

Back to the Future

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[0:00] Some of us don't get poetry. And so when we read through Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and even some portions of the prophets, it can be really tough sledding.

Like when you are in your red plastic sled sliding down fresh snow and you hit a spot that doesn't have any snow on it and you just come to a screeching halt.

That happens to some of us whenever we spot an indented portion in our English Bibles. We just sort of stop and we don't know what to do with that poetry.

Some of us don't get poetry. But some of us don't get history. And so when we read through, for example, 1 Samuel and on through 2 Chronicles, we had better have a good strong cup of coffee, right?

And a reading pace that is going to help us move quickly through that content. Like when you get out of your car and you realize it's raining and you quick hurry to get to the door so you don't get soaking wet.

[1:16] Some of us don't get history. And then there is Psalm 78, which is poetry used to teach history.

But that is an entirely different sermon. Not for today. Not for today. It may seem at first like Daniel 11 is in the form of poetry.

But this style is not poetic. Instead, it is enigmatic. Now, I know that might be a word we don't use terribly often and I suspect most of the kids won't know it.

So give me a moment and let's see if we can wrap our hands around this because it will help us make sense of this prophecy and other prophecies written in similar form in Scripture. Okay, so not poetic, but enigmatic.

Kids, do you know what an enigma is? Okay, very good. Thank you for being honest. An enigma is like a puzzle, a riddle, a word play, a word picture, maybe a clever turn of a phrase that when you read it the first time, you think, I'm not entirely sure what that means, but then the more you think about it, suddenly perhaps some meaning becomes clear from this enigmatic style of writing.

[2:45] You can think of a clever headline, right, that has some kind of a word play in it. Maybe something like what Emily might write for part of her job, right? Trying to catch people's attention with the content that she's writing.

Maybe you can think of a proverb as you read through some of the proverbs or idioms. Riddles are probably the closest thing to enigmatic style writing that we would think about.

Enigmatic writing uses intentionally ambiguous words, vague words, purposefully to obscure the full meaning of what is being said.

Think about a fortune cookie. And the fortune cookie says, happiness will be greater by staying. What does that even mean? Whose happiness? Greater than what? Staying where? We don't know, right?

[3:52] It's obscure. It's intentionally vague. So you don't know the full meaning of what is yet trying to be communicated. Adults, you might recall the so-called prophecies of Nostradamus.

And his prophecies, I'm putting that in air quotes if you happen to be listening this on the podcast, his prophecies are written in an enigmatic style.

The meaning is not immediately clear. Daniel 11 takes us back to the future. I say back to the future because God has already revealed portions of this future through Gabriel in Daniel chapter 8.

But now, the man dressed in linen, who we met last week, who I believe, and maybe you do as well, to be the Son of God.

Jesus, before he became flesh. The man dressed in linen from chapter 10 speaks. And he begins by telling Daniel about the Persian Empire.

[5 : 06] And here's how we're going to do this. I'm going to give you actual world events. And then we're going to read the enigmatic style prophecy.

And you see if you can make sense of what is going on. And I think as we work our way through this, it'll become more and more clear how this style of writing works.

Okay? So here's how the man dressed in linen begins telling Daniel about the Persian Empire. After King Cyrus, who is the current king, there will be three more Persian kings.

And after those three kings, there will be a fourth king who will be more wealthy than all of the other kings. And this fourth king is Xerxes I.

Look in your Bible, Daniel chapter 11 and verse 2. And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them.

[6 : 11] And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece.

And sure enough, in the year 480 BC, Xerxes invades Greece, which triggers the rise of Alexander the Great.

And Alexander the Great conquers Persia. But Alexander dies in his early 30s, and he leaves behind no heirs.

And so his kingdom is divided amongst four generals. Look in your Bible. Oh, not ready for the next Bible section yet.

Hold on. So here's what I want us to notice. Oh, we do need to read a couple more verses. Are three and four up here? Oh, okay, you're just going to have to bear with me.

[7 : 10] I knew we were missing something. We need verses three and four. Here's verses three and four. Then a mighty king shall arise. This is Alexander the Great. A mighty king shall arise who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills.

And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, not to his children, not to any heirs, nor according to the authority with which he ruled.

For his kingdom shall be plucked up and it shall go to others besides these. Now, these four kingdoms, two of these kingdoms are relevant to the people of Israel, to God's people.

And so from this point, verse five in chapter 11 and on, we're going to read only about the two kingdoms. We're going to read about the king of the north and the king of the south.

But even this is enigmatic writing because it's not actually two kings that we're reading about, but really two kingdoms. Does that make sense?

[8 : 27] So if we just read this and we think that the king of the north through this whole section is one king, we're going to be horribly confused. And if we think the king of the south is one king, we're going to be horribly confused.

It's not two kings. It's two kingdoms. One is in Syria to the north of Israel and one is in Egypt, which is to the south of Israel.

We're going to see four kings of the north recorded and six kings of the south. Here's where we pick up history again.

Ptolemy I of Egypt, he is the king of the south, initially controls the land of Israel, the land of Palestine. But soon, Seleucus I, not Sir Lucas, it's just Seleucus.

Seleucus I takes possession and he is the king of, not the south, not the south, but the north. So Seleucus soon takes possession of it.

[9 : 32] And then in 250 BC, Ptolemy persuades Antiochus II to marry his daughter Bernice. They are going to form an alliance between these two kingdoms.

This is the plan. Form an alliance and our son, our heir, will rule over both kingdoms. This sounds good.

Except for the plan requires Antiochus to divorce his wife. He does. And she poisons all three of them.

She's not a happy camper. Okay? She gets revenge, poisons all three of them, ensuring that her son, Seleucus II, becomes king. Look down in your Bible, verse 5.

Then the king of the south shall become strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he, and he shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority.

[10 : 35] And after some years, they shall make an alliance. And the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement, but she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure.

But she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those times. Ptolemy III, Bernice's brother, is not happy about this murder, and he marches north to avenge his sister, attacks Seleucus II, and plunders Syria.

Seleucus retaliates, and he is partially successful, although Ptolemy remains in control of Egypt. And we read about this in verse 7. And from a branch, from her roots, one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army, and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall deal with them, and shall prevail. He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods, with their metal images, and their precious vessels of silver and gold.

And for some years, he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north. Now, the sons of Seleucus II are, not surprisingly, Seleucus III, and somewhat surprisingly, Antiochus III, also known as the Great.

[12 : 09] And in 217 BC, Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III fight in the battle of Raphia, and Antiochus is forced to retreat.

Look at verse 10. His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north, and he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand.

And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail.

For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude greater than the first, and after some years, he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies.

[13 : 15] Between 212 BC and 205 BC, Antiochus regains much of what he has lost.

And in the year 198, Antiochus, he is still the third, the great, wins the battle of Panium. Many Jews join Antiochus' army.

They think that by joining his army and helping him defeat their enemy, that they will be given independence. But instead, Antiochus plunders the land of Israel.

We read about these events in verse 14. In those times, many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent from among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail.

Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siege works and take a well-fortified city, and the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand.

[14 : 26] But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him, and he shall stand in the glorious land with destruction in his hand.

Antiochus the Great gives his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V, endeavoring again to form an alliance, but this time with the empire of Rome.

Not surprisingly, I suppose, she betrays him. And in 182, when he dies, Cleopatra rules Egypt. We read about this in verse 17.

He shall set his face to come with strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand, or be to his advantage.

Now we are at 196 BC. Antiochus the Great catches the attention of the rising Roman Empire.

[15 : 33] He extends his kingdom to the coastlands called Thrace, and he disregards Rome's threats to back off until he is defeated in the year 191 BC, and we read about this in verse 18.

Afterward, he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence.

Indeed, he shall turn his insolence back on him. Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortress of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.

After this, Rome forces Seleucus IV to pay such a heavy tribute that he sends a royal tax collector to raid the temple in Jerusalem.

And in 175, Heliodorus, the prime minister, leads a conspiracy that assassinates King Seleucus.

And although he is not heir to the throne, Antiochus IV, Antiochus Epiphanes, who we met in

chapter 8, seizes power.

[16:50] We read about this in verse 20. Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom.

But within a few days, he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle. In his place shall arise a contemptible person.

This is Antiochus IV. A contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

When we met Antiochus IV in Daniel chapter 8, did you notice that he was not a very nice fellow? I find it so interesting that the scripture refers to him as a contemptible person.

On the day he was born, I wonder if all the nurses gathered round because Antiochus is certainly ba-ba-ba-ba bad. He is a brutal leader.

[17:57] He deals violently with any kind of opposition. He ruthlessly persecutes God's people, even killing the high priest in 171 BC.

We read about this in verse 22. And from the time that an alliance is made with him, he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people.

Without warning, he shall come into the richest part of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers' fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods.

He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time. In 170 BC, Antiochus invades and conquers Egypt.

He seems now, remember, he is the king of the north, and having now conquered Egypt, he seems to have the whole world right at his feet. And although Ptolemy VI pretends to submit to him, he betrays Antiochus Epiphanes to Rome.

[19:14] And Antiochus retreats all the way back to Syria, plundering the temple in Jerusalem as he passes through. we read about this in verse 25.

And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south with a great army, and the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him.

Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil.

They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed. And he shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant, and he shall work his will and return to his own land.

two years later, in 168 BC, Antiochus again invades Egypt.

[20:32] But a Roman fleet appears with an ultimatum. Either you retreat or you will be at war with Rome. Antiochus angrily retreats, and as he retreats, he vents his fury on God's people, the Jews.

He cancels the Sabbath. He outlaws circumcision. He bans the study of the Torah. He forbids dietary rules. He suspends temple sacrifices.

He profanes the temple by setting up an idol to Zeus and not offering sacrifices to it. Antiochus maliciously and mercilessly tortures and kills those who refuse to renounce their religious beliefs and practices.

We read about this in verse 29. At the time appointed, he shall return and come into the south. But it shall not be this time as it was before.

For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant.

[21:45] He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress and shall take away the regular burnt offering and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame by captivity and plunder. When they stumble they shall receive a little help and many shall join themselves to them with flattery and some of the wise shall stumble so that they may be refined, purified, and made white until the time of the end for it still awaits the appointed time.

Earthly rulers make future future plans but God rules earth's future.

what can you tell me about tomorrow? Maybe you have some plans for tomorrow, right?

[23 : 06] But we can't control those plans terribly well, can we? What can you tell me about the 4th of July? What can you tell me about two days from now?

What's going to happen? We don't know, do we? What can you tell me about a hundred years from now? You will be dead, Elam, we all will be dead in a hundred years, won't we?

What about two hundred years from now? We couldn't possibly tell anything that is going to happen two hundred years from now.

If you read any so-called prophecy by Nostradamus, you will likely be able to find some event in world history that he seems to predict, but accurately revealing all of these events in sequence is a stunning display of sovereign power.

Earthly rulers make future plans, but God rules earth's future. Maybe you're skeptical about all of this.

[24 : 19] I get it. I get it. But let me ask you, is this revelation really any more unlikely than Daniel walking into Nebuchadnezzar's throne room and telling him his dream that he had last night and apparently also what it meant?

Is it any more unlikely? Who does that? Who reveals somebody else's dreams? Only God. only our God does this.

If you deny that God can reveal future events like this, then you are like Nebuchadnezzar taunting Daniel's three friends. Who is a God who can deliver you from my hands?

And then watching, shocked, as he sees not three, but four people walking around inside of his burning fiery furnace.

Who does that? Only our God. Only our God. Friend, please do not continue in stubborn unbelief.

[25 : 35] Do not continue in stubborn unbelief. The God of this world is blinding your eyes from believing the truth of the gospel, from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Ask God, beg God, to take the blinders off of your eyes, so that you might believe the gospel and receive God's grace.

Why does God use this enigmatic style to reveal the future to Daniel? Why not make it crystal clear? Why not make it obvious?

These are good questions. This enigmatic style of revelation requires the context of history in order for the meaning to be clear.

That means that a reader, the first readers of Daniel, chapter 11, could not predict the future like some kind of doomsday prophet that we might hear about today, claiming to be able to predict the next event in world history.

[26 : 54] You need the context of history to understand this style of revelation. But what happens as God's people in future generations, as they continue to refer to Daniel, chapter 11, and they continue to see these events passing from the future into history, they will be able to say, look what God is doing.

We couldn't see it perfectly clear before, but now that history, that the future has become history, we see clearly what God said, and everything that God said has, in fact, come true exactly as He says it.

This enigmatic style ensures that the context of history is necessary in order for the meaning to be clear.

See if you can sort out the meaning of this. The gathering is below the stars. Blankets and beach towels become beds.

light flashes in the darkness, light colored by the rainbow. The sounds of war echo, but they do not fear. Indeed, some participate.

[28 : 19] Even children hold fire near their hands. What do you think I'm talking about? Fireworks, right?

How do you know that? Because you have some context to back that up. But what if you didn't have any context and you just had these words and you had no clue what fireworks were, you'd be puzzled and wondering, what is this that's going on here?

How is it that a child could hold fire near their hand? And you would then have to go, I have no idea. But you know what a sparkler is? And suddenly this few phrases make sense and you go, I know exactly what he's talking about.

This revelation to Daniel is like that. we need the context of history to make it clear. We're not supposed to be able to predict the future with what God has given us.

But we are supposed to be able to learn to trust our God who knows and controls the future. brothers and sisters, the future is not a free for all.

[29 : 32] The future is as certain as the past. God isn't scrambling around heaven reacting to whatever is happening here on earth in order to get the outcome that he wants.

Earthly rulers make future plans. But God rules earth's future. Look at verse 36. And the king 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. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished for what is decreed shall be done.

He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god for he shall magnify himself above all.

He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know. He shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts.

[30 : 42] He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. he shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.

At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind with chariots and horsemen and with many ships and he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through.

He shall come into the glorious land and tens of thousands shall fall but these shall be delivered out of his hand Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites.

He shall stretch out his hand against the countries and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver and all the precious things of Egypt and the Libyans and the Kushites shall follow in his train but news from the east and the north shall alarm him and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction.

And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain yet he shall come to his end with none to help him.

[32 : 03] Now the king in verses 36 down through 39 sounds quite a bit like Antiochus. And so it is tempting to think that this portion is about him as well.

but we don't have recorded history that corresponds to the events in verses 36 through 39. And although verse 40 to the end continues using this enigmatic style of the king of the north and the king of the south, we know that this portion from 40 to the end is not about Antiochus Israel.

Because he did not invade Egypt again and he died in Syria, not in the promised land. So how should we understand this portion of scripture?

Well, Bible critics, Bible critics say that this is about Antiochus Epiphanes and Daniel just got it wrong. some say that these verses describe a future that includes a literal resumption of the ancient rivalry between a kingdom of the north and a kingdom of the south.

And some, like me, believe that this part of the revelation uses Antiochus as a prototype of future rulers, kingdoms, and governments.

[33 : 35] In other words, these verses don't describe Antiochus IV Epiphanes, rather Antiochus becomes the paradigm, the model, the example of future human rulers, rulers that exalt themselves against God and his people.

So we shouldn't use these verses to try to predict the future. That's not the point of God's revelation. But, but, with the context of history, just like the first readers of Daniel, as the future becomes history, we also have the privilege of looking at this text and saying, look at that.

That ruler is exalting himself against God and against God's people. And every generation of followers of God, followers of Jesus, have the privilege of looking at this text and recognizing, look at what our God is doing.

The future is becoming history, and just like he said it would. Kings and kingdoms rise, rulers exalt themselves, and yet, we can still be assured that our God is in control even when presidents and prime ministers act like Antiochus.

[35 : 09] Earthly rulers make future plans, but God rules earth's future. Jesus teaches us in Daniel chapter 11 that earthly kingdoms are inherently unstable.

Did you notice that as we read through this long text? Earthly kingdoms are inherently unstable. Why is this? Because each of these empires is rooted in pride, jealousy, self-exaltation, left to ourselves, humanity would have bit and devoured itself long, long ago.

Is that true? It is true, isn't it? We would have devoured ourselves long ago, left to ourselves. Our hearts, friends, are no less sinful than these ten kings that we read about in Daniel chapter 11. Thanks, thanks be to God, who through our Lord Jesus Christ Christ, gives us the victory over the beastly impulses of our hearts.

Jesus also teaches us in Daniel 11 to wait in hope of a great reversal. And we notice this about a dozen times in Daniel chapter 11, but let me just point you back to a few.

[36 : 39] Verse number four. As soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity.

Again and again, we notice this. Children, we looked at this this morning. The king's heart is like a stream of water in the Lord's hand.

He directs it wherever he will. all of these kings rise to power, hurt God's people, and yet it is God who is directing every one of those kings' hearts.

So, when rulers who look nothing like Jesus come to power, and when presidents and prime ministers and courts and cabinets make following Jesus difficult, when antichrists arise and they revile and persecute and kill believers, don't lose hope.

Don't give up. Stand firm. What happens in persecution? What happens historically when Christians are persecuted?

[38 : 03] You persecute Christians, and it turns into a revival. Go back and read through church history. Persecution exposes those who are false believers, and it emboldens those who are true believers, and as a result, the church, the big C church, by purifying small C churches, the big C church is purified, and those who are left are emboldened, and revival happens.

Persecution and revival like to hold hands. They tend to stick together. Brothers and sisters, we wait in hope of a great reversal.

We may suffer now. We may suffer now, but our suffering will only be for a little while. the God of all grace has called us to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, so we can be absolutely sure that he will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us in order to remain faithful in a foreign land, until we see his glory.

Can we pray about that together? Let's pray. Father, we are grateful again for your word.

Thank you for Daniel chapter 11, and though it is difficult for some of us, me included, to work our way through this long history, you know, good Father, that I am more of a poetry guy, than a history guy, would you please settle your word in our hearts and allow us to take from this time the truths that you have for us to remember.

[40 : 07] Convince us again and again and again that you really are in control of the future, and that the future is as certain as the past.

Father, we confess that you are the God who controls the king's hearts, even kings that devise plans to hurt, to damage, to persecute, to kill your people.

You are the one in control of those king's hearts, and because we believe that is true, we also recognize that though we make plans, things that we hope will come to pass, big dreams, goals, building up the things that you have put in front of us.

We recognize that our plans are also in your hands, that you are able to direct us as well.

Would you please convict us of where we have made plans and forgotten about you? remind us again and again from this text of the instability of earthly kingdoms and the hope of a great reversal for the followers of Jesus someday yet to come.

[41 : 38] Blessed Holy Spirit, would you please move in our hearts right now as we take a few moments to be honest with you about the things in our heart that you have shown us either during this time together or at some point during this week when we have felt conviction as we prepare to celebrate communion together.

Would you please help us to be honest with you about our sin? Father, your word tells us that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Your children claim this promise. We claim the forgiveness that is ours for all of our sins through the precious blood of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving us your righteousness in exchange for our sin. thank you that you who had no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.
We are so humbled and so grateful by all that you have done for us. Holy Spirit, please continue to be with us as we continue our time of worship.
[43 : 03] In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.