reaches its darkest point. A king arises who “shall do as he wills,” exalting and magnifying himself above every god, speaking astonishing things against the God of gods. He honors no god of his fathers, no desire of women, no god at all, but only the god of fortresses, the worship of raw power. He is the very picture of human pride run to its limit, a man who has made himself the measure of all things and bows to nothing but strength. For a season he prospers, and it seems that arrogance and force will simply have their way in the world.

And then, in a single quiet phrase, the whole proud edifice comes down: “yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.” That is the epitaph of every willful king who has ever lived. He pitches his royal tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain, at the height of his ambition, and there, with no army able to save him and no god to deliver him, he simply comes to his end. The man who answered to no one finally answers to the One he refused to acknowledge. Pride that lifts itself against heaven always ends the same way.

But the vision does not stop with the fall of a tyrant, because there is a far greater enemy that no human king can defeat, and a far greater deliverance than any earthly rescue. “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been... But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” The story is moving past the kings of north and south, past every Antiochus and every tyrant, toward the final hope of the people of God.

And then comes one of the clearest statements of resurrection in the entire Old Testament: “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. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above... like the stars forever and ever.” Here, centuries before the empty tomb, is the sure hope that death is not the end, that God’s people will be raised to everlasting life, and that those who turned many to righteousness will shine like stars. This lesson is about the end of every proud power and the dawn of an unfading hope, the resurrection of the dead, which is the real future of the people of God and which is secured forever in the risen Christ.

Group Discussion: The willful king exalts himself above every god and seems unstoppable, yet the prophecy declares simply, “he shall come to his end, with none to help him” (11:36, 11:45). What does this teach about the certain end of all pride that lifts itself against God? How does it reframe the way we view the proud and powerful of our own day?

Personal Reflection: The willful king worshiped only “the god of fortresses,” trusting in power and strength alone (11:38). In what subtler ways are you tempted to put your trust in your own strength, control, or resources rather than in God? What would it look like to rest your security in God rather than in your own “fortresses”?

Read Daniel 11:36–12:4

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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)?
4. 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?

5. 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)?

6. 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?

7. 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)?

8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 14:13–14, the pride that says ‘I will make myself like the Most High’; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8, the lawless one destroyed by the breath of the Lord’s mouth; John 5:28–29, all in the tombs hearing His voice and coming out to resurrection; 1 Corinthians 15:20–22, Christ the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep; Daniel 12:3, the wise shining like the brightness of the sky and the stars forever.

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