

Warfare and Witness to the End

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[0 : 00] really rather daunting chapter and one very fine Bible commentator says this, quote, we do not see how it could possibly be used for a sermon or sermons.

So that's not a very encouraging start for the preacher. I'm not sure that he's right. Nevertheless, it certainly is not an easy chapter and you saw that, you heard it as we read it.

So I want to say two things, first of all, by way of introduction. The first is this. We need to be clear that these later chapters of the book of Daniel, the second half of the book really, as it goes on, does have an increasing focus on the future of God's people as it stretches right out into the distance to the very end of history.

The first section of the book, remember, after chapter one, which is really the introduction, chapters two to seven were written in Aramaic and they, if you like, they proclaim the big story to the world in the world's language.

And the big message is that the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, is the God, the God of heaven and earth. Do you remember? It's enclosed by the two visions, chapter two and chapter seven, which give a sweeping panorama of the whole of human history from beginning to end.

[1 : 23] And that history climaxes with the kingdom of God that he is establishing forever and ever. Remember in chapter two, the image was of the great stone which smashed every earthly kingdom and which grew to fill the entire earth.

And then in chapter seven, Daniel saw that that happens through the triumph of the Son of Man who ascends to receive the kingdom. But then the second half of the book, verses, chapters eight to twelve, begin to focus much more clearly on the conflict involved for God's own people as that kingdom is being established.

And the increasing focus as we go through is on that conflict as it comes towards a climax, as it comes towards the final end.

Now I've been indebted here to Dr. Palmer Robertson for his magnificent recent book, *The Christ of the Prophets*, and I heartily recommend it to anybody who's interested in studying the biblical prophets.

But he points out that in these later chapters of Daniel, there are three historical cycles of the story of God's kingdom that are portrayed. And in each, the pattern is the same.

[2 : 40] The empires rise and they threaten God's kingdom. But there's a struggle, they're overthrown, and the ultimate end is that they are defeated by God.

And God's people are preserved and prosper. So there are three cycles. The first is the seventy years of Israel's captivity, their exile in Babylon.

The second cycle is the seventy times seven years, or the seventy weeks of years, that stretch out, as Daniel sees in the vision, from the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, right on until the coming of what he calls an anointed one.

One who would come in history and who would decisively intervene for God's people and would bring an end to sin and would establish everlasting righteousness.

Do you remember the end of chapter 9? That's the second cycle of history, following on from the seventy-year captivity. But the third cycle that's in view in these later chapters in particular, is the time from that decisive intervention in history, right up until the final restoration of God's people forever.

[3 : 54] Not just the return to the land, not even just the final dealing with sin, but a final end to everything. And of course, as we saw last time, if you turn over to chapter 12, that means resurrection from the dead.

Just look at the very last three verses of this book, chapter 12, verse 11. These verses just summarize that last cycle that Daniel is interested in.

Verse 11, from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, remember that's the end of chapter 9, that's what we saw there, shall be this period of 1,290 days or 1,335 days.

And then, verse 13, will be the end of days. The resurrection. When Daniel and the righteous will stand.

When, as the NIV puts it, they will arise to receive their inheritance. Clearly, the very end of history, the day of judgment and the resurrection.

[5 : 04] And that's the third cycle of history that's in view in the book of Daniel. And it particularly dominates these last chapters. Now, whatever this mysterious period of days is, the 1,290 days, certainly it's parallel to chapter 12, verse 7, just above it, where it's put in a different way.

Time, times, and half a time. Remember, that's something that we saw back in chapter 7 as well, as describing the period after the triumph of the Son of Man and the people inheriting the kingdom, all the way up until a final judgment, when at last all evil would be done away with.

It also corresponds to the same kind of idea at the end of chapter 9, verse 27. After the decisive intervention of the Anointed One, there will remain half a week of years.

It will be in the middle, says verse 27, of that last week, that 70th week, that this decisive intervention will take place, but there will remain war till the end.

And the focus of these later chapters of Daniel is increasingly on this conflict for God's people as the time of God's final intervention in history draws near.

[6 : 27] But there are two horizons in view. First of all, you see, there is this intensification as the time approaches for God's kingdom to arrive in history, as his Anointed One comes.

And that's why there is such a focus in chapter 8 and in chapters 11 and 12 on the period of history running up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and a special focus on the Greek empires, the empire of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Remember, we've come across that in chapter 8. That was the third of the four kingdoms in Daniel's vision of chapter 7. But that's not the only focus here, because also, as we've seen, this is a conflict that somehow, somehow, even after God's decisive intervention in history, somehow it goes on beyond that.

It stretches out to the very, very end of human history itself. And indeed, it intensifies all the more as the end draws near.

And so, you see, what we have in this chapter, in chapter 11 of Daniel, is a focus that merges into descriptions that go beyond the time of the Anointed One and which typify the ultimate struggles of God's people as the final end of all history approaches.

[7 : 50] So then, the focus is on the nature of human history as it stretches out far beyond Daniel's time and right into the great distance of what is, in fact, still future for us today, because the day of judgment has not yet come.

And that's why, in fact, these chapters are still so very relevant for us. That's why Paul in the New Testament says that all these Old Testament scriptures are written for us, not for those of the past. It's not just history. This is prophecy. It's a word from God for his people, right until the very last day. Of course, we've got to understand what that message really is and what it's meant to lead us into and what it's not meant to lead us into.

How it's not meant to lead us into wrong thinking. So that's the first thing. An increasing focus on history stretching to the very end. Second thing is, and this will help us to understand how the message really is for us, second thing is this.

We must remember, as we said last time, that chapters 10 to 12 are all one unit and that the introduction, chapter 10, that we studied last week is vital to understand what's going on here in chapter 11.

[9 : 09] Remember in chapter 10, Daniel had a vision, a revelation from God that showed him the big picture behind human history. He saw the spiritual reality that lies behind.

He saw the pattern as it will be right until the very end. As you remember, chapter 10, verse 1 said, it concerned a great conflict, a great war.

And now, in chapter 11, what Daniel is seeing in this vision is what that conflict will actually look like on the ground, what it will look like in real human history on earth.

And you see, the point is really very clear. Human history, with all its machinations, with all its convulsions, with all the ebb and flow of empires and powers, human history cannot be fathomed unless we see it as it is explained by what lies behind the scenes.

That's the message of the whole book of Daniel from beginning to end. Human history is kingdom history. God and his plan and his purpose is behind everything.

[10:23] You'll never understand human history unless you understand that. And because that's true, the character of human history as we experience it will also inevitably reflect the character of God's kingdom history.

Chapter 9, verse 26 tells us that to the end on earth there will be war. Why is that? Because, chapter 10, verse 1 tells us that in the heavenly realms it is a great conflict.

And human history, you see, is the stage on which the great cosmic drama for God's redemption of the universe is being played out. That's what explains history and that's what explains current affairs as we know it today.

It's the struggle, it's the struggle to the very death whereby God has purposed to restore his world and his people forever through the destruction of all his enemies.

And that's what Daniel saw in chapter 10. He saw the conflict in the heavenly places. And what he sees in chapter 11 is that conflict as it works itself out in the events of earthly history from his own time right forward to the very end.

[11:38] Because, and this really is the great message of the biblical faith, because the ultimate cosmic answers of eternity, the great issues of time and eternity, the great issues of sin and salvation, these are issues that are settled in human history.

Our God's story invades our human story. Our faith is a historical faith. And the heavenly world invades the world of earth in the most wonderful way in the person and in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the future of the heavens is decided here on earth. Heaven and earth can't be separated. And so as we see this mysterious human history unfolding in chapter 11 of Daniel, we mustn't forget what he saw in chapter 10.

This is God's story. This is his word. He's coming to earth. And he is the great actor in this drama. And therefore, the most important truth of all is simply this, that the people of the world and the powers of this world must choose.

They must choose which side they're going to be on. They're either with God who is working out his story through human history or they're against him.

[13:03] There's a stark choice. There's no middle ground in war. There's only two sides. And this chapter makes clear that history to its end will be a time of war.

It concerns a great conflict. So, with that, by way of introduction, let's look more carefully at this chapter itself. It's a long chapter.

We can't get bogged down in it. All we can do is get the big issues. And in fact, that's far, far more important than getting stuck in some of the minutiae of these things. Let me put it this way.

This chapter unfolds two sides of this great conflict that stretches to the very end of time. It unfolds, firstly, the relentless warfare of a contemptuous world against God and his people.

And secondly, the resolute witness of a confessing church. Let's look at these in turn. The first one will take us most of our time.

[14:07] The relentless warfare of a contemptuous world. This is what the human world under the power of the dark powers and the heavenly princes that Daniel saw in chapter 10.

This is what that world looks like in the flesh in real world history. The overwhelming picture that we have in this chapter is of relentless evil, of a contemptuous world, self-exalting world, showing its absolute scorn for the God of heaven.

And it shows that scorn by focusing its opposition on God's kingdom as it's being built here on earth and on the gospel of the kingdom, the word of his covenant faith.

That's what the dark opposition to God in the heavenly realms actually looks like in human history. And that's how it's going to be right to the very end. And that's the real issue, you know, behind all the ebb and flow of human history.

A story of many and varied assaults on God's kingdom and on his covenant, his gospel.

[15:21] And that's why everything in this chapter actually is viewed from that perspective. Look at verse 16. This is really what's central to everything from the way the writer is speaking.

To him, central, is the glorious land. You see that phrase occurring again in verse 41. At the time of the end, where is the assault? It's on the glorious land. God's land. In verse 45, the great assault is on the glorious mountain. It's on the place where God dwells.

The focus of all of this history has at its center the place of the kingdom of God. And similarly, another prong of this focus of attack we see in verse 28.

It's on the holy covenant. It's again there in verse 30. And in verse 32, it is hearts set against the holy covenant, set against God's gospel, his word of promise.

[16:29] You see, from the perspective of heaven, that's what we're getting here on human history, from the perspective of heaven, all human history is understood in its relation to the progress and the preservation of God's kingdom, which for Daniel's day was focused in the land of Israel, and God's gospel, his covenant, his promised salvation by faith.

You see, if we can see this perspective governing this chapter, it'll help us to see the significance of it. There are many and varied interpretations of the details in this chapter. Some of them are totally mutually exclusive to each other.

But if we keep this big picture in view, it'll help us to see that the nature of world history is its relation to the progress of the kingdom of Christ.

And if we see that, we'll see the significance of this word for us today. We'll see that it's not just, although it is, a prophecy foretelling the coming chapter of evil for Daniel's people in the day after his time, but it's also about the continuous character of evil that confronts God's people in every age.

And further, it is also about the cosmic climax of evil that will face God's people at the very end of the age.

[17:56] And we need to give some thought to each of these three aspects if we're to understand this word for us. First of all, there can be no doubt that this chapter speaks first directly to Daniel about the coming chapter of evil that would confront God's people in the centuries following his own time.

Most of what is described in chapter 11 here is with extraordinary accuracy the unfolding of the history of the centuries after Daniel right up until the second century BC.

It gives in great detail really the broader picture of the vision of chapter 8. Do you remember the rams and the goats and the horns? This is filling in so many of the details. In fact, that's actually where the problem lies because for many scholars there is so much detail here it can be mapped so accurately to the history books that they say well it must have been written after the events.

And they say that verses 1 to 39 was written by somebody in the second century looking back pretending to be this person Daniel. And then they say that verse 40 onwards because they can't quite so easily map that to known history.

Well they say well that's when he started prophesying but he really got it all wrong. Now obviously that view discounts the very possibility that God can reveal the future and does reveal it.

[19:22] And it means that this book is well sheer deception sheer forgery. They bring out all sorts of arguments to try and suggest why people would understand the way it was written and it wouldn't bother them but really it's very unconvincing.

But if we take the Bible seriously and to my mind really it is far far more credible to take this book as it stands and for what it claims to be because the whole purpose of it is meant to be written to encourage God's people in times of war and conflict.

It's very hard to see what possible encouragement there can be for make believe. Not much comfort for me in the thought that well if I'm having a really difficult time and struggling somebody says to me well never mind let's make up the kind of God that you would like to have and let's pretend that he'll give you all this kind of help.

I find that a very unconvincing way of being encouraged in time of difficulty. It seems quite ridiculous. What encourages me is to find out about the God who's real, who does answer prayer, who moves mountains, who does intervene to help his people.

So if we take the Bible seriously, if we take God seriously, there's no problem in seeing this as real predictive prophecy and indeed it does describe very accurately the history after Daniel's day.

[20:42] verses 2 to 4 speak of the Persian and the Greek empires. The mighty king of verse 3 is certainly Alexander the Great. His empire was divided into four.

This next long section from verses 5 to 20 speak of the warring of the northern and the southern kings. From verse 5 you see it was the king of the south who was strong first. Well that's the Ptolemies of Egypt. Then in verse 10 the initiative seems to move to the north and to Syria. That's the Seleucid kings. You can read about all of this in your history books. Tales of political maneuvering, of battles, of marriage alliances and so on. It's fascinating. Verse 6 there speaks of a marriage alliance of a northern king to an Egyptian queen. You can read about that in the history books. Verse 17 mentions one the other way around. And that's Cleopatra the first, the daughter of a Syrian king who married into the Egyptian royal family. [21 : 45] She then became the first of seven Cleopatras. It's Cleopatra the seventh by the way, it's a famous one that had the fling with Mark Antony. You might not know her, you probably know her by her stage name, Elizabeth Taylor.

But this is real history. And it's fascinating, you can read all about it. And God revealed it to Daniel hundreds of years before. At verse 21 enters a contemptible person. And that's really the focus of the rest of the chapter. We've met him already in chapter 8, Antiochus the fourth, Antiochus Epiphanes. Not one of the great leaders of the world from the world's perspective, but a huge, huge figure in the history of God and his people and his kingdom. Because he above all, says verse 28, he set his heart against God's holy covenant. Do you remember he ransacked the temple, he killed the priests, he offered pigs, the filthy animals on the altar of sacrifice, he set up a statue of Zeus in the holy place. Remember in chapter 8 he was called the king of bold face. He's the one who blasphemes God himself. And this man was a huge threat to God's people, to his kingdom and to the faith. [23 : 05] He sought to overrun God's people in their own land, to extirpate the biblical faith and to swamp them with the culture of Greece and the surrounding nations.

And so this vision really had a real personal warning for Daniel and for his people. That the future was to be back in the beautiful land, yes God was taking them back, but even worse than exile was going to face them in future days.

Not this time a punishment from God, but just because this is what building God's kingdom involves. Chapter 9 made that clear, the city would be rebuilt, but in troubled times.

And to the end there shall be war. Even in the glorious land, even within the visible company of God's kingdom on earth, there would be huge challenges, huge attacks, real warfare.

And so God's people must listen, they must be ready, they must be ready to resist the evil onslaught, to fight for the true faith, to fight to preserve the covenant, the gospel, the truth of God.

[24 : 20] Of course you only have to say these things to realize how little has changed. The New Testament is full of just exactly the same kind of warnings, isn't it? So much of our own thought here in recent days has been taken up with the battle to preserve the truth of the gospel within the visible constituency of the Christian church, God's kingdom here on earth.

You see, that points us to the fact that although for Daniel much of what we are seeing here was certainly fulfilled in the coming chapter of history for his own people.

This vision certainly describes more than that. It describes the continuous character of evil. Describes what confronts God's people in every age.

This is real history, but it's more than real history. For one thing, Jesus himself picks up the language of this chapter and applies it to events that are still in the future from his perspective.

Do you remember we saw that in Matthew chapter 24? Jesus knows perfectly well all about Antiochus Epiphanes, but he picks up this language about the abomination that makes desolate and he applies it to something in the future, to the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.

[25 : 43] And clearly the first plain application was to Daniel's immediate people and their concerns, but these specific events are, you see, simply one manifestation of that heavenly conflict that Daniel has seen in chapter 10.

The continual warring of the dark powers against God's kingdom right till the very end. And so we shouldn't be surprised that these things exhibit the same characteristics of such opposition in a continuous way all through the history of God's kingdom on earth.

God's kingdom on earth. Just look at verses 30 to 32. Doesn't that describe a pattern that we've seen again and again through history? Rulers and powers helping those who want to forsake God's covenant, profaning the temple, God's one unique prescribed way of worshipping him, seducing and flattering those people away from the truth of God?

Just think of Nero's persecution of the early Christians. Just think of the counter-reformation, the persecution of the French Huguenots and others.

Just think in this country's history of the post-reformation times and the time of the covenanters and the killing times in this land where people were massacred for maintaining the true faith.

[27 : 13] We forget it today, it's all romanticized in songs about Bonnie Dundee, but Bonnie Dundee slaughtered the people of God in this land. Hope you never sing that song.

Don't these verses describe China under Mao's cultural revolution? Don't they describe the Soviet persecution that suppressed Christianity behind the Iron Curtain?

Don't they describe exactly the things that we read today in the magazine of the Barnabas Fund in persecuted parts of the world? And in subtler ways, but no less dangerous ways, don't they also describe the forces of secularism that are at work in our own society here?

To silence the truth of God, to seduce and flatter people away from God's truth, from God's standards, from God's morality? This present government of ours, you know, has done more than any other government in living memory to systematically undermine God's covenant faith.

It's aggressively pushed an agenda to destroy marriage. It's just been in the newspapers again this week, more proposed legislation. It's pushed legislation to promote sex between teenage boys.

[28 : 39] It's legalized gay sex with children by using the parliament acts to force it through despite opposition in the House of Lords. If that isn't deceit and flattery against God's covenant, I don't know what it is.

It's all there in verse 28. Hearts set against God's covenant, wittingly or unwittingly. See, this isn't just history we're reading about here.

It's prophecy. It's the present day. These verses clearly speak of the continuous character of human history. And we see it in the rise and fall of nations.

It describes all that you've read in your history books. The pattern of hubris, the ruthless rise of rulers who exalt themselves. Look at verse 12. His heart shall be exalted, this one.

Verse 16. He shall do as he wills. Isn't that the history of rulers and empires in this world? Of course it is. And of course then comes nemesis, doesn't it?

[29 : 42] Verse 19. But he shall stumble and fall. Then comes another in his place. Verse 20. But he too shall be broken in just a few days. It's the continuous character of history.

So watch out, leaders. Watch out, Mr. Blair and whoever comes after you. You see here the pattern's always the same.

Relentless opposition of a contemptuous world to God and his kingdom and his covenant. That's human history from God's perspective. That's how he sees it, from heaven.

And it's encapsulated there in verses 36 to 39, isn't it? It's the story of human history of the kingdoms of this world. It is a story of self-deification.

Man thinking he is God. Verse 36. Exalting himself, magnifying himself above any God. It's a story of decadence and autonomy.

[30 : 43] Verse 37. This one will respect not even the gods of his contemporary culture except to use them for his real aim. What's that? To magnify himself above all these things.

It's a story of the lust for power. Verse 38. The only God really worshipped is the God of fortresses. Altresses. That's not just military might, but it's a whole understanding.

Might is right. Power is the way ahead. Well, isn't that the pattern of our history books? Isn't that what we read in our newspapers yesterday? As one writer puts it, the shadow of Antiochus Epiphanes has stopped across Europe in the 20th century.

Not the literal Antiochus, but the spirit of Antichrist. You see, what we're reading about here is the constant character of evil that expresses itself in every age.

It's the heavenly conflict of principalities and powers breaking into history again and again and again, as they will do right until the very last.

[31 : 52] until they come, in fact, to their awful climax at the end of all things. And that brings us to the third aspect of this, that this chapter does also point to the cosmic climax of evil that will face the people of God at the very end of history.

You see, the description here of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second half of the chapter just epitomizes, it encapsulates this anti-God, anti-kingdom, anti-gospel, anti-Christ spirit.

He calls himself Epiphanes, which means God manifest. He exalts and magnifies himself. He blasphemes God. His heart is set against God's covenant.

He's set against God's kingdom, his beautiful land. And as such, he typifies many, many such figures all through human history.

The Bible speaks of some of them. Ezekiel chapter 28, it speaks of the king of Tyre who said, I am God. Isaiah chapter 14 speaks of the king of Babylon who said, I will be like the Most High.

[33 : 06] History is full of them too. It's the Hitlers, it's the Stalins, it's the Pol Potts, it's the Saddam Husseins. But you see, all of these are just extreme examples of the universal rebellion in the heart of man since the very first.

Since in Genesis 3, the first men and women were seduced by flattery. And Antiochus was one of these. He is perhaps the extremist of all the embodiments of evil and opposition to God and his people.

His very definition in Scripture. is by his hatred of God and his covenant and his kingdom and his people. And that's why he, more than any other, foreshadows the final embodiment of evil that the Bible tells us will appear at the climax of human history, at the time of the end.

Did you notice how that phrase was repeated through this chapter? Verse 27, at the time of the end. Verse 35, verse 40, and again in chapter 12.

And so you see, if you look at verses 40 to 45, they do speak, they do speak, albeit in a figurative and a symbolic way, albeit using the language of Daniel's day and the descriptions in terms of his known world.

[34 : 32] They do speak of a final conflict with the forces of evil. And of a conflict that will be real on this earth.

Now there's a degree of mystery here. We can't understand everything with absolute clarity. Even Daniel himself, at the end of chapter 12, admits that he can't grasp it all. But the Bible is uniformly clear on some things, and this is one of them.

It is clear that towards the end of history there will be a crescendo, a climax of evil. And it will manifest itself in opposition to God through opposition to his church and his gospel in the world.

The book of Revelation speaks in very similar ways in terms of Daniel's vision here. Chapter 13, for example, speaks of an unholy trinity of anti-Christ spirits who embody evil opposition to God in this world.

But it's also the very, very plain teaching of the New Testament epistles. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul speaks of the coming of Jesus at the end of history, and he plainly says that there will come a time at the end after which there will be what he calls the rebellion, the apostasy, and the appearance of what he calls the man of lawlessness.

[35 : 53] One who, quote, opposes and exalts himself against every so-called God or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

He goes on to say that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, just as we've seen. It's a constant pattern. It's a constant pattern of heavenly warfare already at work, says Paul, but there will be a climax at the end.

Just as 1 John says that already many anti-Christ's are in the world, but the anti-Christ is coming. Already we see opposing, deceiving, flattery, drawing people away from God's covenant, from his gospel, from his kingdom.

And just so there will come a cosmic climax of evil. There will be what C.S. Lewis calls in his books the last battle, when the final denouement of everything that has been opposed to Christ and his kingdom from the beginning will be played out, and there will be victory.

Now, whatever mystery surrounds the exact manifestations of all of that, and what it will mean in human history, let me say that one thing, one thing is absolutely clear, and it's this, and it's by far the most important.

[37 : 17] What we need to concern ourselves with is not endless speculation about the second coming of Jesus, the great appearance of evil, or the anti-Christ, or 6606, and stuff like that.

What we need to concern ourselves is the fact that all such evil will have a certain end, a certain end. And all through that chapter that we've read together tonight, that is the recurrent theme.

Every rise of every evil power is only for a time. Verse 27, there is an appointed end. The time of the end, says verse 35, is an appointed time.

God has decreed it, and it shall come. Verse 45 tells us most graphically that when evil is at its height, when it's pitching its palatial tent against the holy mountain of God, against the very citadel of his kingdom, bang!

There will be utter deflation. He shall come to his end with nothing to help him. That's exactly what Paul says to the Thessalonians.

[38 : 34] Quote, Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nothing at the appearance of his coming.

And friends, that is what we need to know. However powerful, however menacing, however apparently in the ascendant and triumphant the powers of evil may appear to be in this world, however much they appear to be arrayed unassailably against the kingdom of God and his Christ, they will all, all be utterly destroyed.

There is absolutely no question about that in Scripture. The judgment will come. Daniel saw it here, afar off. The New Testament tells it with absolute plainness.

Paul says we've got a proof of that, because he has raised his judge, Jesus Christ, from the dead. That's what he tells the Athenian philosophers. The day of victory is assured in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

His covenant is sealed by his blood. His kingdom is come. It shall fill the earth. Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail.

[39 : 52] And because that final triumph is assured and the powers of darkness will never utterly crush God's kingdom and his church, so also in all the conflicts of history, though hard pressed on every side, though often danger, often woe, the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, in this world will not be overcome or destroyed utterly.

Whatever the statisticians might try and tell us. That brings us to the final point. Yes, the continuous character of the opposition of Antichrist will pervade the world right up to the end, opposing his kingdom and getting worse as the end approaches.

There is no place for naivety for Christians. There is no place for triumphalism, certainly. But, there will always be, right in the midst of that, there will always be a resolute witness of a confessing church.

As verse 32 says so wonderfully, although there will be flattery and seduction and violation of the covenant to the very end, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

As the old version says, the people who know their God shall be strong and do exploits. You see, even in the midst of this, the people who know their God, the real God of Scripture, they can be strong and they will be strong, says God, and they will do exploits.

[41 : 31] They won't just maintain themselves, they will do mission. See, even in the midst of what verse 33 calls sword and flame, captivity and plunder, extreme hardship, extreme persecution, even in the midst of that, what does he say?

The wise shall make many understand. What does that mean? Chapter 12, verse 3 tells us, the wise shall turn many to righteousness so that they too will shine like the stars in the firmament forever and forever.

That's the calling of the wise. That's the calling of the saints of God in every age, however much evil is arrayed against us. Those who know their God will be strong and do exploits.

Exploits for the eternal salvation of men and women and boys and girls. And you see, that's the relevance of these chapters to you and me today. They tell us about God so that we can know Him. And so that we can know His purpose for this world. So that we can know His power and authority over everything in this world. Everything is in His hands. And even the worst manifestation of evil is only for a time.

[42 : 49] The end of all evil has an appointed time, says this chapter. Nothing shall prevail against God's mountain. Nothing. Towering above all turmoil in this world is the man of heaven that Daniel saw.

The one with faith like lightning. The one with a voice like thunder. And He commands and strengthens His angels and His people. And friends, knowing that is what makes you wise. Knowing that is what enables you to stand and do exploits for God. That's why those who think that the sovereignty of God is somehow a stifling, a crippling doctrine are so wrong.

That's why those who think that God can't know the future are so mistaken. No, it's knowing this God. It's knowing the sovereign God of Scripture that sets you free.

That sets you free to be strong in the face of adversity, to do mission, to win many to salvation. Because you know that He is the Lord of Lords.

[43 : 54] That He has it all in His hand. You can join the advance of His kingdom. Knowing that God is sovereign never can lead us to passivity. It leads us to prayer because we know He's the sovereign God who answers prayer.

It leads us to proclaim His gospel covenant because we know it's the power of God for salvation. That's why in the time of the Reformation people went out from Geneva and Strasbourg and these places all over Europe to plant churches and to win people for the gospel because they knew God was a sovereign God.

Despite the persecution, the opposition, and the martyrdoms, they turned many to righteousness. They made many understand the glory of the gospel of Christ.

You see, that's the message for you and me. Despite the relentless warfare of a contemptuous world, there can be and there shall always be the resolute witness of a confessing church.

The people who know their God shall be strong. The people who are wise shall make many understand. Despite apostasy and falsity even within the professing church and many people being seduced by the flattery of the world.

[45 : 14] Despite personal loss and hardship and persecution, many of the wise will stumble, we're told, so that they may be refined. Despite the evil that God allows to have its hold in this world till the end, despite all of this, if you and I are people who know this God, then even we can be strong.

even we can be wise and turn many to righteousness so that they shine like the stars. Don't you find that a liberating thing as you look at the world the way it is?

I want to just read to you in closing something from an exposition of this chapter by my father. This is the great clarion call that this chapter makes, he says, faith is possible in the midst of unspeakable pressures and difficulties and persecutions and advance is possible.

The wonderful thing in this chapter is that there's absolutely no thought of defense here. The church is not cowering in fear and terror, it's not drawing in its lines of defense, there's no retrenchment here.

The Christian church is going forward, mighty in Christ, instructing even at the cost of life itself and the blood of the martyrs as it has done down the ages proves to be the seed of the church.

[46 : 42] Friends, isn't that a message that you and I need and are likely to need more and more as this nation of ours departs more and more and becomes even more openly hostile to the Christian gospel?

Sword and flame and captivity and plunder may not be our lot just yet. Certainly is in many ways but it may come. Isn't that a word that persecuted believers need to hear in Indonesia, in Pakistan, Nigeria, places like that?

It's so wonderfully reassuring that when you're facing struggles and oppositions in your life and hardship for Jesus' sake, your family or your friends or your workmates are sneering, they're undermining your faith.

Jesus knows. He's told us in advance in these prophecies and in many other places, in the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world and so shall you.

That's what this chapter tells us. We just need to have the vision and to know the God who is in control of all these things. that even when the worst convulsions of evil in this world and in our personal world are happening to us, God works every single one of these worst things for the good of those who are called according to His purpose.

[48 : 13] Yes, there will be tribulation and distress and persecution and famine and nakedness and danger and sword but in all these things, in them, the resolute stand of a confessing church will show that we are more than conquerors witnessing the glorious covenant gospel of Jesus Christ turning many to righteousness drawing them into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

It would be hard to find a better word really for a service of admission of new members because this is the call of discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ. to call to sword and famine to captivity and to plunder because it's the call of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Could you have any greater call in your life? Could there be any greater call for our lives together as a fellowship here than to this the stand of a confessing church but notwithstanding everything that's thrown at us we who are wise call many to understand and to be turned to righteousness?

Friends there's nothing greater nothing greater in this world than to be called to belong to those who know their God and all such all such you and me included will be strong and do exploits if we know him and if we trust him.

Well let's sing together to confess our faith Thank you.