

From North *and* South to the Beautiful Land



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 11; Dan. 8:3–8, 20–22; Isa. 46:9, 10; Dan. 8:9, 23; Matt. 27:33–50.*

Memory Text: “And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time” (*Daniel 11:35, NKJV*).

As we begin this challenging chapter, a few points should be made at the outset.

First, Daniel 11 stands in parallel overall with the previous prophetic outlines in Daniel. As in chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9, the prophetic message extends from the days of the prophet to the end of time. Second, a succession of world powers emerges, powers that often oppress God's people. Third, each prophetic outline climaxes with a happy ending. In Daniel 2, the stone obliterates the statue; in Daniel 7, the Son of man receives the kingdom; and in Daniel 8 and 9, the heavenly sanctuary is cleansed through the work of the Messiah.

Chapter 11 follows three basic points. First, it begins with the Persian kings and discusses their fates and the time of the end, when the king of the north attacks the holy mountain of God. Second, a succession of battles between the king of the north and that of the south and how they affect God's people is described. Third, it concludes with a happy ending as the king of the North faces his demise by the “glorious holy mountain” (*Dan. 11:45*). Such a positive conclusion signals the end of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.

Prophecies About Persia and Greece

Read Daniel 11:1–4. What do we see here that reminds us of some of the previous prophecies we have seen in Daniel?

Gabriel tells Daniel that three kings will still rise from Persia. They will be followed by the fourth king, who will be the richest one of all and will provoke the Greeks. After Cyrus, three successive kings exert dominion over Persia: Cambyses (530–522 B.C.), the False Smerdis (522 B.C.), and Darius I (522–486 B.C.). The fourth king is Xerxes, mentioned in the book of Esther as Ahasuerus. He is very wealthy (*Esther 1:1–7*) and marshals a vast army to invade Greece, as predicted in the prophecy. But, in spite of his power, he is repelled by a smaller force of valiant Greek soldiers.

It is not difficult to recognize Alexander the Great as the mighty king who arises in Daniel 11:3, and who becomes the absolute ruler of the ancient world. He died at age 32 without leaving an heir to rule the empire. So, the kingdom was divided among his four generals: Seleucus over Syria and Mesopotamia, Ptolemy over Egypt, Lysimachus over Thrace and portions of Asia Minor, and Cassander over Macedonia and Greece.

Compare Daniel 11:2–4 with 8:3–8, 20–22. How do these texts together help identify Alexander as the power here?

What can we learn from this assortment of names, dates, places, and historical events? First, we learn that the prophecy is fulfilled as predicted by the divine messenger. God's Word never fails. Second, God is the Lord of history. We may get the impression that the succession of political powers, leaders, and kingdoms is propelled by the ambition of emperors, dictators, and politicians of all stripes. However, the Bible reveals that God is in ultimate control and will move the wheel of history according to His divine purpose, which ultimately will lead to the eradication of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Prophecies of Syria and Egypt

Read Daniel 11:5–14. What is unfolding here?

Upon the death of Alexander the Great, the vast Greek Empire was divided among his four generals. Two of them—Seleucus in Syria (North) and Ptolemy in Egypt (South)—managed to establish dynasties that would fight each other for control of the land.

Most Bible students understand the wars between the king of the North and the king of the South prophesied in Daniel 11:5–14 as referring to the many battles involving these two dynasties. According to the prophecy, an attempt would be made to unite these two dynasties by marriage, but that alliance would be short-lived (*Dan. 11:6*). Historical sources inform us that Antiochus II Theos (261–246 B.C.), grandson of Seleucus I, married Berenice, a daughter of the Egyptian king, Ptolemy II Philadelphus. However, that agreement did not last, and the conflict that directly involved the people of God soon resumed. Thus, Daniel 11 deals with some important events that will touch the lives of God's people during the centuries after the prophet Daniel passes from the scene.

Again, we can ask the question of why the Lord reveals ahead of time all these details about wars involving kingdoms fighting each other for supremacy in that part of the world. The reason is simple: *these wars affect God's people*. So, the Lord announces beforehand the many challenges His people will face in the years to come. Also, God is the Lord of history, and as we compare the prophetic record with the historical events, we can again see that the prophetic word is fulfilled as predicted. The God who predicts the vicissitudes of those Hellenistic kingdoms fighting each other is the God who knows the future. He is worthy of our trust and faith. This is a big God, not an idol manufactured by human imagination. He not only directs the course of historical events, but He also can direct our lives if we allow Him to do so.

Read Isaiah 46:9, 10. How much basic Christian theology is found in these two verses, and what great hope can we take from them? Think about how scary verse 10 would be if God were not kind and loving but vengeful and mean.

Rome and the Prince of the Covenant

Read Daniel 11:16–28. Though the text is difficult, what images can you find that appear elsewhere in Daniel?

A transition in power from the Hellenistic kings to pagan Rome seems to be depicted in Daniel 11:16: “But 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” (*NKJV*). The Glorious Land is Jerusalem, an area where ancient Israel has existed, and the new power that takes over that area is pagan Rome. The same event also is represented in the horizontal expansion of the little horn, which reaches the Glorious Land (*Dan. 8:9*). So, it seems clear that the power in charge of the world at this point is pagan Rome.

Some additional clues in the biblical text reinforce this perception. For example, the “one who imposes taxes” must refer to Caesar Augustus. It is during his reign that Jesus is born, as Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for the census (*Dan. 11:20*). Also, according to the prophecy this ruler will be succeeded by a “vile person” (*Dan. 11:21*). As history shows, Augustus was succeeded by Tiberius, an adoptive son of Augustus. Tiberius is known to have been an eccentric and vile person.

Most important, according to the biblical text, it was during the reign of Tiberius that the “prince of the covenant” would be broken (*Dan. 11:22*). This clearly refers to the crucifixion of Christ, also called “Messiah the prince” (*Dan. 9:25*; see also *Matt. 27:33–50*), as He is put to death during the reign of Tiberius. The reference to Jesus here as “the prince of the covenant” is a powerful marker that helps show us the flow of historical events, again giving readers powerful evidence of God’s amazing foreknowledge. God has been right on all that has come before in these prophecies, so we can surely trust Him on what He says will happen in the future.

Even amid all political and historical events, Jesus of Nazareth, “the prince of the covenant,” is revealed in the texts. How does this help show us that, despite all the upheaval and political intrigue, Jesus remains central to Scripture?

The Next Power

Read Daniel 11:29–39. What is this power that arises after pagan Rome?

Daniel 11:29–39 refers to a new power system. Although this system stands in continuation with the pagan Roman Empire and inherits some characteristics of its predecessor, at the same time it seems to be different in some aspects. The biblical text says that “it shall not be like the former or the latter” (*Dan. 11:29, NKJV*). As we look further, we find that it acts as a religious power. It aims its attack mainly at God and His people. Let us look at some of the actions perpetrated by this king.

First, he will act “in rage against the holy covenant” (*Dan. 11:30, NKJV*). This must be a reference to God’s covenant of salvation, which this king opposes.

Second, this king will produce forces that will “defile the sanctuary” and take away the “daily sacrifices” (*Dan. 11:31*). We noted in Daniel 8 that the little horn casts down the foundation of God’s “sanctuary” and takes away the “daily sacrifices” (*Dan. 8:11*). This must be understood as a spiritual attack against Christ’s ministration in the heavenly sanctuary.

Third, as a consequence of his attack on the sanctuary, this power places the “abomination of desolation” (*NKJV*) in God’s temple. The parallel expression “transgression of desolation” points to the acts of apostasy and rebellion by the little horn (*Dan. 8:13*).

Fourth, this power persecutes God’s people: “some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end” (*Dan. 11:35, NKJV*). This reminds us of the little horn, which cast down some of the host and some of the stars and trampled them (*Dan. 8:10; compare with Dan. 7:25*).

Fifth, this king will “exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods” (*Dan. 11:36, NKJV*). Unsurprisingly, the little horn also speaks “pompous words” (*Dan. 7:8, NKJV*), even against God (*Dan. 7:25*).

Other similarities could be mentioned but, considering what we read in Daniel 7 and 8, who is this power, and why is it so important to us, despite social pressures, to stay firm in our identification of it?

Final Events

Read Daniel 11:40–45. What is happening here?

The following phrases help us understand this text:

Time of the End: The expression “time of the end” appears only in Daniel (*Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9*). Examination of Daniel’s prophecies indicates that the time of the end extends from the fall of the papacy in 1798 to the resurrection of the dead (*Dan. 12:2*).

King of the North: This name first geographically designates the Seleucid dynasty, but then it refers to pagan and finally papal Rome. As such, it does not describe a geographical location but the spiritual enemy of God’s people. In addition, we also should note that the king of the North represents a counterfeit of the true God, who in the Bible is symbolically associated with the North (*Isa. 14:13*).

King of the South: This name at first designates the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, south of the Holy Land. But as the prophecy unfolds, it acquires a theological dimension, and is associated by some scholars with atheism. As Ellen G. White, commenting on the reference to Egypt in Revelation 11:8, says, “This is atheism.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 269.

The glorious holy mountain: In Old Testament times this expression referred to Zion, the capital and heart of Israel and geographically located in the Promised Land. After the Cross, God’s people are no longer defined along ethnic and geographical lines. Therefore, the holy mountain must be a symbolic designation of God’s people spread throughout the world.

So, perhaps, we can interpret events like this:

(1) The king of the South attacks the king of the North: the French Revolution attempted to eradicate religion and defeat the papacy but failed. (2) The king of the North attacks and defeats the king of the South: the forces of religion headed by the papacy and its allies will eventually overcome the forces of atheism and will form a coalition with the defeated enemy. (3) Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon will escape: some of those not counted among God’s true people will join the fold in the last hour. (4) The king of the North prepares to attack the holy mountain but comes to his end: the forces of evil are destroyed, and God’s kingdom is established.

How can we draw comfort from knowing that, in the end, God and His people will be victorious?

Further Thought: It is interesting that at least in reference to Daniel 11:29–39, Martin Luther identified the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11:31 with the papacy and its doctrines and practices. Thus, the correlation of Daniel 11 with Daniel 7 and 8 reinforces the view of Luther and many other Protestant commentators that the institution of the papacy and its teachings constitute the fulfillment of these prophecies in history. In this connection, Ellen G. White says: “No church within the limits of Romish jurisdiction was long left undisturbed in the enjoyment of freedom of conscience. No sooner had the papacy obtained power than she stretched out her arms to crush all that refused to acknowledge her sway, and one after another the churches submitted to her dominion.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 62.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we be sensitive to the feelings of others yet not compromise on what the Bible teaches regarding the role of Rome in the last days?
- 2 Daniel 11:33 reads: “And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering” (NKJV). What does this text say about the fate of some of God’s faithful people? What does the text say, too, about what some of these faithful people are doing before they are martyred? What message is there for us today?
- 3 Daniel 11:36 reads: “Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done” (NKJV). Of whom and what does this remind you? (See *Isa. 14:12–17*; see also *2 Thess. 2:1–4*.)
- 4 Daniel 11:27, 29, and 35 use the phrase *lammo‘ed*, “the appointed time” (NKJV). What does that tell us, again, about God’s control of history?