

Main Idea: In Daniel 11:21-35, we discover the difference between the godless and the godly. The difference is made perfectly clear when hardship comes.

- I. When hardship comes, the godless look *in* (21-32a).
 - Case in Point: Antiochus IV Epiphanes
 - A. He was a self-seeking man (21-24).
 1. He exhibited deceit (21).
 2. He exhibited aggression (22-23).
 3. He exhibited manipulation (24).
 - B. He had a self-seeking plan (25-28).
 1. Might makes right (25).
 2. Truth is relative (26-27).
 3. Enough is never enough (28).
 - C. He had a self-seeking response in defeat (29-32).
 1. He turned against God.
 - He desecrated God's reputation.
 - He desecrated God's worship.
 2. He turned against God's people.
 - II. When hardship comes, the godly look *up* (32b-35).
 - A. They know God (32).
 - B. They teach God's Word (33).
 - C. When they stumble, they keep going (34).
 - D. When afflicted, they trust God (35).
- Make It Personal: Where am I looking?

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

This morning we're going to take a closeup look at a godless man. I should mention we're also going to see some godly people after we look at this godless man, for they're both in the text before us, the prophetic vision of Daniel 11.

“Why do I need to look at a godless man? I see them all the time.”

And most of us do. We work next to the godless man, or sit next to him at school, or perhaps live with him, or her.

The reason we're going to look at him is because God described him in His Word. He wants us to know about this man, what he was like and did, and what happened to him. And He wants us to know the difference between this godless man and the godly, and what happens when the two intersect in life.

It's all in Daniel 11, and it's a timely text for us. In Daniel 11 Daniel learned that a war was coming, several in fact.

"War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war."

That chilling statement is taken from the book *The Lessons of History*, by historians Will and Ariel Durant.

War *is* a constant. It's true in our day, as it has been since the day man first shook his fist at God's good plan for this planet.

But why is there war anyway? We could pose lots of reasons, but I want you to think about the issue from this slant.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

There are two types of people in the world. There are self-pleasers and there are God-pleasers, which is another way of saying the godless and the godly. War occurs when one nation attempts to please self and another nation stands in the way.

In Daniel 11 God gave Daniel a vision that foretold a series of wars. One of the primary aggressors the prophetic vision was a man by the name of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was the epitome of a self-seeker, and in fact, a hater of the true God.

A godless man. In Daniel 11:21-35, we discover the difference between the godless and the godly. The difference is made perfectly clear when hardship comes.

Review from Last Week: Daniel 11 is full of prophetic details. In fact, Walvoord proposes it contains 135 prophetic statements that have already been fulfilled.² It would be easy to get lost in the specifics of this vision, so I want to remind you of two helpful reminders we considered last time.

Reminder #1 is to keep in mind three guidelines. First, the vision pertains to the future of the Jews (10:14). Second, it will not be understood entirely until the end (12:8-9). And third, the revealed conflicts remind us of the unseen conflict. There is angelic warfare taking place behind the scuffles on the world scene which we learned about from the angel's remarks to Daniel in chapter 10.

Reminder #2 is to keep in mind the big picture. There are three divisions to the vision. The first section (1-20), which we studied last week, described what would happen from Daniel's day to the coming of Antiochus, roughly speaking a 350 year period from 535 B.C. to 175 B.C. The second section (21-35), which we'll consider this morning, deals with the deeds of Antiochus from 175-164 B.C.. The third section (36-45) deals with the future, and predicts a wicked, world ruler that will be on the scene during the Day of the Lord.

Now let's look at the difference between the godless and the godly, starting with the godless.

I. When hardship comes, the godless look *in* (21-32a).

Case in Point? Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a man who looked *in*, for his life revolved around himself.

Antiochus Epiphanes reigned for eleven years, from 175-164 B.C. He is the same person who was prophesied as the "little horn" in Daniel 8:9-14. What kind of person was he? We learn three things about him in verses 21-32.

A. He was a self-seeking man (21-24). Remember, what we're reading in Daniel 11 is explanation the angel delivered to Daniel. He's telling him what's coming. We left off in verse 20 with the prediction of the fall of a great leader, probably Antiochus the Great, who would be succeeded by another who would rule a few years, likely a reference to Seleucus IV Philopator.

Let's read the account of his successor, Antiochus Epiphanes in verse 21, "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person [AV, 'a vile person'] who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue [AV, 'obtain the kingdom by flatteries']."

So Antiochus was a self-seeker, a fact which is evidenced in three ways here.

1. *He exhibited deceit (21).* The Bible calls this coming ruler a "contemptible person" who would come to power, not rightfully, but by "intrigue." Antiochus had "not been given the honor of royalty," that is, he wasn't the rightful heir to the throne. Antiochus Epiphanes was the younger son of Antiochus the Great. As such he had no legal claim to the

² Walvoord, p. 269.

royal throne. His older brother's son, Demetrius I, did. That didn't stand in the way of Antiochus.

Antiochus was a master at power politics. Please don't think that the practice of crafty deals behind closed doors is unique to our day, for it's not. Antiochus buddied up with influential government leaders, and gave them promises of promotion and favor in return for their support. His deceitful tactics worked, and he took the throne. Just like the Bible predicted three centuries before it happened.

Antiochus was an ambitious, vigorous leader. I should note he gave himself the title, "Epiphanes," which means, "the Manifest One." He also produced coins and claimed divine honors for himself on every major coin he minted. He used the inscription, "*King Antiochus, Theos Epiphanes* (God Manifest)."

His opponents appropriately referred to him as "Epinanes" instead of "Epiphanes." Epinanes means "madman." Which brings us to his second, self-seeking trait in the text.

2. *He exhibited aggression (22-23)*. Notice how he did it in verses 22-23, "Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully and with only a few people he will rise to power."

In the 1930s, Adolph Hitler rose to power. At first, no one took him seriously. He used propaganda and flattery to cover up his destructive, self-seeking intent. He used intrigue and deceit to take Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Austria. When other European leaders objected, he covered his tracks and convinced them he meant no harm. Finally, he showed his true colors when he sent his *blitzkrieg* into Poland in 1939.

That's how Antiochus operated centuries before Hitler. He rose to power with only a "few people," says verse 23. When its people felt "secure," he invaded the kingdom by the use of "intrigue," according to verse 21. Along the way, he made promises and then later broke them.

3. *He exhibited manipulation (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."³

You might say that Antiochus was the original Robin Hood. His strategy was to take from the rich and, instead of hoarding it, share it with the masses. A kind gesture? Hardly. He was merely using the people for which he seemed to care. He wanted grass roots support, for he knew the populace could take him where he wanted to go.

Being generous to people, so you can later use them for a selfish end. Sound familiar? It's an evidence of a godless man.

Earlier, verse 23 said he would make an agreement with the "prince of the covenant." It's not easy to determine who this is. Some commentators believe it refers to the Jewish High Priest, Onias III (Walvoord, Strauss). Others suggest it refers to Antiochus' rival to the south, Philometor, ruler of Egypt.

Gleason Archer proposes the latter and shows that history supports him. Antiochus's policy was to throw his intended victims off guard by making friends with them first. Then he would maneuver for position and catch them by surprise. According to history, that's what happened with Philometor.

³ AV, "He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province, and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches; yea, and he shall plot against the strongholds, even for a time."

Antiochus captured Philometor in battle, so the Egyptian people picked another king to take Philometor's place. Guess what Antiochus did? He made a deal with Philometor (the agreement talked about in verse 23). He would overthrow the new king of Egypt and put Philometor back on his throne.

Another nice gesture? Hardly. Just a ploy by Antiochus to unite Egypt and Syria under *his* control. That's the kind of man Antiochus was, a self-seeker who used deceit, aggression, and manipulation.

We learn something else about this godless man in the next section.

B. He had a self-seeking plan (25-28). What was it? Stately simply, to be number one, to rule the world. We see the attitudes by which he operated in verses 25-28, three in fact.

1. *Might makes right (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."

Remember, Antiochus started with only a "few" back in verse 23, but now he's in charge of a "great" army. And He's using this great army to accomplish his agenda. For the godless man, might makes right.

2. *Truth is relative (26-27)* In the very next verse we learn about one of his conspiracies. He had contact people right within the top administration of the Egyptian government.

Notice verses 26-27, "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."

Antiochus was a pragmatist to the core. "Do whatever you can get away with and whatever it takes to succeed." That was the support structure for his political platform. For him, like many in our day, truth was relative. Say whatever you need to say to get what you want.

Does it bother you that there is a shortage of truth-telling in our day? Have you ever found yourself thinking, "Yea, why should I be true to my word when so many around aren't?"

Don't lose heart. Verse 27 is a powerful reminder that the day is short-lived for those who live by relativism. As with Antiochus and Philometor, those kings who lied to each other across the bargaining table, *an end will come at the appointed time*. God still rules.

This, of course, is the theme of the book of Daniel. God is sovereign, no matter how He appears to the natural eye, and His kingdom will prevail in the end. And along the way He is rescuing people from their self-seeking ways, by the power of His grace, through His Son, and preparing them to enjoy the wonders of His eternal kingdom.

Now if verse 27 wasn't so sad, it would be funny. What happens when two self-seeking people sit down across the table from each other to make a deal? You'd better read the fine print!

My friend, relativism destroys meaningful relationships. What happens when two self-seeking people get married, both of them thinking, "I expect you to make me happy."? It's the same thing that happens when two self-seekers do business together, and both are thinking, "You are important to me as long as you help me get where I want to go."

This is at the core of what it means to be godless. You can go to church and still be godless. You can pray before your meals and still be godless. A godless person lives for himself or herself rather than for God and His glory.

Thankfully, God specializes in transforming self-seekers into kingdom-of-God seekers. How? Through the One God predicted in Daniel 9, the Anointed One, who would come to Jerusalem “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness,” says verse 24. And how? By being “cut off,” says verse 26.

And that’s what Jesus Christ did. He, the perfect God-man, walked into Jerusalem and was “cut off” from the land of the living as He died on the cross to atone for wickedness.

It’s through Jesus Christ that God turns self-seekers into His kingdom-seekers. Do you want Him to rescue you? Then repent and put your trust in Christ.

There’s a third attitude of the godless man’s self-seeking plan. Might makes right. Truth is relative. Third...

3. *Enough is never enough (28)*. In verse 28, we learn that Antiochus did not believe in separation of church and state. We're told that on his return trip The Manifest One made a whistle stop in Jerusalem.

Notice the text, “The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant [a reference to Israel]. He will take action against it and then return to his own country.”

We learn something here about the godless. They're never satisfied. Enough is never enough. When Antiochus left Egypt, he took with him "great wealth," says verse 28. But he wasn't satisfied. He wanted more, and made Israel pay the price of his covetous greed.

May I ask you something? Are you a content person? The lack of contentment is a more serious problem than we often recognize. It’s an evidence of godlessness. Godliness with contentment is great gain, says 1 Timothy 6:6. People who are godly have learned to be content. Not so the ungodly.

The tables turned for Antiochus beginning in verse 29. What he did next reveals the depth of his self-seeking godlessness.

C. He had a self-seeking response in defeat (29-32). I mentioned earlier that Antiochus made a deal with Philometor to put him back on his throne in Egypt. As it turned out, Philometor was as crafty as Antiochus, and in time turned against Antiochus. When Mr. Epiphanes learned of it, he marched his army southward against Egypt to teach his former ally a lesson. His effort stalled when he ran into a Roman fleet.

Verses 29-30a tell us prophetically what happened, “At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands [the Romans] will oppose him, and he will lose heart.”

History tells us that the Roman commander Popilius Laenas met Antiochus and told him to get out of Egypt immediately or face war with Rome. Popilius drew a circle around Antiochus with his staff and ordered him to make his decision before he stepped out of it.

Humiliated, Antiochus left Egypt and headed north for home in Syria. He was fuming mad.

So picture this. A 16 year old teenager was walking down the hall in school, happy as a lark, on his way to meet a special female friend at her locker. As soon as he got there, in front of a large crowd, the school bully (who was 5" taller and 75 pounds heavier) stuck a finger in his face, and demanded he get away from the girl. Like a whipped pup, he retreated and headed for home, his peers snickering behind him.

Now, what do you think this fellow’s frame of mind would be like on his way home? What would he likely do if his kid brother pestered him as he walked through the door?

Well, after red-faced Antiochus left Egypt, he headed through Israel, and here’s what happened according to the prediction at the end of verse 30, “Then he will turn back and vent

his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.”

So in response to the defeat, self-seeking Antiochus committed two atrocities.

1. *He turned against God.* Again, history tells us that in 168 BC, Antiochus marched into Jerusalem, stopped the Jews from offering sacrifices to the Lord in the temple, and poured the blood and broth of a swine upon the temple altar. After polluting the temple of Yahweh, he set up an altar to the image of Zeus Olympius.

That’s what history says. Now listen to how God’s Word predicted all this over three hundred years before it happened.

Verse 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.”

Antiochus committed blasphemy in two ways. First, He desecrated God's reputation, for the temple represented God's presence. This was His house, the place where He had chosen to manifest His presence.

But Antiochus deliberately defiled that place, and in so doing, defiled the very reputation of the Lord.

Next, He desecrated God's worship. He abolished the daily sacrifice, which was something God graciously had authorized so sinners could be right with Him. Atonement.

But Antiochus didn’t believe in atonement by the death of a substitute. He made his own religion. He set up his own idol, “the abomination that causes desolation.”

The prophet Jeremiah confronted this double problem in Jeremiah 2:13, “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

This brings us to a second atrocity that Antiochus committed. Just as God predicted in Daniel 11, so it happened. First, against God...

2. *He turned against God's people.* Verse 30, “He will...vent his fury against the holy covenant.”

The book of 2 Maccabees, a book that records Jewish history written around 100 BC, tells what happened. According to 5:11-14, Antiochus assaulted Jerusalem, and massacred with the sword 40,000 men, women, and children, and sold another 40,000 as slaves.

The date, December 16, 168 BC.

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus Himself made reference to this phrase from Daniel 11:31 (which is also in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11). In Matthew 24:15, “So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel...then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

But Jesus said this two centuries *after* Antiochus. So Jesus doesn’t see “the abomination that causes desolation” as just a past event, but a future one too. Again, when Jesus cites Daniel’s text, he doesn’t look back to Antiochus, but looks ahead to the yet future Antichrist.

More about him next time, in the final section of Daniel 11.

Finally, after his deadly deed, Antiochus found some apostate Jews, put them in charge of Jerusalem, and then left for home. That’s verse 32, “With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.”

So not all the Jews were believing Jews, but apostates. And Antiochus flattered them and corrupted them into joining his wicked schemes.

Isn't it interesting to watch what unites godless people? They are brought together by their common rejection of the true God and the true people of God. Even in our day, hatred of God and God's people brings enemies together.

You say, "I'm sure glad I'm not like Antiochus Epiphanes."

But wait a minute. The 19th century Russian novelist, Ivan Turgenev, said, "I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like. And it is terrible."⁴

The truth is, we are all born into this world as *godless*. "Without hope and without God," says Ephesians 2:12. We enter the world not knowing God, not wanting to obey God, but rather wanting to go our own way.

That's what makes the cross so vital. At the cross, Jesus gave His life to rescue us from our plight of self-centeredness. He who was *godly* was treated as though He was *ungodly* so that in Him we might become *godly*.

So how do you tell the difference between the godless and the godly? Wait till hardship comes, for when it does, the godless *look in*. Just like Antiochus did.

What do the godly do? God's Word shows us in the next paragraph.

II. When hardship comes, the godly look up (32b-35).

They look up to God. You'll recall that when faced with the fiery furnace and the lion's den, God rescued Daniel and his three friends. They experienced divine intervention. But here in this vision, Daniel learns this would not always be the case for God's people.

God does not always deliver His people *from* trials. Sometimes He delivers them *through* trials. That's what Daniel learned would happen to a remnant of Jews in the coming massacre of Antiochus.

There's a strong contrast right in the middle of verse 32. "But." We know Antiochus was a self-pleaser, and so were the Jews who betrayed God to spare their necks. BUT. We're introduced to a second group in verse 32.

The godly. Do you know what a God pleasing person does when trials come? He or she looks *up* to God. We learn four characteristics of the godly in verses 32-35.

A. They know God (32). Verse 32, in the AV, "But the people that do know their God [in contrast with the Jews that went through the motions and later betrayed God] shall be strong, and do exploits." God always has His remnant. He knows them, and they know Him.

Such a man was Mattathias. Mattathias, a Jewish priest, chose to risk his life rather than betray the God of Israel. He and his five sons resisted Antiochus by leading a guerrilla band that fled to the hills. Mattathias died, but his son, Judas Maccabaeus (known as the "Hammer") assumed military leadership. Eventually, Judas Maccabaeus also chose to lay down his life in battle rather than retreat.

For people who truly know God, there is no greater motivation than this. They want to please God. Secondly, not only do God-pleasers know God, but...

B. They teach God's Word (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."

Please notice something. Trials bring opportunities.

Do you remember what happened during Desert Storm? I'm not talking about what happened in the Middle East where the war was happening, but what happened *here*. Church attendance went up. People started asking questions. It was a great teaching time. When trials hit a nation, people ask questions. When trials hit a family, moms and dads and children start searching.

Daniel learned that during the coming blood-bath, a spiritual revival of sorts would occur. The truly godly would use the opportunity to teach others God's Word.

⁴ from Hughes, 75

That's the ambition of the godly. They want others to know what they know, about God and His Word. And they are looking for ways to make it known. And that includes through hardship.

When we go through a trial, it's like going out on a platform. A pulpit, if you will, from which to make Christ known. And when we suffer well, people can't miss the message that we know something they need to know.

But don't get the idea that godly people are perfect. They're not. Positionally in Christ, yes. Practically, not yet. They struggle, and sometimes they fall. But herein lies the difference.

C. When they stumble, they keep going (34). Notice verse 34, "When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them."

In the vision this is talking about the Jews that resisted Antiochus. They *fell*, for he was too strong. But eventually, however, they received *a little help*. And with that help Judas the Hammer and other Jewish guerrilla fighters recaptured Jerusalem, and rededicated the temple altar in December 165, now celebrated as Hannukah.

And many who are not sincere will join them. This too happened, for once the God-fearing Jews took control, others joined them, not out of conviction as much as expedience.

When the godly stumble, they keep going. They don't give up. They persist.

You ask, "What keeps them going?"

D. When afflicted, they trust God (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."⁵

If you chart the growth of the godly, it's not a straight line. There are ups and downs. *Some of the wise will stumble.*

But there's purpose even in this, and the godly see it. *So that they may be refined, purified, and made spotless.*

Until the time of the end. The godly live with the long view. They know that God can use failure, even our own failures, to accomplish His good plan.

Have you stumbled in the past? Which of us hasn't? There's hope. Turn to the Lord and put your trust in Him.

Those of you who grew up in the fifties may remember the name Mickey Cohen. He was one of the most well-known criminals of the day. Perhaps you may even remember the account of Cohen becoming a "Christian".⁶

At the height of his career, Cohen was persuaded to attend an evangelistic service and showed a surprising interest in Christianity. Christians were ecstatic. Just think of the influence a converted Mickey Cohen could have for the cause of Christ! Some prominent Christian leaders began visiting him in an effort to convince him to accept Christ. Late one night, after repeated appeals for him to open his heart on the basis of Revelation 3:20, Cohen prayed.

The Christian community was elated. But as time passed, no one could detect any change in Cohen's life. Finally, his Christian friends confronted him with the fact that being a Christian meant he would have to give up his friends and his profession.

Cohen would not. His reasoning? There are "Christian football players, Christian cowboys, Christian politicians; why not a Christian gangster?"

⁵ AV, "And some of them of understanding shall fall, to test them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end, because it is yet for a time appointed."

⁶ The story told by Kent Hughes, 21

Sound crazy? Sadly, the mentality is all too common. There are many in our day who have "accepted Christ," but continue to live as they always have. There is no repentance, no zeal for godliness. They remain as they always were, self-reliant, self-sufficient, and self-centered.

There's a question we each must ask ourselves this morning. And let's be honest.

Make It Personal: Where am I looking?

Am I looking *in*? Is my life basically about *me*? I live to do what *I* want, and by *my* strength.

Or, am I looking *up*? I freely acknowledge I exist for Him, and belong to Him for He purchased me.

To be saved, we must look up. But we must also live that way, looking up, in dependence upon the Lord, and seeking to do all things to the glory of the Lord.

If your life has been focused on self, today is the day to repent and look up.

And if this is your desire, the following song will help you express your desire to the Lord... "O Jesus, I have promised to serve you till the end."

Hymn of Response: #369 "O Jesus, I Have Promised"

Let's spend some time in reflection and prayer. With our heads bowed and eyes closed, allow the Holy Spirit to help you rightly respond to God's will for your life.

Time for Response in Prayer

Does your life truly revolve around Jesus Christ? You may find it hard to answer that question, so allow me to help you with some specific follow-up questions:

Have you ever been truly born again? Has there been a time in your life where you called out to God, admitted that you are a sinner and have been living for yourself, but wanted to change? Have you ever truly repented of living for yourself, and trusted in the Person of Jesus Christ? Have you ever committed your life no-strings-attached to Jesus Christ? If you haven't, or are not sure, do so right now.

How about since that day? Are you living for Christ now? Does your calendar reveal that Christ is at the center of your life? How about your bank account? How much time have you spent in the Lord's work in the past month versus how much time you've spent doing your own thing? How much money have you given to advance the gospel in comparison with how much you've spent on recreation and hobbies and other things for yourself?

Let's repent of living for self, and choose to live for Him from now on.