

Civil War: Just Like God Said It Would Happen

Daniel 11:1-20

Introduction 1) In James 4:1-2 the Bible says, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Lust for power, lust for prestige, lust for possessions, a bloodlust for more is a dark cloud that has cast its ominous shadow over the totality of human history going all the way back to Genesis 4 and the story of Cain and Abel. Daniel 11 gives us more of the same.

2) Daniel 10-12 is a single unit and gives us the final vision of this remarkable book of prophecy. It gives us a glimpse of the history that takes place between the Old and New Testament. Chapter 10 provides the context. Chapter 11 contains the content. Chapter 12 is the conclusion.

3) Chapter 11 is a remarkable passage for a number of different reasons. Because of its unique content some, like H.C. Leupold, do not think it can be preached in a sermon (*Exposition of Daniel*, 525). It might be okay for a Bible study, but not

proclamation. On the other hand, because of its detailed and accurate description of history, more liberal scholars have denied its prophetic nature, arguing that a 2nd century author simply recorded past history and passed it off as prophecy. There is a technical, theological term for this: *vaticinium ex eventu* which means “prophecy from or after the event.”

4) My response to these two issues is simple and straightforward. First, since all scripture is divinely inspired, then all scripture, including Daniel 11, should be preached. It may be more challenging than a Pauline letter for sure, but it still should be proclaimed. I basically agree with James Boice, “even though the eleventh chapter is difficult, it calls for a detailed explanation... this is the last, longest, most detailed, and therefore most important, prophecy in the book” (*Daniel*, 111). Second, the issue of prophecy comes down to the supernatural and the nature of God. If the God of the Bible is omniscient, knowing all things past, present and future, then predictive prophecy, even a highly detailed one like Daniel 11, is not a problem. Sinclair Ferguson is right, “What is at stake then is a vital issue: Does God so rule history and can He so communicate with us that His future purposes may be disclosed to us before the events? (*Daniel*, 204). It is my conviction, rooted in a supernatural worldview, that this chapter is a bona fide prophecy of future events. God inspired it, the angel revealed it, Daniel wrote it and we get to read and interpret it!

5) The first 20 verses, the object of our study, breaks down into two uneven divisions examining four kingdoms: 1) Medo-Persian and Greece in 11:1-4 and 2) Egypt and Syria in 11:5-20. How these kingdoms relate to God's people, the nation of Israel, is always the backdrop and interest of Daniel.

I. God raised up Medo-Persia and Greece according to his plan and purposes

11:1-4

Four great empires, in relation to Israel, were described in Daniel 2 and 7: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. In Daniel 8 the vision narrows the focus to two: Medo-Persia and Greece. Those same two empires are the interest of the angel at the beginning of Daniel 11. However, this time they do not get a chapter. They only get four verses.

1) God supports and protects as He chooses 11:1-2

Daniel 11:1 is a hinge verse that connects chapter 10 with chapter 11. The angel of chapter 10, possibly Gabriel, informs Daniel that he came on the scene, "I stood up," to assist ("strengthen and protect") "Darius the Mede" (Cyrus) in the first year of his reign (539 B.C.). This is two years before the vision of chapters 10-12 (cf. 10:1). This is important because it was that same year that Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Israel. Perhaps God used Gabriel to strengthen Darius to issue the decree.

Verse 2 begins our lengthy history lesson! It also contains a divine affirmation: “Now I will tell you the truth.” Following Darius (Cyrus) “three more kings will arise in Persia.” History records that these three kings were Cambyses (530-522 B.C.), Smerdis (522 B.C.) and Darius I Hystapes (522-486 B.C.). Then a fourth shall arise who is “far richer than the others.” This king will also provoke Greece and set the stage for the rise of Greece. His name was Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.). He would invade Greece with a mighty army but be defeated in the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. And with that, we are finished with Persia. God used her to send Israel back home. She did her job. To the dustbin of history she goes. God supported and protected her to accomplish His chosen purpose.

2) God breaks and divides as He chooses 11:3-4

There is a 150 year gap between verses 2 and 3. What happened then is not important for the story God wishes to reveal in this vision. All scholars agree that the “warrior king” (*ESV*, “mighty king”) of verse three is the Greek Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). Historians have written volumes about him. God gives him one verse! He was a powerful king who conquered the known world of his day and ruled with absolute power. He indeed did whatever he willed (v. 3). But, he died at 33. So, “as soon as he had arisen, his kingdom was broken and divided toward the four winds of

heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.”

(v. 4). This is precisely what happened. Alexander’s sons were murdered and no part of his vast empire went to his descendants. Following his death, four of his generals divided up his kingdom into four parts:

- 1) Cassander took Macedonia and Greece
- 2) Lysimachus took Thrace and portions of Asia Minor
- 3) Ptolemy took Egypt and Israel
- 4) Seleucus took Syria and Mesopotamia

However, none of these kingdoms ever came close to the power and strength of Alexander’s brief empire. God plucked Alexander’s kingdom up, divided it into four pieces, and gave to others as he saw fit. And with that the Great Alexander is done with. He served God’s plan and purposes. Off he goes!

II. God raised up Egypt and Syria according to His plan and purposes

11:5-20

[The exposition of verses 5-20 are heavily dependent upon Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, pages 293-297.]

Bob Fyall provides a nice list of the cast of characters for Daniel 11:5-35:

The South (Ptolemies in Egypt)

Ptolemy I (Soter) 323-285

Ptolemy II (Philadelphia) 285-246

Ptolemy III (Euergetes) 246-221

Ptolemy IV (Philopator) 221-203

Ptolemy V (Epiphanes) 203-181

Ptolemy VI (Philometor) 181-145

The North (Seleucids in Syria)

Seleucus I (Nicator) 312-280

Antiochus I (Soter) 280-261

Antiochus II (Theos) 261-246

Seleucus II (Callinicus) 246-226

Seleucus III (Ceraunus) 226-223

Antiochus III (Magnus) 223-187

Seleucus IV (Philopator) 187-175

Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) 175-163

(Daniel, 167).

On the grand scheme of world history, Egypt and Syria don't amount to much during this period of time (c. 323-163 B.C.). Rome is the "bad boy" arising on the horizon. The reason they receive all the press here is because they are important in their relationship to Israel and the people of God. They will play political ping-pong with the nation of Israel for almost 175 years until the evil, antichrist type figure Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) comes on the

scene. That is the subject of verses 20-45. Until then, ongoing civil war takes place between Egypt and Syria with Israel tragically caught in the middle.

1) God gives Egypt victory but its king exalted himself 11:5-12

Verses 5-12 record the period of Ptolemaic or Egyptian dominance. The “king of the South” (v. 5) is a reference to Ptolemy I Soter (323-285 B.C.), the ruler of Egypt and a general under Alexander.

“One of his commanders” alludes to Seleucus I Nicator (312/311-280 B.C.), who fled (in 316 B.C.) to Ptolemy Soter to serve under him, but later abandoned him and returned to the northern kingdom. There he greatly increased his power, eventually controlling more territory than Ptolemy. His kingdom included Babylonia, Syria, and Media, the largest of all the divisions of the Greek Empire.

Conflicts would continue between the kingdoms of the Ptolemies (Egypt) and the Seleucids (Syria). Ptolemy I died in 285 B.C., and war continued under his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), who according to tradition instigated the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek called the Septuagint. Finally, Ptolemy II made a treaty of peace with the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus II Theos (261-246 B.C.; grandson of Seleucus) in c. 250 B.C. It is this alliance that verse 6 refers.

Berenice, Ptolemy's daughter ("the daughter of the king of the South"), was arranged to marry Antiochus ("the king of the North") "to seal the agreement" between the two kingdoms (v. 6). Marriages for political expediency have been going on for a long time. However, Antiochus was already married to a woman named Laodice. The former wife and woman scorned took revenge and succeeded in murdering Antiochus, Berenice, and their child. Berenice, therefore, "did not retain power" (v. 6).

Verse 7 refers to Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 B.C.), who succeeded his father, Philadelphus, to the throne of Egypt.

In retaliation for his sister's murder, Ptolemy III attacked Syria ("the king of the North") with a great army. This war lasted from 246 to 241 B.C.

Ptolemy captured and looted the Seleucid capital of Antioch, "the fortress of the king of the North."

Ptolemy seized Syria's "gods" and other valuables (v. 8). He also returned to Egypt treasures, including sacred idols, taken by the Persian monarch Cambyses in 524 B.C.

"The king of the North" is the subject of verse 9. Apparently (we have no further information) he attempted an invasion of Egypt, but the campaign was brief. He would "return to his own land."

The Syrian king Seleucus II died in 226 B.C., but his sons, Seleucus III Ceraunus (226-223 B.C.) and Antiochus III (the Great; 223-187 B.C.), continued the conflicts with the Ptolemies (v. 10). Seleucus III was murdered after a brief three-year reign, and his brother Antiochus III, came to power. He was called the “Great” because of his military successes, and in 219-218 B.C. he campaigned in Phoenicia and Palestine, part of the Ptolemaic Empire (“as far as his [the king of the South’s] fortress”). In response, “infuriated” (v. 11), Ptolemy IV Philopater (221-203 B.C.) launched a counterattack. Ptolemy would win a great victory over Antiochus and the Syrians at Raphia (located in Palestine) in 217 B.C. Because of this victory Ptolemy “became arrogant” (v. 12). The Egyptian army slaughtered “tens of thousands” of the Syrian troops in the battle. Yet Ptolemaic triumph would not continue.

The text implies in verse 11 that God gave the king of the South, Egypt, its victory. However, as the human heart is so easily inclined to do, the Egyptian king became “arrogant,” his heart was “exalted” (*ESV*). He became proud and we all know how God deals with that!

2) God gave Syria victory but its king was willful and insolent 11:13-20

Verses 13ff. change direction and describe the period of Seleucid supremacy. Approximately fifteen years later (202 B.C.) Antiochus III again

invaded Ptolemaic territories with a huge army (v. 13). The occasion for this invasion was the death of Ptolemy IV in 203 B.C. and the crowning of his young son (between four and six years of age), Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203-181 B.C.), as the new Egyptian ruler.

“The many who will rise up against the king of the South” (v. 14) included Philip V of Macedon, and native insurrections within Egypt. “Violent ones among your own people” is literally “the sons of the violent ones.” Here it refers to those Jews who aided Antiochus.

These Israelites “will assert themselves” against Egypt “to fulfill a vision,” possibly the prophecy recorded here. The fulfillment of the prediction was not the intention of these persons, but it was nevertheless the result. “But they [those who sided with Antiochus] will fail.” Although General Scopas of the Egyptian forces was ultimately defeated, he punished the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah who rebelled against the Ptolemaic government.

The Syrian forces advanced against Egyptian at the Battle of Panium (near the NT Caesarea Philippi, now called Banian) in 199 B.C. and won a resounding victory (v. 15). Antiochus’s forces pursued the Egyptians south and captured Sidon, the “well-fortified city.” General Scopas finally surrendered in 198 B.C. The South had suffered a decisive defeat to the North. It “will not stand.”

With the defeat of the Egyptians at Sidon, Antiochus acquired complete control over Phoenicia and Palestine “and will do whatever he wants” (v. 16). Indeed “no one can oppose him.” Although Palestine had come under Antiochus’s control for a brief time previously (ca. 219-217 B.C.), now the “Beautiful Land” (Palestine; cf. 8:9; Ezed 20:6) would become a permanent possession of the Syrian Empire. David Helm reminds us, “Earlier in Daniel we came across the phrase “the glorious [beautiful] land” (8:9) and we will see it again in this chapter (11:41). In both instances it refers to Israel, to Jerusalem and the city of God” (*Daniel for You*, 192). This is important because it sets the stage for the reign of terror to follow under the Syrian Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). “With total destruction in his hand” emphasizes his complete power over the land.

The Syrians forced terms of peace upon the Egyptian king (v. 17). To seal the deal, Antiochus gave his “daughter,” Cleopatra (not the Cleopatra who married Mark Anthony over 100 years later), to Ptolemy V as a wife.

Antiochus hoped that through Cleopatra he could gain further control of Egypt. However, his plan did “not succeed.” Cleopatra loved her husband more than her father and supported the Egyptian cause completely.

Verses 18-19 prophesy Antiochus’s defeat and ignominious end. Having defeated the Egyptians in 197 B.C. or shortly thereafter, Antiochus turned

“his attention to the coast and islands” or countries around the Mediterranean (v. 18). After Antiochus had some initial success (“he captured many”), Lucius Cornelius Scipio was sent against him by the Roman government. This is the “commander who will put an end to his taunting; instead he will turn his taunt against him.” In 191 B.C. the Romans, fighting with their Greek allies, routed the Syrians at Thermopylae and forced them to withdraw from Greece and flee to Asia Minor (v. 19). Thirty thousand Roman troops pursued Antiochus into Asia and defeated his much larger army of seventy thousand at the Battle of Magnesia near Smyrna (Turkey) in 190 B.C.

After this humiliating defeat, Antiochus returned to his country, where he was killed by an angry mob in 187 B.C. as he sought to pillage the temple of Zeus (Bel) at Elymais (v. 19). He indeed stumbled, fell and was no more. The son and “successor” of Antiochus III was Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 B.C.), who sent a “tax collector” (Heliodorus) to collect money to pay the thousand talents indemnity demanded annually by the Romans as part of the settlement for Syria’s surrender to Rome (v. 20).

Seleucus IV reigned only “a few years” and was not killed by an angry mob (“in anger”) like his father or “in battle.” Heliodorus, his tax collector and prime minister, evidently seeking to gain the throne for himself, poisoned the

king (possibly aided by Antiochus IV). The stage is set for the antichrist figure Antiochus IV Epiphanes in verses 21-35. History has unfolded just like God said it would. Kingdoms and their despots come and go. They live and die. They win and lose. And our great God in heaven watches it all and laughs (Ps. 2:4)!

Conclusion: This is an unusual and unique passage to be sure. God is never mentioned by name and there is a lot of unfamiliar imagery for our western 21st century minds to grasp. Asking five basic theological and practical questions we should ask, in some manner of every text, can help us get at what God wants us to understand in inspiring this portion of the Bible.

- 1) What does the text teach us about God? Our God is sovereign and omniscient who knows the future to the smallest detail. He can predict the future and not miss a beat in terms of accuracy. Back in Daniel 4:17 we were taught, “The Most High is ruler over the kingdoms of men. He gives it to anyone He wants and sets the lowliest of men over it. He is the One breaking and dividing and plucking up in verse 4. These earthly rulers are mere pawns in the sovereign hands of an omnipotent and providential God.
- 2) What does this text teach us about fallen humanity? Man in his depravity, pride and sin has a bloodlust for power and stuff. He fights and wars “doing as he wills” if he can. Might makes right. Man exalts his heart and inflates his sense

of self-worth. Given the opportunity, he will trample over others with little or no regard for those who get hurt in the process. This is the story of human history since the fall and it will continue to be our legacy until the return of God's King and the inauguration of His Kingdom.

- 3) What does this text teach us about Christ? This passage and the one that follows (11:21-45) must be read in the context of Daniel 7:13-14 and 9:24-27. There we see the Son of Man coming in glory to receive from the Ancient of Days a kingdom that shall not pass away or ever be destroyed. His kingdom is not a fly-by-night empire that is here today and gone tomorrow, an empire and kingdom that is little more than "dust in the wind!" Further, the Anointed Prince of Daniel 9 does what no piddly, earthly potentate can do. He brings rebellion to an end, puts a stop to sin, wipes away iniquity, and brings in everlasting righteousness. What a contrast are these power hungry dictators with the humble King from Galilee who put the needs of others far ahead of His own.
- 4) What does God want me to know? In Christ, pride gives way to humility and wanting more and more gives way to giving and serving others. A passion to build my kingdom gives way to a passion to build God's kingdom!
- 5) What does God want me to do? Learn from the mistakes and sins of men and women from the past who pursued earthly gain and not heavenly reward.

Avoid the pitfalls of pride and greed and instead pursue Christ and His traits of humility, generosity and service. You won't act, live or look like the kings of Daniel 11. You will, however, begin to look more and more like the King of kings and the Lord of lords.