

Daniel 11:2-4, 21-35**The Kings of the South and the North**

² “Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. ³ Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. ⁴ After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parcelled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.

²¹ “He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honour of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. ²² Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. ²³ After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. ²⁴ When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time.

²⁵ “With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. ²⁶ Those who eat from the king’s provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. ²⁷ The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. ²⁸ The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country.

²⁹ “At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. ³⁰ Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against

the holy covenant. He will return and show favour to those who forsake the holy covenant.

³¹ “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. ³² With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

³³ “Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. ³⁴ When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. ³⁵ Some of the wise will stumble, 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.

Philippians 4:12-13

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Sermon: “A Vision of the Sovereignty of God”

Please have your Bibles opened up at **Daniel chapter 11** – we’re looking at verses 2 to 35. And we’ll also look briefly at those two verses from Philippians 4.

There is an **outline** if you would like to take some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Intro – Niggling Questions?

Who’s in control and ruling your life? (pause)

Is it **God**? (pause)

Is it **You**? (pause)

Is it **Someone else**? (pause)

Or is life **just a matter of chance** – good or bad luck? (pause)

Well according to the Bible – **God is Sovereign** – And **He's in control!**

[Slide-Sovereign]

What does **Sovereign** mean? It means **2 things**:

It means...

1. **Our God is in Heaven and does whatever pleases Him** (Psalm 115:3)
2. And that **God is in complete control of everything** – because nothing happens without His say so (Lam 3:37)

So according to the Bible – **God is Sovereign**, and he rules and controls **everything**.

You might be thinking - I'm not sure if **God is in control of everything?**

Or you might be thinking – when I look around the world - or look at my life, it **doesn't seem** like **God is in control at all** (pause)

I want to begin this morning - with **2 niggling questions** –

[Slide-Questions]

I'm sure you've - either **had these niggling questions yourself** - or **heard people ask them?**

1. If God is in control of everything – why doesn't He eliminate evil and suffering?
2. If God is in control of everything – how can human beings have free will to do as they please?

I'm going to **leave you sweating on those 2 questions** – until later -

And hopefully as we look at **this passage from the Old Testament Book of Daniel – chapter 11** –

We can gain an understanding of how God's Sovereignty works – And at the same time **answer these 2 niggling questions?**

Context

[Slide-Context]

Let's get the **context** first...

The year is 536BC – 3rd year of the reign of King Cyrus

Daniel and his fellow Israelites (Jews) have now been in exile in Babylon (modern day Iraq) for 70 years.

In those 70 years Daniel has faced many trials and the leadership of Babylon has now been taken over by the Persians. And at this time – some of Daniel's people have started to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple.

And we saw last week that Daniel prayed and fasted for 21 days for his people because they were already experiencing difficulties as they were rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

[Slide – Man]



And God answered Daniel's prayer by sending an angelic man dressed in man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude (10:5-6)

This angelic man told Daniel that whenever there are battles or wars on Earth there's an equivalent spiritual battle going on in the Spiritual realm.

And then as we hit this chapter 11 – the angelic man describes a **vision** of what lies ahead for the Persians and the nation of Greece - and more importantly for God's people, the Jews.

[Slide-Sovereign because...]

From this vision we will see that **God is sovereign over all things**

Because:

1. God knows the future
2. God works with people's good and bad choices
3. God ultimately has victory over evil

God knows the future

1st then – **God knows the future**

[Slide-future]

What Daniel is told in the vision will happen - is so accurate – that some people try to say it was written by someone else - 200-300 years after Daniel when these things had already happened.

But we have to realize that our Lord Jesus some 500 years after Daniel - refers to Daniel's prophecy – so we don't need to doubt these things.

The angelic man tells Daniel – in verse 2 – there will be three more kings of Persia – and then a fourth one who is far richer - this fourth Persian king will pick a fight with the Kingdom of Greece – which is not a great idea!

And from the history books we know that these 4 Persian Kings were: *Cambyses (529-522); Pseudo-Smerdis (522-521BC); Darius I Hystaspes and Ahasuerus Xerxes, the Persian dictator mentioned in the book of Esther.*

Then verse 4 – Daniel is told a Greek King will rise up – after these 4 Persian kings - and then this Greek King's kingdom will be broken up into four.

And again, from the history books we know that this Greek King is **Alexander the Great [357BC – 324BC]**

Alexander was known as a military and administrative genius by conquering and commanding a great geographical area from Greece to India.

Alexander died at age 33; and his kingdom was 'broken up and parcelled out' (v4) and history shows that, after Alexander's death, the Greek Empire was divided into four and ruled by four generals of Alexander's army:

- 1) The **Seleucid Dynasty** – **Syria**, Babylon, Mede, Armenia
- 2) The **Ptolemaic Dynasty** – **Egypt**, Judea, Cyprus and North Africa
- 3) Lysenachus' rule – Thrace, Asia Minor and part of Cappadocia
- 4) Cassander's rule – Macedonia and part of Greece

Although Alexander's Kingdom was split into four; the only two powers that Daniel's vision deals with are the Kings of the South (**Egypt**) and the Kings of the North (**Syria**) [red on the screen]

[Slide-Empire]

In verses 5 to 20 – the vision goes into great deal about the battles between the Kings of the South [**Ptolemy**] and the Kings of the North [**Seleucid**] – and sandwiched in between them both is the land of Israel – referred to in verse 16 as the **Beautiful Land**.



The vision gives such detail as to what will happen in the future –after Daniel’s time - it’s quite incredible. **God knows the future.**

[Slide-future]

The Bible is full of verses that tell God’s people what is going to happen in the future – here’s a few examples:

- In the very first book of the Bible – God told Adam and Eve – that an offspring of Eve – Jesus – would crush an offspring of the Serpent – Satan (Gen 3:15)
- 700 years before Jesus was born – God told the prophet Isaiah that a virgin would give birth to a son – named Immanuel (fulfilled by Jesus’ birth)
- 700 years before Jesus was born – God told the prophet Micah – the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (fulfilled at Jesus’ birth)
- 700 years before Jesus was born – God described to the prophet Isaiah how Jesus would die in incredible detail (fulfilled when Jesus was crucified)
- And 500 years before Jesus – God told the prophet Zechariah – that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (fulfilled on Palm Sunday)

So, if all these things God said would happen – have happened

We can have confidence that when God says – believing in Jesus’ death and resurrection is the only way to Heaven – we know it’s true!

And when the Bible says – Jesus will come back one day to judge the living and dead – we can be confident - that’s also true (Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1)

We can have confidence in everything God says will happen!

God is sovereign in all things

(pause)

God works with people's good and bad choices

2nd then – **God works with people's good and bad choices**

[Slide-good and bad choices]

From verses 21-35 – The vision tells of the reign of a king from the North – who is described as a contemptible person (v21)

This king comes to power with treachery and deceit – not through military expertise like Alexander the Great.

This king battles with the king of the South – and then – verse 30 - gets threatened by ships from the west coastland (the Romans) who oppose him. So, he takes his anger and frustration out on God's people in Israel. So much so - that he desecrates the temple in Jerusalem and abolishes the daily sacrifices (v31)

He will manage to deceive some of God's people (v32a) but those people who know God will firmly resist him. (v32b)

The history books tell us that - this king from the North - was **Antiochus IV Epiphanes [215BC – 164BC]** who returned to Syria because of his fear of the growing Roman powers. He stopped in Israel on his way back to Syria and took out his frustrations on the Jewish people.

Conspiring with Jewish traitors, he desecrated the Temple sanctuary by erecting, in place of the altar, a statue of the Greek god Zeus. This was the abomination that made the Temple desolate, because no faithful Jew would have approached such an idol to worship the Lord God (v31).

Antiochus IV Epiphanes stopped the Temple sacrifices and stopped the practice of circumcision and anyone who observed the Sabbath was put to death. Old Testament scrolls were destroyed by his orders and pigs were sacrificed on the Temple altars. He even forced the Jewish people to eat pork!

He basically tried to eliminate the Jewish culture and religion altogether. [sounds a bit like Hitler, doesn't it?]

Even though - these were terribly despicable actions by Antiochus IV against God's people – and even though - some of God's people were sucked in by him and helped him.

God was sovereign – he worked around these bad choices and raised up people who made good choices. One of them was a guy called Judas Maccabeus – and he led a revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167-160BC. This was known as the Maccabean Revolt – and through this revolt – Antiochus was driven out - and the temple was rededicated to the Lord God. The Jews still celebrate this event each year – and it's called **Hannukah**

You see God works with people's good and bad choices – and even when wrong things are done – God can turn bad/evil situations into good.

In a far greater way – when Jesus lived on this Earth 2000 or so years ago – the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Him because they didn't believe Jesus was/is the Son of God and the Messiah saviour. So, they put Him on trial for blasphemy (for saying He is God) and for saying He is a King (when Caesar the Roman Emperor is the only King). And then they handed him to the Romans to be crucified.

That terribly bad choice – by the Jewish people and the Romans – to kill Jesus – was not a problem to God – because He is sovereign – and His plan – all along - was for Jesus to die on a cruel cross to pay for the punishment of sin – and to allow people a way to be right with God and forgiven for their sins.

And even though Jesus was killed – that wasn't a problem to God either – 3 days later – God raised Jesus to life – to show He has power over even death – and so He can offer all who believe in Jesus - eternal life.

God is sovereign – He can even work with people's' bad choices as well as their good ones!

God even worked with the bad choices of the writer of our NT reading from Philippians – the Apostle Paul

Before Paul was an apostle – he was called Saul – and he didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God and Saviour – and so he took it upon himself to round up Jesus' followers and have them persecuted and arrested and some were killed.

But Saul also had a vision like Daniel – a vision of Jesus – and Jesus spoke to Saul – and showed Saul he was wrong about Him -- and Jesus gave Saul a job to do – to go and tell non-Jews how they can be saved for Heaven by believing in Jesus.

God worked with Saul's bad choice and turned him around to follow Jesus and become the Apostle Paul

(pause)

If you're someone here this morning – who's hasn't thought too much about following Jesus?

Or if you think you've made too many bad choices that you're beyond help?

Remember, Paul was equivalent to a terrorist today – and Jesus turned him around.

Following Jesus is the only way – to have your sins forgiven

Following Jesus is the only way – to get to Heaven and live forever.

The best choice anyone can make is to put their faith in Jesus!

(pause)

God ultimately has victory over evil

3rd point – God ultimately has victory over evil

[Slide-victory over evil]

Following Jesus guarantees us a future in heaven!

But it doesn't mean our life on Earth is going to be easy.

As we said in the children's talk – Jesus told his followers – “***in this world you will have trouble***” (John 16:33)

That's what Daniel's vision is all about – warning God's people they will have trouble in this world.

And it's the same for us – we will face trouble in this world – because of the sin – and wrong choices in this world – and because not everyone will like us because we follow Jesus

But whatever trouble we face in this world it does not affect our destiny in Heaven

The Apostle Paul also suffered greatly once he started following Jesus

He was beaten many times, flogged, arrested, put in jail several times, shipwrecked three times and even survived a fatal snake bite.

One time in jail with his friend Silas – instead of being miserable – Paul and Silas sang hymns and prayed and praised God!

And Paul said in our NT reading.

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

How can Paul say that he can be content in every situation?

Because he knew that the suffering in this world is nothing in comparison to the everlasting peace and joy we will have in Heaven!

Paul knew as he says in Phil 3:20 that: ***Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.***

And Paul also believed what he said in Romans 16:20: ***The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.***

Jesus Himself says: ***But take heart; I have overcome the world*** (John 16:33)

God ultimately has victory over evil – when Jesus returns!

In the meantime, as we live out our life on Earth – can we join the Apostle Paul and be content in every situation we face – and rely – not on our own strength – but on Jesus to give us His strength.

Conclusion

To finish up then

[Slide-Conclusion]

Back to our **two niggling questions**

1st question - Q1. If God is in control of everything – **why doesn't He eliminate evil and suffering?**

From what we've seen this morning – because God knows the future – and because He can work with people's bad choices – He ultimately does eliminate evil and suffering.

Suffering is temporary – and we have Jesus with us to help us through the suffering – and the joy of Heaven awaits.

And the Bible describes Heaven as a place where:

God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev 21:4)

2nd question - Q2. If God is in control of everything – **how can human beings have free will?**

All the people we've mentioned in our Bible passages this morning – they were not robots – they had free will – and they made their own choices – and God intervened where He saw fit – and God also worked around their bad choices to bring about good.

God's sovereignty works in parallel and together with our free will!

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you for being sovereign in all things.

Thank you for knowing the future!

Thank you that you can work with our good and bad choices.

And thank you that ultimately you have victory over evil – because of your Son, Jesus' death and resurrection.

Thank you that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

Help us in the meantime – as we suffer in this world – to be like the Apostle Paul – and learn how to be content in each situation – and to rely on Jesus' strength – and not our own! In Jesus Name, Amen.

Benediction (1 Peter 4:12-13)

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Amen