

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Daniel

Lesson 12: From North and South to the Beautiful Land

“Perplexity” is the word that the Son of God used to describe the kind of international stalemate that characterizes the relations between the Western World and the Middle East. The ABCs have been trying to find the elusive XYZs of peace. And Christ’s word is right on. He said that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be. ... upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity” (Luke 21:24, 25). Neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians want all-out war, but their religious traditions are in total conflict over the fate of the tiny Old City of Jerusalem. Strange, that in our age of economic and political euphoria that mysterious Middle Eastern “city” still dominates world attention.

The words of Jesus are solemn, but cryptic. Prominent church leaders don’t know for sure how to understand what He meant; and there are the equally mysterious chapters of Daniel 11 and 12 where the prophet spoke of political (and religious) developments centering in Jerusalem (the city “between the seas in the glorious holy mountain”) as signaling the time for Christ to “stand up” at the beginning of the “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” (11:45; 12:1). One’s heart goes out to all political leaders who sincerely have been agonizing over what to do to prevent bloodshed.

The religious traditions of Jews and Muslims are deeply rooted and take us back to the biblical beginnings of the present tensions—the Old and New Covenants in the Book of Genesis (we take notice of this because of the 1888 Message bringing to our attention the two covenants).

In the last Book of the Bible we are introduced to God’s solution to the crisis: the proclamation of a Good News New Covenant message that will “lighten the earth with glory” (Rev. 18:1-4). It will penetrate even to those deep roots of conviction that motivate Jews and Muslims. How that “loud cry” message will capture their attention is something only God knows. But it will; and it deserves our solemn attention just now. In that same Luke 21 Jesus says the time for fun and games is over (vss. 34-36).

Daniel 11 is probably the longest, most detailed prophecy of the Bible. It mentions wars, persecution, and suffering in connection with alliances and conflicts. National politics, world governments, and power plays involving nations and ideological factions seem overwhelming. All of this can easily cause believers to retreat or, just as dangerously, to embrace worldly methods to advance God’s work. Many Christians have fallen into either of these extremes. Some have cowed before the challenge, while others have joined the world in an attempt to advance God’s kingdom.

Beyond this important lesson, what else can we learn from Daniel 11 that is relevant and meaningful to our lives? This complex chapter shows that the powers of the world by themselves can neither thwart nor advance God's work.

Daniel 11 focuses on the kings of the north and the south because God's people, living between the warring parties, would be affected by the war and, ultimately, become the target of the final attack. However, as the prophecy reaches its climax, it becomes evident that the God who stands above and behind the unfolding military, political, and religious events will destroy the enemy.

As the prophecy unfolds, there arises "one who imposes taxes on the glorious kingdom" (Dan. 11:20). Historicist interpreters have identified this ruler as Caesar Augustus, who ordered the census that led to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1). Next, the prophecy predicts the rise of "a vile person" who has no legitimate claim to the throne and who destroys the "prince of the covenant" (Dan. 11:21, 22).

Augustus Caesar was a man of peace. He was famous as a "raiser of taxes." Luke speaks of "a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1), at the time that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Augustus' days were the "glory of the kingdom" of Rome. Peace was universal, corruption had been curbed, justice was maintained, and learning was promoted. He died a few years after the birth of Christ, not at the hand of assassins as happened so often, but peacefully in bed.

But Another was "broken" during the reign of Tiberius Caesar—the Prince of the Covenant, the Christ, the Son of God, mentioned as the "Messiah the Prince" in Daniel 9:25-27. This was the one great event of all world history. Rising above the stormy waves of a sea of corrupt human history, stands this eternal Rock of Ages—the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whence we have everlasting salvation.

The death of Christ, the "Prince of the covenant," confirms beyond all doubt the interpretation of these verses in Daniel 11. Christ died only once, under only one government, under only one Roman emperor—Tiberius Caesar. Like an expert surveying land, we see this landmark as making certain our understanding so far of the history in this prophecy.

People from the four quarters of the earth gathered around Christ in His last hours. The Greeks representing the cultured and proud of earth, came saying, "We would see Jesus" (John 12:21). The thief, representing the fallen failures of human life, repented as he was crucified with Jesus. The Roman soldier, a European, was convicted and said, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Simon of Cyrene from North Africa bore His heavy cross to Calvary, the first of hundreds of thousands of Africans who since have gladly shared the sufferings of Christ.

Could it be that what was "present truth" then is still present truth today? It was indeed the intention of Jesus Christ to have returned to earth to claim His people within the

lifetime of those who first began to understand Daniel and Revelation in the opening of “the time of the end” (1798). The Millerites’ prophetic expositions were carefully studied; their conclusions were conscientious and reasonable. Truth is still truth.

God’s word has not failed, but God’s people have failed to “follow on” to grasp the ever-developing “light” of justification by faith. Their failures have delayed the final victorious conclusion of “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.” The delay has not been due to faulty prophetic understandings, but to a failure to grasp the self-humbling revelations of “the everlasting gospel.” It must yet “lighten the earth with glory” when the fourth angel’s message of Revelation 18 is finally proclaimed clearly.

—*Paul E. Penno*

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P2ahxIYLAE>

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