

The Kings Of Syria And Egypt

Daniel 11:12-20

Introduction

In chapter 11 we are given a series of prophecies that concern Gentile world powers. Daniel makes it clear that Israel will suffer subjugation and domination by these Gentile powers until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Let me be clear: a prophet is someone who tells God's will and the future to the people as divine inspiration leads. But there is something else; prophecy incorporates God's will, God's judgments; the defense of truth and righteousness and certainty.

The first prophecy in the chapter concerned the rulers of the Persian Empire (v.2). Three kings important to Biblical history would succeed Cyrus who was ruling when Daniel receives his vision. Remember for Daniel these prophecies are still future. These prophecies are now a part of our ancient past. Daniel is told that after these three Persian rulers a fourth king would arise far richer and more powerful than his predecessors. This king would use his considerable wealth and resources to make trouble for Greece. That king is known in history as Xerxes I and in the Bible as Ahasuerus (see Esther 1:1-22).

The second prophecy concerned a future king of Greece (vv.3-4). This is a reference to Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). The prophecy indicates the vast empire of Alexander will be divided into four portions. The divided empire will set the stage for many years of pain, conflict and difficulty for the Jews and the Jewish capital of Jerusalem. Daniel refers to these kingdoms as the kings of the north and the kings of the south. This constitutes the third prophecy in the chapter. It is a reference to the Ptolomies of Egypt and the Selucids of Syria. In verses 6-12 we see the Egyptian dominance over Syria and then the Syrian dominance over Egypt (vv. 13-20). This is the fourth prophecy in the chapter. The angel reveals five significant historical facts to Daniel through this prophecy. We have already studied some of these important historical facts. We learn the two dynasties would form an alliance through marriage (v.6). We learn the alliance will not last. We learn that the brother of the princess of the southern kingdom would attack the northern kingdom to avenge his sister (v.7). Daniel's vision included the predictions of the sons of Seleucus II; Seleucus III and Antiochus III (the Great)(vv.9-11). The brothers would mobilize a vast army, stir up war, and overwhelm their enemies; they would conquer Phoenicia, the Glorious land (Israel); and some of Egypt's fortress cities. The Lord revealed to Daniel that the Egyptian king of the South (Ptolomey IV) would be filled with sinful pride because he was able to slaughter thousands. His victory would be short-lived, for God would not allow him to continue to conquer and prevail over the surrounding nations. His triumphant slaughter of armies and populations would come to a crashing halt, an indication that God's judgment would fall (v.12).

The most important thing to remember is not the names dates and events of these specific prophecies. The most important thing to remember is that predictive prophecy is one of the best evidences for the supernatural origin of the Bible. Why then do I give you the names dates and events that correspond to these verses? The Bible is an extraordinary book. The Bible makes extraordinary claims. The Bible claims that the story of the creation of man, the fall of man and

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the redemption of man are true. The Bible makes predictions about the Jewish people and the Jewish Messiah. The truth of these prophecies are now a matter of historical record.

The Fifth Prophecy (vv.12-14)

Daniel 11:12–14 (NKJV) *12When he has taken away the multitude, his heart will be lifted up; and he will cast down tens of thousands, but he will not prevail.*

In verse 11 we learned that the king of Egypt (Ptolemy IV Philopater) would march out in a rage and rally his army. He would defeat Antiochus III of Syria. This would cause the Egyptian king to swell with pride. He would slaughter thousands. But his success would not last for long.

In history this is known as the fourth Syrian War between Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III. Ptolemy at first sought diplomatic solutions to the ongoing conflict.

The events between verses 12-19 take place over a 30 year period and cover the deeds of Antiochus III (223-187 B.C.).

Why is this prophecy so important in Daniel's vision? The times of the Gentiles will include control of the people of Israel and Jerusalem by world powers. Persia, Greece and among the Greeks the descendants of Ptolemy and the descendants of Seleucus. Now the balance of power will shift from the South (Ptolemy IV) to the North (Antiochus III).

A little background. In 218 B.C. Antiochus III successfully penetrated the Galilee and Samaria. The control of the Galilee and Samaria fell into Selucid hands (v.11) “. . . *but the multitude shall be given into the hand of his enemy*” (*the enemy of Ptolemy*).

The encroachment of Antiochus III into the Galilee and Samaria was a severe threat to Egyptian hegemony.

In 217 B.C. Ptolemy IV gathered a huge army, trained that army and fielded that army. In 217 B.C. Ptolemy would engage Antiochus III at the Battle of Raphia (Greek Rhaphia). Raphia is the traditional dividing line or border of Palestine and Egypt (modern Rapha). Raphia is about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southwest of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast. Antiochus claimed an army of some 62,000 infantry, 6000 cavalry and 102 elephants. Ptolemy's army contained 70,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry and 73 elephants. Antiochus III was beaten badly by the forces of Ptolemy IV. The victory secured the control of Jerusalem, Samaria and Galilee back to Ptolemy. That control was maintained until the death of Ptolemy IV in 203 B.C. Ptolemy died in his 30's and the empire was inherited by his six year old son Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204-180 B.C.).

Some of you are familiar with the apocryphal books called the Maccabees. In 3 Maccabees we read of the visit of Ptolemy IV to Jerusalem after the battle of Raphia (v.12). In that record we learn that Ptolemy IV very much wanted to visit the Temple in Jerusalem. According to the

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account Ptolemy IV was stunned, struck dumb by supernatural powers. Ptolemy IV returned to Alexandria but was convinced that the Jews had somehow bewitched him. He embarked on campaign of cruel tortures attempting to stampede Jews in the arena using African elephants. Somehow the elephants turned away from the Jews and began to stampede the Egyptian troops. He allegedly killed some 40,000 Jews for refusing to worship the gods of Egypt.

13For the king of the North will return and muster a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come at the end of some years with a great army and much equipment.

Antiochus III took advantage of the premature death of Ptolemy IV (he died in what historians call suspicious circumstances). Antiochus III forms an alliance with Philip V of Macedon to initiate what historians call the fifth Syrian War (202-200 B.C.).

14“Now in those times many shall rise up against the king of the South. Also, violent men of your people shall exalt themselves in fulfillment of the vision, but they shall fall.

And what is the fifth prophecy? The angel predicts a shift in power.

What follows is the Battle of Gaza in 201 B.C. Antiochus III once again gains temporary control of Judea, Samaria and the Galilee. But he is pushed back by the Ptolemaic armies headed by one General Scopas. In the next year at the battle of Panion (the head waters of the Jordan) modern Baniyas or Pnias Antiochus III defeats the Ptolemies and takes control of the Glorious Land (v. 16). **At this point in history Rome is beginning to take a foothold in Greece in what is called the second Macedonian War.**

Secular historians dispute the historicity of the story. But according to the account there were two factions in Jerusalem; a pro-seleucid faction (led by the Temple High Priest Onias II); and a pro-ptolemaic faction (led by the powerful and influential Tobiad family—who were in competition for the office of High Priest. This is the province of Judea in Jerusalem. Who are the violent men of your people? Are they the supporters of Ptolemy or the supporters of Antiochus?

The supporters of Antiochus III want to throw off the yoke of oppression by the Egyptians and cast their lot with rulers of Syria. **What a mistake.**

The Facts From History (vv.15-19)

15So the king of the North shall come and build a siege mound, and take a fortified city; and the forces of the South shall not withstand him. Even his choice troops shall have no strength to resist.

The angel predicts the king of the North will invade Egypt, Palestine and Phoenicia (vv.13-19).

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And what are the facts from history? Antiochus III pursues Ptolemies' troops north to Sidon. The Syrian army would set up a siege against Sidon and eventually capture the fortified city (v. 15a). The Syrian army would prove powerful and the forces of Egypt were unable to resist the Syrian army (v.15b).

Antiochus the Great would do as he pleased and no one could stop him (v.16).

16But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and no one shall stand against him. He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power.

Antiochus III manages to conquer the Glorious Land—"with destruction in his power" which means the power to control the land and the Jewish subjects. He will relocate many Jews.

This conquest will set the stage for one of the offspring Antiochus IV Epiphanes who will literally oppress, persecute and crush the Jewish people (vv. 21-35).

17" He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do. And he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it; but she shall not stand with him, or be for him.

What does this mean? Antiochus III will use his power to force Egypt (the king of the South) to sign a peace treaty. **The peace treaty would include the giving of his daughter Cleopatra in marriage to Ptolemy V Epiphanes.** At this time Cleopatra is only a child—so she is called the daughter of women. And what is the motive of Antiochus III? To destroy the dynasty of Ptolemy. **Antiochus III will live to see his plan fail.**

As a dowry Ptolemy V Epiphanes is promised the entire revenue of Coele-Syria; Phoenicia the Galilee, Samaria and Judea (a promise he never kept). The marriage was celebrated at Raphia. Antiochus tried to corrupt his daughter.

Antiochus III decides he will invade Egypt. He collects a vast army and navy. But Antiochus receives a check in his ambitions. The Egyptians appealed to Rome. The Romans were not yet a world power but Rome's power and influence was growing. They defeated Hannibal and sacked Carthage. They had interests in the continent of Africa. Antiochus was beginning to encroach on what Rome perceived as its possessions or turf (both in Africa and Greece). It was no secret that Antiochus wanted to absorb Pergamum and Greece.

18After this he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall take many. But a ruler shall bring the reproach against them to an end; and with the reproach removed, he shall turn back on him.

How does Antiochus III respond? He will embark on a new war with the *coastlands* a reference to the islands of Greece and the islands of the Mediterranean. But Antiochus III will be soundly

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defeated by a new player, a new actor on the world stage. The future kingdom known as the Roman Empire. Antiochus III is defeated by a battalion of Roman soldiers at the Battle of Magnesia in 190 B.C. After this humiliating loss Antiochus III is forced to retreat back to his own countries and possessions in Syria. Antiochus III had an army of 80,000 troops and was defeated by the famous Roman General Lucius Cornelius Scipio. Antiochus was forced to renounce all claims to any part of Europe and Greece or Asia Minor west of the Taurus Mountains. His son Antiochus IV was carried off to Rome to insure his good behavior. He remained there 14 years and Antiochus was fined 2550 talents of gold.

What happens at this point in history is remarkable. The daughter of Antiochus had petitioned Rome against her father. The Romans sent envoys to meet with Antiochus III. Antiochus insisted that Rome had no vital interest in Egypt. The Roman Consul Acilius met Antiochus at the pass of Thermoplae—defeated him and expelled him from Greece. He was defeated at sea by Livius, and Lucius Aemilius Regillus (189 B.C.).

19 Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found.

The king will stumble and fall and not be found. He will die. In a surprising move—the king's own subjects; the citizens of Elymais will kill their king for plundering their temple (187 B.C.); the temple of Baal.

20 "There shall arise in his place one who imposes taxes on the glorious kingdom; but within a few days he shall be destroyed, but not in anger or in battle.

What follows? The son of Antiochus III; Seleucus IV will immediately succeed his father. **The humiliating defeat by Rome put Syria in debt to Rome.** Rome insisted that Syria pay. In order to raise the money Syria was forced to impose heavy taxes on the citizens of Syria which included the Galilee, Samaria and of course Judea. In Judea was Jerusalem and in Jerusalem was the Temple of God. And in that Temple was significant treasure. The people of Israel were severely oppressed by the new king and his leadership.

Seleucus IV Philopator was considered to have a very balanced temperament. He sought peace. He was tolerant. But he needed to pay his father's debt. Toward the end of his reign he sent his treasurer and tax collector Heliodorus to Jerusalem (here called the glorious kingdom) to raise much needed tribute. The treasurer was informed by one Simon (who was of the tribe of Benjamin) of the Temple's great wealth. Apparently he had a score to settle with the High Priest of Jerusalem (Onias III). Let me spell it out. The belief was that wealth was being hoarded by the anti-seleucid factions. Before Onias III could make his way to Antioch to appeal the decision and offer explanation Seleucus IV mysteriously dies.

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Heliodorus embarked on a campaign to plunder the Temple. He was stopped short by a supernatural apparition which rose up from the Temple Treasury. It was not long afterward that Seleucus was poisoned. The king is destroyed; but not in anger or in battle (v.20).

Some believe Heliodorus may have conspired with his brother Antiochus IV to have his brother killed.

Someone once said there are two things that are certain: death and taxes.

According to Daniel 11 perhaps there are three things; taxes, death and death by taxes (or tax collectors).

The next section reveals the tragic story of Antiochus IV and his brutal dealings with the Jewish people. Antiochus IV serves as a type and picture of the future antichrist who will do all in his power to plague and persecute the people of God.

Conclusion

What does this passage tell us? The Lord God is the only true God whose knowledge is infinite and whose word is never broken. “God is not a man, that he should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). All things are subject to God’s divine will. “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Messiah will absolutely be known, based on His credentials; “I declared the former things long ago And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Therefore I declared them to you long ago, Before they took place, I proclaimed them to you, Lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them” (Isaiah 48:3,5).

In short—prophecy reveals there is a God. The existence of His will and the existence of His work. The Bible makes clear that predictive prophecy is evidence of God power and glory and the supernatural nature of His work. God reveals the future. God sees all things before they reach the present. Christian rest assured: nothing will happen that the Father has not already seen and prepared for.