

# God is in Control

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Ian Naismith

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thanks very much, Casey and Steph, and good morning, everyone. If you have your Bible open, please keep it open. If you don't have an open Bible, you might well find it helpful as we go through, because we haven't read the whole passage, but I will refer to quite a lot of it as we go.

Welcome to General Election Week. It feels a bit momentous, doesn't it? If the polls are even vaguely accurate, we're likely to have only the third change of governing party in the last 45 years, and that feels, in many ways, quite a big deal.

Or at least it did until this week I was reading Daniel chapter 11. And Daniel 11 is looking not just at a period of decades, but at a period of centuries.

And he's giving very much the message that kingdoms will rise and kingdoms will fall, rulers will become powerful, and then they'll be defeated. But at the end of everything, what really matters is that God is in control.

I think Maggie said God will win, and that is absolutely right. So as we come to a General Election Week, let's have confidence in our God.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] Whatever happens, our God is in control, and ultimately our God will be seen to be the God of gods. There was something else to do with the General Election that came to me as I was looking at these passages this week.

And that is how we get our information and our understanding. And I think it comes essentially in three ways, which I think are relevant as we look at this section of Daniel.

Some information we get about the election is straightforward, relatively easy to understand. It's in the interest of the political parties to have slogans that come across as simple and straightforward, and people can say, yes, I identify with them.

So in this election, the Conservative Party is promising it will cut our taxes. Labour Party is promising it will grow the economy. And the Liberal Democrats are promising that they'll sort out social care.

Simple messages that we probably can understand, at least at a high level, without anyone explaining them to us. I think there's that in these chapters in Daniel.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] Now, they are long and they're complicated. But if you were to read through them and try to make sense of them, I think you would get some key messages. And they might look something like this.

Chapter 10 has material about conflict in the heavens. Now, it gets complicated, but we can understand there's something in there about conflict in the heavens. Chapter 11 is about chaos on the earth.

All these rulers who come and go, and there's lots of detail in there which we'll come back to. But the message is there's lots happening in our world. Everything is temporary.

No ruler is forever because only God is eternal. No. And that then brings us to chapter 12, which gives comfort for God's people.

And it says, despite all the troubles that we see in our world, and Daniel saw plenty as this message was given to him. Despite all that, it will come right in the end.

[ 3 : 2 6 ] The dead in Christ will be raised, as Paul says, and is foreshadowed here. And overarching it all is the message that's overarching the whole book of Daniel.

God is in control. God is the person who is ultimately in control of our world. And if we trust him, we can have total confidence in him.

So at a high level, then, we have some understanding of what's in the chapters. Going back to the election, there is also quite a lot of information that comes at us that we might find quite difficult to understand until someone explains it.

So, for example, the SNP is lobbying for taxes to be increased in England. And you might say, well, what business is that of the SNP? Well, the reason they're doing it is that if taxes are raised in England and the money goes to fund the English NHS, then Scotland will benefit from Barnett consequentials.

Some of you may understand what that means. Some of you probably don't. I suspect none of us would unless someone had explained it to us or we'd read about it. But it's factual information.

[ 4 : 38 ] The Barnett formula is something you can find and you can understand. You don't really have any controversy about what it is. And so when we come to these chapters in Daniel, there are some things that we wouldn't understand if we just read it.

So most of chapter 11, it's a long series of events that are prophesied. And we very quickly, I think, get lost as we read through them.

But if you have a good commentary or a study Bible and you read that, the commentary alongside Daniel 11, it will explain to you exactly how Daniel 11 was fulfilled in history.

It is a remarkably accurate account of what was at the time of Daniel in the future. And everyone, all the experts agree on the main details of that.

Doesn't matter who you ask, they will agree about it. There's then a third level of information understanding to do with the general election. And that's areas where the experts don't necessarily agree.

[ 5 : 43 ] So all the parties are making promises. They're all saying we're fully costed. And some of the experts are saying, actually, you haven't taken account of this or this is a bit of a dodgy assumption. And the experts may not necessarily agree on what's what.

And that is one of the difficulties, I guess, for us as voters. We're given information. Some of it we can understand easily. Some of it we can understand with a bit of effort. But some of it we're going to just have to decide who we trust, which of the experts we think has potentially got it right.

And that's the third element we find in these chapters. Graham highlighted it last week that there are all sorts of views of the prophecies that are made in the book of Daniel and the visions that he had.

If you were listening to Graham last week and you listened to me today, you probably will see reasonably clearly that we don't agree in our understanding of some of the details. And that's fine. And we're not going to fall out over it. It's difficult stuff that people won't always see the same way. But where Graham and I definitely do agree is that while the detail is important, the really critical things are the big picture.

[ 7 : 00 ] The big picture that God is in control of our world and that he will bring about his purposes in the future. And that's not up for debate. That is not disagreed on by those who hold to the truth of the Bible.

God is in control. There's conflict in the heavens we'll think about. There's lots of chaos on earth, lots of things on earth we don't understand and we probably are quite distressed about.

But God is in control. We can take comfort from that and from the fact that Jesus is coming again. Kingdoms will rise and fall. Evil beings will do their worst.

But there's a glorious future for those who trust in God. Now, with that by way of introduction, let's have a look at the passages.

And we're only going to be able to go over very superficially this morning. There's a lot of detail here we won't cover. We'll try to get the main messages out of it. So at the beginning of chapter 10, Daniel positions for us the time of what's happening.

[ 8 : 09 ] This is quite significant. He says, In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, in terms of the timing of Daniel, this means it is the last thing that happens in the book of Daniel chronologically as well as in the flow of the book.

It is sometime after Daniel was put into the lion's den. He's an old man. He's probably in his mid-80s at this point. What's also significant about the timing is that when Cyrus became the king, when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, that set in train a return of the Jews back to Jerusalem.

We read about it in the book of Ezra in the early chapters, how Cyrus decreed that the Jews were going to be able to go back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. Archie, a few weeks ago, looking at chapter 6, talked about the yearning for home that the Jews had.

And that yearning for home seemed to be being realised as some of Daniel's compatriots went back to Judea. But then they had problems. There was opposition and the work stalled.

It stopped. And it may be that the point we're at now is where Daniel heard about the difficulties in Jerusalem. Heard about the fact that the thing which undoubtedly caused him great joy that his people were able to return actually seemed to be going wrong.

[ 9 : 38 ] And perhaps that is the background behind the whole of this section. It is God coming to Daniel and saying, yes, it looks as if things are going wrong, but don't worry, I am in control.

Whether that's the right interpretation or not, as we look at the beginning of this passage, Daniel is in mourning. In verses 2 and 3, he says he mourned for three weeks, he went on a very restricted diet, and he didn't use ointment in the heat to make things a bit more comfortable.

He was also, as always, engaged in prayer, and it looks as if he was particularly asking for understanding from God. Perhaps I say understanding for why things seem to have gone wrong in Jerusalem.

And as he's doing that, he has a vision. He sees a man dressed in linen. The man has a gold belt on. He has quite startling features that we read about in chapter 10.

He has a voice that is thunderous. And as Daniel hears it, he falls down to the ground. He appears to go into a deep faint. The people who are with him don't see the vision, but they're terrified and they run away.

[ 10 : 57 ] There's a question then, well, who is it that Daniel sees in the vision? What is the vision that Daniel sees? So we note that there are striking similarities between the description here of the man Daniel sees and the description of Jesus in Revelation chapter 1 when John sees him in a vision there.

The white robes, the belt, the striking features, the sound of his voice, and the fact that in Revelation John falls at his feet as if dead and Daniel here also falls to the ground.

So it's possible this could be an appearance of the Lord Jesus before his incarnation. Several points in the Old Testament where that's a possibility, I think it is here.

So John falls into this deep faint. He falls asleep and he's wakened by a hand touching him. And he's then given a message by this person which again is quite disturbing.

So who is it that's talking to Daniel here? Well, you might naturally think it's the same person as in the earlier verses and it might be. But it's noticeable as we read these verses that the person who's speaking to Daniel talks about how he needed help from Michael.

[ 12 : 15 ] Michael, one of the leaders of the angel, the archangel Michael, whoever it was, needed help from Daniel to overcome a spiritual being. And that doesn't tie in, does it, with it being the Lord Jesus, the God incarnate, the one who is all-powerful.

So it may well be the person we're looking at here is not the Lord Jesus but is an angel come to bring the message to Daniel. So possibly we're looking at two separate people.

The one the Lord Jesus in the earlier verses, the other an angel in the later verses and in support of that the earlier verses clearly talk about a vision. The later verses clearly are quite physical because the person touches Daniel three times and so does someone who is physically there with them.

I'll leave that tentatively with you if you're so inclined you can go away and have a think about it. But the purpose of the messenger is to reassure Daniel. And he does it by the way he touches him and gives him back his strength.

He also does it by twice calling him highly esteemed. So Daniel very quickly learns this isn't someone who's come to judge him or to condemn him. It's someone who's come to encourage and to raise him up.

[ 13 : 33 ] But the message that the angel of it is that gives is actually very difficult because it's a message about a battle in the heavens a conflict in the heavens.

The angel talks about the fact that when Daniel started praying 21 days ago he wanted to come and to reassure him then but he was held up by the king of Persia.

He later talks about the king of Greece. And this brings us into territory I think most of us are fairly uncomfortable about if we think about it at all.

That there are heavenly beings who have a real interest in this world. Spiritual powers both good and evil. Here it is at the level of nations.

It is kind of patron angels if you like influencing what happens in the nations of our world. It's also true that the Bible would teach that there are spiritual powers taking an interest in us individually.

[ 14 : 42 ] Maybe the most influential book on this in making people aware of spiritual powers was C.S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters. Quite old now but many of you I'm sure have come across it.

Screwtape Letters are a series of letters from a senior demon to a junior tempter about their work in the life of someone who's just called the patient. They're trying to divert this person away from God and to tempt him in all sorts of ways.

Now it's a work of fiction. We're not to take what C.S. Lewis writes literally but he is trying both to help us to understand the subtlety of much of the temptation we face and to bring us to a realisation of the existence of spiritual beings.

He says this in his introduction. There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence.

The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors. So on the one hand we have a lot of people who would find this too difficult teaching to understand and say no, can't believe that.

[16:00] And then we have a rather smaller group of people who take an excessive interest in demonic activity and to become really obsessed as they think about it.

C.S. Lewis says both errors are wrong. We need to take a balanced view of this to understand that there are powers out there that we don't understand fully.

but not to become so caught up with them that we lose focus on the main thing which is our relationship with the Lord Jesus. Paul covers this in Ephesians.

He says, our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against, sorry, I'm struggling to read up there, I'll read back here, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And he then goes on to encourage us to put on the full armour of God so that when the day comes we'll be able to stand our ground and after doing everything to stand.

[17:13] Paul's advice there is very important. We need to be aware that there are evil forces out there. But we also need to know that the way to combat them is not by becoming excessively interested in them but to put on ourselves the armour of God.

Truth, righteousness, gospel readiness, faith, salvation, God's word. And alongside that, Paul says, to support one another in prayer.

We are all engaged in a spiritual battle. We all face temptations in our lives. It's important that we individually put on the armour that Paul talks about and that we collectively pray for one another and recognise we are all in that battle.

We're not able to triumph by ourselves. We need to be much in prayer for one another that God will support us in it. There's lots more we could say about that. We haven't got time this morning but I hope that is some help.

Let's move on to chapter 11. Chapter 11 is very long and as I said it is very complicated. The messenger here is looking into the future and he's making prophecies.

[18:30] We're not going to go through it in great detail. I'll summarise the passage for you but let me just make two general comments first. The first thing is as I've said this is a very accurate prophecy.

What we read about here which was given to Daniel is in the future then but we can look back now if we have the historic information and we can see that almost all of it until we get right to the end almost all of it has been fulfilled very accurately in history.

So much so that it's quite often suggested well this must have been written after the event it is so accurate. I don't believe that's the case. Our God knows the future as well as the past and he is well able to bring this kind of prophecy to us.

But we have here a very accurate account of what happened historically. But then the second point is that this is not just a history lesson for us. Some people would find it really interesting perhaps some people would find it deadly boring to go through the history.

But that's not the purpose of what the messenger is saying here. The purpose is to give Daniel and those who would follow him confidence in God. That God does know the end from the beginning.

[19:45] That what happens will be as God allows it. And then as we get into chapter 12 that ultimately God will be triumphant and his people will be vindicated.

And I suspect that people over the few hundred years after Daniel as they were facing oppression from all sides as Israel was constantly under pressure they would be able to look at these prophecies here.

And they could say yes we look in the past and we see these have been fulfilled perfectly by God. And so we can have confidence in the future that things will happen as God has decreed it.

So let's just very briefly talk through the chapter. The detail is interesting for some but it's possibly less important than the big picture. So the bit that we read at the beginning begins with Cyrus who was the king of Persia at that time and then says there will be four kings that will follow him over a period of about 200 years.

The fourth of these kings is the one who is going to be richest and most influential and that's generally identified as Xerxes. Xerxes you may remember as the king in the book of Esther that Esther and Mordecai have dealings with.

[ 21 : 05 ] He wasn't the last king of Persia but it was the time of Xerxes that the influence and power of the Persian empire started to wane. Xerxes went to war against Greece and he was soundly defeated at the battle of Salamis and the decline of the Persian empire can probably be dated from that.

We then have in verse three we have a mighty king who will arise and that king is Alexander the Great. The king who in the early 30s looked around him and wept as he said there are no more worlds for me to conquer.

An enormously successful leader and general who then died at the age of just 32. When Alexander died after a little bit of infighting his kingdom was essentially divided into four.

Four different areas which are represented by the points of the compass. Now the key kingdoms that are referred to in this passage are what are called the king of the north and the king of the south.

The king of the north is Syria. It is the Seleucian empire in Syria. The king of the south is Egypt. It is the Ptolemaean empire.

[ 22 : 28 ] And these two empires for a long period were in battle with each other for control of that area of the world. And you can if you're so inclined read through from verse 4 to verse 20 and if you've got a comment you can see the historical side of that.

But there's a lot of plotting, there's a lot of treachery, there's a lot of warfare going on. And poor little Israel is caught in the middle. Between Syria and Egypt it is the one that's kind of squeezed in there and never seems to get on very well.

You have quite a number of verses that are about just one king who is described in verse 21 as a contemptible person. We met him before in chapter 8.

His name is Antiochus Epiphanes. And he was a Syrian ruler who was very cruel, who was very vicious, and by a combination of deceitful diplomacy and brute force, he had a lot of success against Egypt and in controlling the nations round about.

And in particular, he was someone who really was against the Jews. As you've heard to briefly in this passage in verse 28, it is not the full force of what's happened there.

[ 23 : 50 ] In verse 28, it says he will take action against Israel. The action he took on his way back from a campaign in Egypt was extremely cruel and very vicious.

But that was only beginning, because the next time Antiochus went down to Egypt, he was defeated by the upcoming Roman army. Rome, of course, would be the power in the future.

And as he went home, he vented his fury against Israel. And one of the things he did, and again we talked about this a couple of weeks ago, one of the things he did was to stop the normal sacrifices in the temple, to set up an altar to Zeus there, and to sacrifice pigs on it, real anathema to the Jews. Antioch Epiphanes was a cruel, godless man, and you can see that if you read through the verses in the chapter. Now so far we have something that is historically very accurate.

But then when we come to verse 36 it's a lot more difficult to see what's going on. It looks as if it's still talking about Antiochus, but there's nothing in his life that corresponds to what's there, and indeed nothing in the lives of his successors.

[ 25 : 14 ] So what's going on here? Well, one suggestion, one thing that people would hold to is that what we see here is Antiochus as a type, as a foreshadowing of what will come in the end days.

A foreshadowing of someone who's even worse, who will completely fulfil the prophecy here. The person who is described in the Bible as the Antichrist or the man of sin.

Now, if I pursue this view just a little bit further, the 70 weeks that are talked about in Daniel, 70 periods of seven years, and within them you see at the end of week 69, God's anointed is put to

death, so that could be a reference to the Lord Jesus.

And then the thought is there's quite a long gap, gap of at least around 2,000 years in there before the 70th week. Before the 70th week, the church is taken out of the world, as we read in Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, and then this man is let loose.

He makes a number of alliances, but at the end he really rises against Israel, makes his base there as he fights wars on all fronts. And in the end he is roundly defeated by God and by his army.

[ 26 : 35 ] Now, I'll give that to you for your consideration. It is one view, as I say, this is a difficult and in many ways controversial area, but here is one possibility for it.

But let's move on to chapter 12 as we come towards the conclusion. If chapter 12 might make us despair for the world around us, that there is so much evil going on, there are so many people of ill will in leadership, and we can see that today as much as Daniel could see it or the vision presented it to him.

There is a lot in the world that should cause us real distress as Christians. But chapter 12 is there to give comfort to God's people. It starts with a time of great distress.

Jesus called it the tribulation, but ultimately it says God's people will be triumphant. One of the things, one of the glorious things that will happen is that those who have died believing in God, believing in Jesus, will be raised to life again.

And here in Daniel in the Old Testament, we have something that has developed in much more detail in the New Testament. In the immediate context, Daniel may be talking specifically about the Jews, but as we look forward, we know from what Paul writes and what we read in Revelation and elsewhere that everyone will be raised to life.

[ 27 : 59 ] All those who have died will be raised and they will be raised either to eternal life or to eternal judgment. That's in verse 2 of chapter 12.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. All of us will be judged.

All of us will need to face the Lord Jesus. If we haven't trusted in the Lord Jesus, if we haven't put our faith in him as the one who died on the cross to take our sins, that judgment will be to eternal condemnation.

If our trust is in Jesus, if we have put our faith in him, we will be raised to eternal life. And, says Daniel, there will be rewards, special rewards for those who lead many to righteousness.

I would take it that that is those who particularly communicate effectively the message of hope through God, through the Lord Jesus, us, and to, through that, our instrument when bringing others to him.

[ 29 : 08 ] And I think, ultimately, this is the key message we need to take from these chapters. God is in control, and when the Lord Jesus returns, there will be a judgment, there will be reward, and there will be punishment.

Those who trust in Jesus will rise to eternal life. those who don't will rise to eternal judgment. That is a very solemn thought, isn't it?

And if we are Christians today, as we see a world around us with people who don't know the Lord Jesus, perhaps have never heard the message about him, it should be a real challenge to us to tell them the gospel of Jesus, that they may have hope that they will be raised to eternal life and not to judgment.

And perhaps all of us, as we think about these things, we need to examine ourselves and to make sure that our trust is in Jesus and that we know that one day we will go to be with him.

Now, our time is pretty well gone, so I'm not going to go into the latter part of chapter 12, which is about timing. There's three and a half years in there. If you want to talk about it later, I'm happy to do that. I think the key mistake from that, there's a lot we don't know about the future, and particularly about the timing.

[ 30 : 25 ] We don't know when the Lord Jesus will return. But let me end by returning where we started to the general election. If you vote in the general election, your vote will probably be based on a combination of things.

Part of it will be your priorities. Which of the parties' priorities chime with you? Part of it will be what the parties have promised. Is it realistic to expect what they've said?

And is it desirable that these things should happen? But ultimately, I suspect, for many of us, it's going to come down to trust. Do we really trust these politicians to do what they say?

Do we trust that they actually are able to if they want to? And do we trust that they have our best interests at heart? In our country, here, time and time again during the election, the level of trust in politicians is very low.

And we may well vote in the expectation that ultimately we may well be let down. I hope as we've studied the book of Daniel, this section, but the whole of the book, that we can see that God can be trusted to care for his people.

[ 31 : 42 ] Parts of the book come across as a bit weird, certainly very difficult to understand. Parts of it are very heavy. That you really need to think carefully about what's being said, and even then you may not fully understand it.

But the big message, the message in chapter 1, when Daniel and his friends take a stand on eating food, and God honors that. The message in chapter 3, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down to the idol and are thrown to the fiery furnace.

The message in chapter 6, as Daniel refuses to stop his daily habit of prayer and is thrown into the lion's den. And the message of the more difficult bits towards the end.

It's the same message. If we are faithful to God, if we live faithfully in difficult times in a lion's den world, as Darcy's title says, then God will be faithful to us.

We may face opposition. We will face opposition if we're standing firm as Christians. We may face great difficulties in our lives.

[ 32 : 50 ] And there may be times when we're looking around us at what's happening, and we say, why? Why, God, do you allow this? But ultimately, God is in control, and we can trust him for the future.

As John says in his epistle, the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. So let's go away from this series with our confidence in God increased, with an understanding of how great our Heavenly Father is, that he is in control of everything, and that ultimately he will be seen to triumph as that victory has already been won by the Lord Jesus on the cross.

God will be seen to triumph as Jesus is recognized as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God will be seen to you in the world. God will be seen to you in the world.

Let's join together in prayer. Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that although this passage is in many ways very difficult, yet what it brings across to us is a God who is in control, a God who cares for his people, and a God who ultimately will vindicate those who trust in him.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you for his death for us on the cross. We thank you for his resurrection, which gives us the assurance that those who die knowing him will also be raised to eternal life.

[ 34 : 14 ] Help us to trust him. Help us to be faithful in this time, and help us to be those who, like Daniel, put our confidence in God and see his blessing in our lives.

We thank you for this time together. We thank you for your word. We pray you continue to be with us in the time of fellowship we have together over lunch. We give our thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.