

The Kingdoms of This World – Daniel 11:1-30

Here's what we learned last week in chapter 10: Daniel was a very old man. He had already been mourning the condition of the Temple and his dreams of restored worship in Jerusalem. But then the angel brought more news of a very long conflict for the Jews, and the last bit of Daniel's hope seemed to be snuffed out. He was going to die soon anyway, but the angel strengthened him and told him God loved him and not to be afraid. Instead of having his hopes wrapped up in God's Temple, Daniel needed to centre his hopes in the God of the Temple Himself, personally. In relationship to that God. And in chapter 10 Daniel saw Him with his own eyes: His people's Great Prince and Ruler. The Holy One, who was going to come one day to Israel and be the Messiah to save His people from their sins. Daniel was going to die anyway, but what about after that? **Was he ready to die?** Were his people ready to die while still waiting for Messiah to come? Were they ready to believe in God to save them even while generation after generation of Jews suffered under the harsh rule of the Gentiles? The angel came to give Daniel this vision, to help Daniel and his people **and us** be ready to die as believers.

During the "long/great conflict" (see 10:1) until the end-times, Messiah-Prince would be defending His people behind the scenes in the spiritual realm (10:21). I take this from the fact that the angel had just finished introducing the vision we have in the rest of chapter 11, by saying all this is "inscribed in the book of truth" (meaning the plan God has for the future), and that as part of that plan Daniel's people, the Jews (the "you" is plural in verse 21) have a Ruler on their side. And then, to draw attention to the way in which the Ruler of the Jews defends them, the angel gives Daniel an example he is already mostly familiar with: It will be something like what the angel was already doing by supporting King Darius and saving Daniel when he was in the lions' den (Dan 11:1; c.f. 6:1-28).

As Persian rule gives way to Greece, believers needed to trust that God rules over the affairs of Gentile kings, but God's Kingdom is not of this world. To prove it, the angel shows God's sovereign rule over the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms... this proves his authority not just to know the future, or to declare His plans, but to decree the future according to His plan. That's the God whose voice sounds like the roar of the seas and whose glory is blinding, whose Presence strikes fear in the hearts of mortals.

God decreed the rise and fall of many specific kings

Persia sinks and Greece rises

[read vv2-4] The way Gabriel predicts this transition from Persian rule to Greek rule and the breakup of Alexander the Great's Empire is an incredible proof of the inspiration of the Bible. But it also gives us a good example of how to understand the rest of the prophecy's details that are not quite so clear. The history matches these verses when we look backwards in time, but historians wouldn't have described things that way. This shows that the angel is giving an "angel's eye-view", or maybe God's own perspective on events, with an omniscient angle that in some of the descriptions sounds different from what we read in the history books. So picking up after the death of Alexander the Great, followed by the breakup of his empire among his four generals, the angel zooms in on just two of those pieces of the Greek Empire, one on the south of Judea and Jerusalem (he names it as Egypt in verse 8) and one to the north, which history shows was the Seleucid Kingdom later centred in Syria—hence, the Kings of the South and of the North. I'll stop and point out a few of the ways this was fulfilled to the letter.

The Feud between the South and North--with Judea caught in the middle

[read vv 5-20] At first Ptolemy, who made himself king of Egypt, *was greater than Seleucus who took a bit longer to get his kingdom off the ground*. Seleucus even fought for Ptolemy at one point, before founding the Seleucid Kingdom named after him, *that stretched from modern day Syria to Iran*.

Here's how one of the greatest family feuds in history got started (see verse 6). The Egyptian King, Ptolemy II, sent his daughter Berenice to be married to the Seleucid King, Antiochus II, hoping to make peace. But to marry her, Antiochus divorced his wife, Laodice, who turned around and murdered Berenice, the king, and their heir, and made her own son, Seleucus II king. That's verse 6. Then Berenice's bereaved brother, the new king of Egypt, avenged his sister by invading Syria, killing the evil queen Laodice, stealing the northern kingdom's idols and treasure and taking it all back to Egypt after totally crushing Laodice's son, Seleucus II. That's verses 7-9. Unfortunately, he had two sons (and everyone knows in a family feud two brothers are going to spell trouble for the man who killed their pa!). They raised an army and took back a lot of territory before one of them died, and his brother became king, Antiochus the Great, and carried on the fight and made the Seleucid Syrian kingdom strong again. That's why *verse 10 starts as plural "sons" and then switches to singular (in Hebrew) "he shall keep coming and overflow"* etc. Back in Egypt, this made Berenice's nephew, Ptolemy IV, really mad. They both raised massive armies and fought. Egypt won that round, but Antiochus the Great escaped back home to Syria. Ptolemy thought so highly of himself after that, that when he retook Jerusalem, he tried to force his way into the holiest part of the Temple, but he was struck by such terror (probably by God) that he went back to Egypt and died in the year 204BC.ⁱ That's verses 11-12. Ptolemy's infant son became king, leaving Antiochus the Great the opening he was waiting for. With support from neighbouring allies and even many of the Jews who thought this might be their chance to get free of their Egyptian rulers, Antiochus attacked and defeated the Egyptian general, and then, sadly for the Jews, added Judea to his empire. That's verses 13-16. After this, Antiochus the Great had great plans of giving his daughter to marry the young king of Egypt, so that both kingdoms would come under Seleucid control. Her name was Cleopatra I (the famous one is Cleopatra VII) and *she surprised her father by siding with her husband and the Egyptians instead ("...not to his advantage")*. That's verse 17. When that didn't work as planned, Antiochus took his navy and tried to extend his rule over some coastal areas and islands that were allies with the emerging Romans. Rome in 188BC forced Antiochus to withdraw, pay a massive tribute of money for 12 years, and took one of his sons hostage. He returned to his kingdom and tried to loot a pagan temple to pay his fine, but was killed by an angry mob. That's verses 18-19. His other son, Seleucus IV became king for a little while and sent a tax-man around the kingdom to try and raise money for the payments to Rome, but *the taxman turned around and poisoned Seleucus (not in anger or battle) and proclaimed himself king*. That's verse 20, and that brings us to the evil career of Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" described in the Jewish book 1 Maccabees.

These details in the prophecy, and the way they match the history (*and in order of events!*), have led a lot of skeptical scholars to say Daniel was written by the Jewish rebels, the Maccabees, after these events. But when scrolls of Daniel were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and studied, the archaeological evidence is now persuasive that Daniel was written centuries before these events happened.ⁱⁱ

Wrath for Jerusalem, and a sign of things to come

[**read vv21-30**] Antiochus was the son who was a hostage in Rome—he escaped, bribed his way to power, attacked his brother-in-law in Egypt (Cleopatra’s husband, the "prince" with whom his dad had made a "covenant" by marriage), stole the land that was part of the marriage deal, launched a failed plot weaken Egypt from within the royal family, and headed home thinking Egypt would soon be his. But it was not to be, because as verse 27 says, “the end was yet to be at the appointed time”. On his way home to Syria he heard of an uprising in Jerusalem—another bid for independence—and put a stop to the rebellion, slaughtering 80,000 Jews, and polluting the Temple, in 169BC. The angel said that “his heart was against the holy covenant”. That’s verses 21-28. Zooming in suddenly on one Seleucid king because of how he affected the Jewish people. When he thought his plans were ready to take over Egypt he went back with his army to finish the job, but “ships from Kittim” came against him—this is the old biblical name for the tribal people the Romans came from. The Roman Senate sent their ambassador to tell Antiochus to leave Egypt alone, or else. And he drew a line in the sand around Antiochus and told him to make his decision before stepping across that line in the sand. And Antiochus submitted to the old man from Rome, because he was afraid of confronting that rising superpower. Rome was on the rise—already more powerful than the Greek kingdoms, and an old prophecy in Numbers 24:24 said that these “ships from Kittim” would oppress the Hebrew people and bring destruction. Well, Antiochus wasn’t finished yet, although from that time on he had Rome keeping tabs on him.ⁱⁱⁱ On his way home, with his tail between his legs, Antiochus again lashed out at the Jews in Jerusalem—verse 30 says twice that he acted against the holy covenant—he sent his tax collector to punish Jerusalem, where he plundered the city and killed people and started a policy of rewarding Jews who gave up their Jewish ways and adopted pagan Greek culture.^{iv} Antiochus’ treatment of the Jews and his hatred for the holy covenant was a sign of more cruelty to come later that same year. Which sparked a Jewish rebellion that led to a new Jewish kingdom that lasted 100 years until the Roman general Pompey came, besieged the city, entered the Temple himself, and made Judea a province of the Roman Empire. Rome shows up for the first time blocking Antiochus’ plans in verse 30, but that fourth Beast in Daniel’s vision would soon take Greece’s place in stepping on the necks of the Jewish people.^v But that’s for the next sermon!

God declares if you trust Him you will rise again

There are then, three kinds of unbelievers that are featured in Daniel 11’s prophecy so far: Gentiles who ignore God completely, Jews who turn their backs on the Bible altogether, and Jews who try to force God’s kingdom to come (v14), and to “fulfill the vision” themselves. One of the main sources for this history comes from 1 Maccabees, a book written by a Jewish Sadducee who hardly mentioned God, assumed was on their political side, didn’t mention the Messiah at all, and didn’t believe in life after death.^{vi} Those beliefs represented most Jews of that time in history. But the central figure in this vision, in Daniel 11, is once again not some villain like Antiochus, but the Son of God in 10:4-9, who was standing, and presiding over the Persian Empire (above the Tigris River, c.f. Dan 8:15-16), whose holy presence made Daniel helpless, even the sound of his voice was too much to bear. He is the Great Prince of Daniel’s people (10:21), who was called, “Who Is Like God”^{vii} (*Michael* in Hebrew), and who stood, ruling the nations at the beginning of this vision, and at the end: [**read Dan 12:1-2**]. The persona of this divine Ruler of the Jews overshadows all these wars and plots and schemes of earthly kings and queens in Daniel 11! And the message is as clear as the Gospel: just like Daniel was wrong to place all his hopes in an earthly temple, Daniel’s people were wrong in every century that followed, to put their hopes in earthly kingdoms, kings, or even their own good works. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world, [if it

was] ...my servants would have been fighting. But my kingdom is not from the world" (John 18:36). The victory Jesus' followers hope in is not victory over our earthly enemies alone, but victory over death itself. To serve our risen King, even if it means dying for Him. But not dying to stay dead, but to be raised to live forever when His Kingdom comes! Our hope must not be in this world, but in Christ Himself, in who He is, what He has done, and what He will do when He comes again. At the end of this chapter, and at the end of this world, the Great Ruler of the Jews and the Head of the Church, He stands up. In Revelation 19 when He appears, John cries out, "Then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True... and he has a name written, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'," (Rev 19:11, 16). This reminded me of something Tim Keller said, that I saw the other day: "Job never saw why he suffered, but he saw God, and that was enough".^{viii}

ⁱ *Universal History*, Vol.9, pp 220-221.

ⁱⁱ So, "...the canonical acceptance of the book of Daniel at Qumran suggests an earlier origin of the book than the second century BC. In 1969, based on the evidence available at that time regarding the Qumran Daniel texts, Roland K. Harrison had already concluded that the second century dating of the book of Daniel was 'absolutely precluded by the evidence from Qumran, partly because there are no indications whatever that the sectaries compiled any of the Biblical manuscripts recovered from the site, and partly because there would, in the latter event, have been insufficient time for Maccabean compositions to be circulated, venerated, and accepted as canonical Scripture by a Maccabean sect' (Harrison 1969:1127). ...Subsequent to this, he stated that based on the Qumran manuscripts, 'there can no longer be any possible reason for considering the book as a Maccabean product' (Harrison 1979:862). The most recent publications of Daniel manuscripts confirm this conclusion." (Gerhard Hasel, "New Light on the Book of Daniel from the Dead Sea Scrolls", *Bible and Spade*, 1992. Reproduced at [<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/07/31/New-Light-on-the-Book-of-Daniel-from-the-Dead-Sea-Scrolls.aspx>] Accessed May 27, 2017.)

ⁱⁱⁱ That Rome stood in the way of Antiochus' plans of genocidal destruction of all Jews, and that Antiochus died while trying to rush his army back to Jerusalem to reconquer that city, is recounted in *The Universal History*, Vol. 6, pp286-294. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015073728811;view=1up;seq=288>

^{iv} See note in *The ESV Study Bible*, "Daniel 11:30" for a good summary. 1 and 2 Maccabees describes it like this: "29 And after two years fully expired the king sent his chief collector of tribute unto the cities of Juda, who came unto Jerusalem with a great multitude, 30 And spake peaceable words unto them, but all was deceit: for when they had given him credence, he fell suddenly upon the city, and smote it very sore, and destroyed much people of Israel. 31 And when he had taken the spoils of the city, he set it on fire, and pulled down the houses and walls thereof on every side. 32 But the women and children took they captive, and possessed the cattle." (1 Ma. 1:29-32 LXA) **and then later**, "24 He sent also that detestable ringleader Apollonius with an army of two and twenty thousand, commanding him to slay all those that were in their best age, and to sell the women and the younger sort: 25 Who coming to Jerusalem, and pretending peace, did forbear till the holy day of the sabbath, when taking the Jews keeping holy day, he commanded his men to arm themselves. 26 And so he slew all them that were gone to the celebrating of the sabbath, and running through the city with weapons slew great multitudes." (2 Ma. 5:24-26 LXA)

^v For historical details of all of the above, see E.B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae*, Vol.4, pp 63-77; *Universal History*, Vol.6, pp 1-288; *ESV Study Bible* notes on Daniel 11:2-35; *Josephus, Antiquities XII. Chas. 1-7*.

^{vi} See "Maccabees, Books of" *International Standard Encyclopedia*, "1 Maccabees; 5. Author's Standpoint and Aim".

^{vii} Compare Colossians 1:15-19, Jesus is "like God" exactly: Father, Son, and Spirit are "Three in One", triune.

^{viii} Facebook post from "Daily Keller", May 26 2017.