

The Reign of Rebellion, Part 1

Scripture: Daniel 11:1–35

Code: 27-28

INTRODUCTION

We live in a rebellious age. Daniel 11 chronicles an age of defiance towards God--a defiance that will last through our own time to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. The Chastening of Israel

Within the larger context of the world's rebellion against God we read of Israel's rebellion against Him. The Old Testament affirms that Israel is God's chosen nation. Yet it also chronicles its disobedience to Him through idolatry and immorality. It defied God, spurning His grace and lovingkindness. As a result God has chastened Israel.

The chastening of Israel sets the context for Daniel 11. The prophet Jeremiah declared Israel would be punished by spending seventy years in captivity. While in captivity the prophet Daniel realized the seventy years were nearly over and expected the Jewish people to return to their land, Jerusalem to be restored, and the Temple rebuilt. But when permitted to return, only a small fragment of the people made the trip to the Promised Land. Jerusalem remained in disrepair and the Temple in ruins. Instead of responding to God's chastening, they remained entrenched in the pagan lifestyle of Babylon. The seventy-year exile in Babylon was obviously only the beginning of Israel's chastening. Daniel was discouraged by what he saw and turned to God in prayer. He wanted to know why things hadn't turned out the way he expected. After mourning with fasting and prayer for three weeks, Daniel received the prophecy contained in Daniel 11-12. He was told that the chastening of Israel would continue until when the nation was completely restored. At that time the Messiah will establish His kingdom on earth.

B. The Protection of Israel

Daniel 11:1 says, "I [the messenger angel], in the first year of Darius, the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen [the archangel Michael]." Michael had helped out that angel about three years previously (Dan. 10:1) when the decree allowing the Jewish people to return to their land was issued. Apparently the demon named "the prince of Persia" (Dan. 10:13) was trying to prevent that return, and that's why Michael needed assistance. That gives us insight into how the holy angels enforce God's will in the midst of demonic activity.

The messenger angel brought a revelation of God's future plans for His people. Though Daniel was told that his people would continue to suffer through the tribulation until the establishment of the millennial kingdom (Dan. 12:2), it was a comfort for him to know that his people would be under the protection of God's holy angels throughout that period.

Daniel in the Critic's Den

Though the prophecy in Daniel 11 deals with the rise and fall of Gentile world powers, it's primarily concerned with the suffering and fate of Israel. The minute details of the prophecy have already been fulfilled in history with an accuracy that has attracted the attacks of literary critics. It so precisely predicted future events involving the Persian and Greek Empires that critics assume Daniel must have been written after the events took place. That's based on the premise that God didn't write the Bible and they must thus conclude that the author of the book of Daniel was a liar, since he claimed to receive knowledge of future events from God prior to their actually happening. They are left with a God who doesn't know the future and a prophet of impeccable character (Ezek. 14:14, 20)

who in fact behaved dishonorably. But there are many linguistic and historical reasons to authenticate the book of Daniel as prophecy. (For further information see Josh McDowell's Daniel in the Critic's Den, available from Josh McDowell Ministries, P. O. Box 1000, Dallas, Texas 75221; 1-800-222-JOSH). Daniel wasn't a liar and our God is able to tell us about the future as easily as if it were the past.

LESSON

I. AHASUERUS (v. 2)

"There shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all, and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. "

The angel told Daniel that three Persian kings would precede a fourth, who would be stronger and richer than the others. He would attack Greece. Historically that's exactly what happened: though there were more than four Persian kings in the history of Persia, from the time of Daniel there were four, the last of whom mounted a massive assault on Greece.

The first was named Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, who was king at the time Daniel's prophecy was given (ca. 537 B. C. ; cf. Dan. 10:1). The second was a man named pseudo-Smerdis who looked so much like Cambyses that he was able to usurp the throne by deception. The third king was Darius Hystaspes, who launched a minor unsuccessful attack on Greece. The fourth was King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes I. He is the Persian king spoken of in the book of Esther. He had fabulous wealth and commanded one of the largest military forces ever assembled in the ancient world. With his huge army and navy he attacked Greece, but was soundly defeated by the Greeks on both land and sea. The Greeks never forgot that attack, and 150 years later took revenge on the Persians through Alexander the Great.

II. ALEXANDER THE GREAT (vv. 3-8)

"A mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven, and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those. And the king of the south shall be strong, and one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion shall be a great dominion. And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the power of the arm, neither shall he stand, nor his arm; but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begot her, and he that strengthened her in these times. But out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, who shall come with an army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail; and shall also carry captives into Egypt their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the north. "

A. The Extent of His Dominion

The "mighty king" of verse 3 was Alexander the Great of Greece. That is affirmed by the vast majority of Bible commentators. He retaliated for the previous Persian incursions into Greece by seizing the entire Persian Empire. He conquered the western world from Greece to India, and then wept that there were no other kingdoms for him to conquer. He was a man of "great dominion" (v. 3) , and may have had a more significant impact on history than any other ruler. He was an absolute monarch with a powerful personality, great leadership ability, and a powerful army. With those assets he was able to "do according to his will" (v. 3). Israel was part of the Persian Empire at the time of Alexander's conquest, so in occupying the empire Alexander took possession of Israel.

B. The Division of His Empire

Alexander died at the age of thirty-three. No sooner did he "stand up" (v. 4) in the power of his empire than he was struck down. His empire shattered and "divided toward the four winds of heaven" (v. 4) --amongst his four generals. As Daniel 11 predicted, the empire did not go to "his posterity" (v. 4) nor remain "according to his dominion which he ruled" (v. 4).

Alexander's heirs were a mentally retarded half-brother, an illegitimate child, and a baby born after Alexander's death. They were all murdered. After a struggle for power General Cassander took Macedonia and Greece, General Lysimachus took Thrace and Asia Minor, General Seleucus took Syria (to the north of Israel) , and General Ptolomy took Egypt (to the south of Israel). The dominion of each was less than that of Alexander--just as Daniel prophesied.

C. The Resulting Conflict

Seleucus and Ptolomy produced the dynasties that Daniel 11:5-20 focuses on. The two dynasties were often at war, and since Israel was located between them, their wars were often fought in Israel or on its borders. In those verses are recorded two centuries of conflict in which Israel was a pawn between the Ptolemaic kings in the South and the Seleucid kings to the North.

Initially, the Ptolemaic dynasty was more powerful than the Seleucid, but as time went on the northern dynasty increased in power. The two kingdoms determined to resolve increasing tension between them by an alliance. Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (the king of the south) , married Antiochus II Theos (the grandson of Seleucus, the king of the north). That was a common method of cementing together alliances in the ancient world. Unfortunately Antiochus was already married, but he divorced his wife and went ahead with marriage to Berenice in about 250 B. C. That's exactly what the angel told Daniel would happen (Dan. 11:5-6).

The marriage did not produce any lasting peace: after the death of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Antiochus II Theos divorced Berenice and took back his former wife, Laodice. Laodice took revenge by murdering Berenice, her son, and her attendants. She also murdered Antiochus (thus completely fulfilling verse 6). Those murders brought Laodice's son, Seleucus II Callinicus, to the throne in 246 B. C.

Berenice did not remain unavenged. The angel told Daniel, "Out . . . of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, who shall come with an army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them and prevail" (v. 7). Bernice's brother Ptolemy III Euergetes, the king of Egypt at the time of Berenice's murder, brought an army against Callinicus and defeated him. As a result the angel's statement that he would "carry captive into Egypt their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and gold" (v. 8) came true. History records that Ptolemy returned to Egypt with hundreds of idol statues and thousands of talents in silver.

Callinicus died from a riding accident about 226 B. C. Ptolemy III reigned in Egypt for six years after that, for the angel told Daniel that he would "continue more years than the king of the north" (v. 8). The precise way in which these prophecies were fulfilled points to the accuracy of Scripture. It also points to the continued suffering of Israel as it sat in the middle of those two warring dynasties.

III. ANTIOCHUS THE GREAT (vv. 9-20)

Liberal and conservative scholars agree that the next great king was Antiochus III the Great.

A. Revenge from the North (vv. 9-10)

"The king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land. But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces; and one shall certainly come, and overflow, and pass through; then shall he return, and be stirred up, even to his fortress. "

Ptolemy had defeated Callinicus, the northern king, so he now controlled Israel. But Callinicus had two sons (v. 10). They raised "a multitude of great forces" (v. 10) to avenge their father's defeat--but one (Seleucus III Soter) died. The remaining son (Antiochus III the Great) became king of the north and continued the campaign against the south. He swept through Israel with a force of about 75,000 soldiers and penetrated all the way to a southern fortress.

B. Retaliation from the South (vv. 11-12)

"The king of the south shall be moved with anger, and shall come forth and fight with him, even with the king of the north; and he shall set forth a great multitude, but the multitude shall be given into his hand. And when he hath taken away the multitude, his heart shall be lifted up; and he shall cast down many ten thousands, but he shall not be strengthened by it. "

At the time of Antiochus's invasion Ptolemy IV Philopator the king of the south was. In response to the invasion Ptolemy raised an army of 70,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry, and 73 elephants (which were used as beasts of burden and battering rams). Ptolemy was successful and the multitude from the north was "given into his hand" (v. 11). History records that Antiochus lost 10,000 infantry, 300 cavalry, and five elephants. But Ptolemy was not strengthened by his victory--in the long run he only made Antiochus angry.

C. The Return of the North (vv. 13-20)

1. The Attack (vv. 13-15)

"The king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come, after certain years, with a great army and with much riches. And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south; also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision, but they shall fall. So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a siege mound, and take the fortified cities; and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to withstand. "

Thirteen years after his defeat by Ptolemy, Antiochus returned to fight Egypt with "a multitude greater than the former" (v. 13). His army was assisted by "the robbers of [Daniel's] people" (v. 14). The Hebrew word translated "robbers" literally means "sons of breaking. " It refers to violent men among the Jewish people who broke the covenant law of God--apostates. They were revolutionaries who joined the cause of Antiochus as mercenaries. They apparently thought that by aiding Antiochus he would give the Jewish people their freedom. But the angel told Daniel respecting their goal, "They shall fall" (v. 14).

In 199 B. C. Antiochus's forces routed the southern army in Palestine (v. 15).

2. The Aftermath (vv. 16-20)

"He that cometh against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him; and he shall stand in the glorious land, which by his hand shall be consumed. 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, corrupting her, but she shall not stand on his side, neither be for him. After this shall he turn his face unto the coasts, and shall take many, but a prince on his own behalf shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease; without his own reproach, he shall cause it to turn upon him. Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found. Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom, but within a few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle. "

Antiochus the Great's entry into "the glorious land"--the land of Israel--did not result in freedom for Israel. Antiochus treated the Jewish mercenaries who joined him with favor and paid them well. But he took longlasting control over Palestine, contrary to their wishes.

Antiochus decided to consolidate and strengthen his power by an alliance with Egypt. He offered "the daughter of women" (a phrase probably used to express high feminine charm) to the Egyptian king in marriage as a gesture of good faith. That woman was his daughter, the lovely Cleopatra (not the one associate with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony). Antiochus intended that she act as a spy ("corrupting her"--v. 17) at the Egyptian court, but the angel told Daniel, "she shall not stand on [Antiochus's] side, neither be for him" (v. 17). Cleopatra loved her husband more than her father.

History Is His Story

The prophecy in Daniel 11 is replete with seemingly inconsequential details. Perhaps you wonder

why they're in the Bible. One reason is to show us God's control of history. He determines the boundaries of nations. He knows history from the beginning to the end because history is, quite literally, "His story."

Once Antiochus achieved control of Palestine, his desire for conquest shifted toward "the coasts" (v. 18) --the Mediterranean islands and Greece. But that was an area in which Rome had an interest, and Antiochus was defeated in battle by a Roman army in 191 B. C. As a result Antiochus was forced to return to "the fortress of his own land" (v. 19). There he was murdered when he tried to plunder a temple dedicated to Jupiter.

Antiochus the Great was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV Philopater, who became a "raiser of taxes" (v. 20). That's because he was forced to pay Rome one thousand talents annually in reparation for injuries caused by his father's battles. His short reign was ended when he was "destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle" (v. 20) : he was assassinated by his prime minister in 176 B. C. The details of Daniel's prophecy were fulfilled precisely!

IV. ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES (vv. 21-35)

A. His Accession (vv. 21-24)

"In his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honor of the kingdom; but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. And with the arms of a flood shall they be overflowed from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant. And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully; for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people. He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province, and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches; yea, and he shall plot against the strongholds, even for a time." Antiochus Epiphanes, the next northern king, was "a vile person" (v. 21). He obtained the throne by deceit and flattery in 175 B. C. He was the younger son of Antiochus the Great and had no claim to the throne. His nephew ought to have been installed as king, but was held hostage in Rome. Antiochus devastated the Egyptians and their boy king Ptolemy VI Philometor. (The battle is described more fully in verses 25-27). He accomplished that by initially adopting a policy of friendship with Egypt while at the same time deceitfully plotting against it (v. 23). In his own territories he entered "upon the fattest places" (v. 24) , despoiling the rich and then distributing gifts to the poor--he was a self-styled Robin Hood. That gained him popular support. He also did everything possible to undermine strong communities in his kingdom so there would be no challenge to his power. He quickly put down any move against him.

B. His Aggression (vv. 25-35)

1. The first attack (vv. 25-28)

"He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army, but he shall not stand; for they shall plot against him. Yea, they that feed of the portion of his food shall destroy him, and his army shall overthrow, and many shall fall down slain. And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table, but it shall not prosper; for yet the end shall be at the time appointed. Then shall he return into his land with great riches, and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits, and return to his own land. "

In 170 B. C. Antiochus's army was victorious over Ptolemy's larger Egyptian army at the battle of Pelusium. Antiochus was victorious in part because Ptolemy's counselors plotted against him (vv. 25-26). The angel told Daniel that because of the betrayal, "His army shall overflow, and many shall fall down slain" (v. 26).

Following Egypt's defeat the two kings sat down together and spoke "lies at one table" (v. 27). Their promises to each other were not intended to be fulfilled--like so many of the world's worthless

treaties. The goals of the two kings remained unfulfilled because they didn't coincide with the "end" God had in mind. That end would come in God's "appointed time" in the future.

Antiochus failed to obtain complete control of Egypt because Rome intervened. Instead he turned his army north and marched through Israel. Daniel was told that Antiochus's heart "shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits" (v. 28). He pillaged the land and sacked Jerusalem, killing many Jewish people and causing terrible suffering. He then continued north "to his own land" (v. 28).

2. The second attack (vv. 29-35)

a) Against Egypt (vv. 29-30) "At the time appointed, he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter. For the ships of Kittim shall come against him; therefore, he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant; so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with those who forsake the holy covenant. "Many of us are familiar with movies in which, during a fight between the cowboys and Indians, a distant trumpet is heard and then the cavalry comes charging over the hill. Verse 30 gives us a similar scenario: Antiochus returned with another army to attack Egypt, but the Ptolemies had enlisted the aid of Rome. "The ships of Kittim" refers to the arrival of a Roman fleet that effectively deterred Antiochus in his attack on Egypt. Angry and disappointed, Antiochus turned his army north. En route he vented his anger against those of "the holy covenant" (v. 30) --the faithful Jewish people. There he was supported by those Jews who had forsaken the holy covenant. b) Against Israel (vv. 31-35) "Forces shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate. And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries; but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many; yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help; but many shall cling to them with flatteries. And some of them understanding shall fall, to test them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end, because it is yet for a time appointed. "(1) Israel's desolation In Jerusalem Antiochus placed guards around the Temple to prevent worship. On a particular Sabbath he ordered that women and children be slaughtered. He required idolatrous worship and held Greek athletic contests (in which the athletes competed while naked) in full view of the Temple. Greek culture was imposed, a statue of the Greek god Zeus erected in the Temple, a swine (a ceremonially unclean animal) sacrificed on the Temple altar, and the priests were forced to eat pork from the sacrifice. All those abominations were intended to desecrate the Jewish Temple. Although Antiochus's actions were supported by apostate Jews, Daniel was told that "the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (v. 32). Those who resisted Antiochus were subjected to his persecutions--typical of the persecutions by the Antichrist described in the New Testament. Their suffering was "by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil" (v. 33). (2) Israel's defense In response to those persecutions arose a group of Jewish people called the Hasidians. They were upholders of the law according to the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees (2:42). Their leader was Judas Maccabeus, who led a revolt from 168-165 B. C. His revolt "helped with a little help" (v. 34) --but was only a temporary respite from Syrian persecution. He did take bloody revenge against those Jews who had helped Antiochus, but like many revolutions, many who identified with the Maccabean revolt joined only for personal gain. God allowed his people to be persecuted "to test them, and to purge, and to make them white" (v. 35). He wanted His people purified from sin like metal is refined from impurities. Nothing drives people to God like suffering. A person's thoughts tend to go straight up when faced with imminent destruction. Daniel received an astonishingly complete revelation from God concerning the future suffering of the Jewish people "even to the time of the end. " They would suffer through the Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires. And they would continue to suffer up through the time of the revived Roman Empire and its ruler, the Antichrist.

God's Persistent Love for Israel

God has ordained all of history from first to last. He has determined history's notable events and its minutest happenings. He is not finished with refining Israel, and that explains why the Jewish people continue to suffer.

God is faithful to Israel in spite of her refusal to turn to Him. Our Lord said of Israel, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Paul echoed God's words through Isaiah, "All day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom. 10:21).

Israel's suffering is according to God's grace. Though He has every right to forget them--to write them off for their constant spiritual harlotries, disobedience, abuse of privileges, and covenant breaking--He doesn't. God will continue the purging process until "the time of the end . . . a time appointed" (Dan. 11:35).

There will come a time when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). That's a great promise! All during the time of Israel's chastening the archangel Michael has watched over them, and the time will come when he will fight for them (Dan. 12:1). The Spirit of God will descend upon Israel, they'll be redeemed, and will receive their kingdom (Zech. 12:10).

CONCLUSION

I hope you have a heart for the Jewish people. Among them are an elect remnant who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and God calls every believer to reach out to them. An old missionary hymn puts it this way:

Shall we whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high;
Shall we to souls benighted the lamp of life deny?

Focusing on the Facts

1. How long will man's defiance of God last?
2. How does the Old Testament say Israel disobeyed God? What has that resulted in?
3. Explain the context of Daniel 11.
4. Describe what kind of answer Daniel received to his prayers as given in Daniel 11-12.
5. In the midst of demonic activity what are God's holy angels doing?
6. Describe the attacks of literary critics on the book of Daniel. What is their basic presupposition?
7. Who was the fourth Persian king who led a major attack on Greece? In what other book of the Bible does he appear, and under what name?
8. When the Greeks finally retaliated against the Persians for the attacks made on them, who were they led by? Describe his success.
9. What happened to the Greek Empire after its great leader died?
10. Identify the two dynasties identified as "the king of the south" and "the king of the north" in chapter 11.
11. How did the two kingdoms attempt to resolve increasing tension between them?
12. What two realities does the minute fulfillment of prophecy in Daniel point to?
13. After his initial unsuccessful campaign against Egypt, what did Antiochus the Great do thirteen years later? Who assisted him?
14. How did Antiochus attempt to establish a deceptive alliance with Egypt? Why did it fail?
15. Who was the "vile" successor to Antiochus the Great? How did he obtain the throne (Dan. 11:21)?
16. After failing to obtain control of Egypt in 170 B. C. , what did Antiochus Epiphanes do?

17. What deterred Antiochus Epiphanes in his second attack on Egypt? How did he vent his anger and disappointment?
18. What did Antiochus Epiphanes do to the Temple in Jerusalem? What was his persecution of the Jewish people typical of?
19. What is God's purpose in the persecutions of the Jewish people according to Daniel 11:35?

Pondering the Principles

1. Daniel 11 shows the ongoing chastening of rebellious Israel. Unfortunately, few responded to that discipline. When allowed to return to their land from captivity, many were so entrenched in a pagan lifestyle that they wouldn't leave Babylon. Is that how you respond to the Lord's discipline in your life? A right response to God's gracious dealing with us is reflected in this hymn by Adelaide Pollard:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay:

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Resolve to adopt the attitude of the hymnwriter in God's dealings with you.

2. The ultimate purpose of divine testing is to strengthen our faith (cf. James 1:2-3). Chastisement may not seem pleasant, yet it does affirm God's continuing commitment to us. We see that truth in the affirmation that though the Jewish people have rebelled against God, "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). God has promised us that He will never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Praise God for His faithfulness to His own, and ask Him how you may be used to bring the light of the gospel to a Jewish person you know.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).