

Daniel 11: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 11. And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him. And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do as he wills. And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be 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.

Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he, and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority. After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm. And he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those times.

And from a branch from her roots one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army, and enter the fortress of the king of the north. And he shall deal with them, and shall prevail.

He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images, and their precious vessels of silver and gold. And for some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north. Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south, but shall return to his own land.

His son shall wage war, and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north. And he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand. And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude greater than the first, and after some years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies. In those times many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail. Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siege works and take a well-fortified city, and the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand. But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him, and he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand. He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand, or be to his advantage. Afterward he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed he shall turn his insolence back upon him. Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found. Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle.

In his place shall arise a contemptible person, to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant. And from the time that an alliance is made with him, he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people. Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his father's fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time. And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south, with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army.

[4 : 12] But he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed. And he shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant, and he shall work his will, and return to his own land. At the time appointed, he shall return, and come into the south. But it shall not be this time as it was before.

For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid, and withdraw, and shall turn back, and be enraged, and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back, and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear, and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant. But the people who know their guard shall stand firm, and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end.

For it still awaits the appointed time. And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the god of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished, for what is decreed shall be done. He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honour the god of fortresses, instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honour. He shall make them rulers over many, and shall divide the land for a price. At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him, but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries, and shall overthrow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land, and tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand, Edom and Moab, and the main part of the Ammonites. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of

Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, and the Libyans and the Kushites shall follow in his train. But news from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him. Daniel chapter 11 contains the main part of the fourth and last of Daniel's visions. This vision runs from chapter 10 to chapter 12. The prophecy covers a period of well over 550 years, and with the frequent ping-ponging between the king of the north and the king of the south, it can be quite difficult to follow. It does, however, provide us with a schema for thinking about much of the intertestamental period. Beginning with the period from Cyrus to Alexander the Great, it takes us through the six Syrian wars, from 274 BC to 168 BC, followed by the Maccabean revolt, and taking us down to the time of the Herods. The chapter begins with a verse that really belongs with the preceding chapter. The verse refers to Gabriel's assistance of Michael from the first year of Darius the Mede. This confirming and strengthening of Michael probably relates to the overthrow of the

[8 : 18] Babylonian empire and the subsequent release of Israel, Michael's people. From verse 2, the chapter relates the history of the region that is to be expected. Following Cyrus, three more kings will arise in Persia. Cambyses, Gaumata, Darius. After them comes the fourth king, who is far richer than all of them, Exerxes. His stirring up against the kingdom of Greece is the second Persian war. The mighty king that arises after them comes from Greece. It's Alexander the Great. He reigns from 336 to 323 BC.

However, he does not get to pass on his kingdom to his son. Rather, it is divided among four of his generals. Cassander gets Macedon and Greece, Antigonus, Anatolia and Asia Minor, Seleucus, Mesopotamia, and Ptolemy, Egypt and the south. In Israel's history, it was generally caught between a northern and a southern power. The northern powers were generally Babylon and the Assyrians. The great southern power was Egypt in its various guises. For much of the chapter that

follows, the king of the north is the man who rules in the Seleucid empire, and the king of the south is the Ptolemaic king. The first Ptolemy, from 322 to 285 BC, established his kingdom in Egypt. He buried the body of Alexander in Alexandria. He was the first of a very long line of Ptolemies. Seleucus, who had been one of the officers under Ptolemy, was attacked by Antigonos to his west, but was assisted in defeating him by Ptolemy. Ptolemy I was succeeded by Ptolemy II, who gained the authority of Egypt and married his sister. The Seleucid king Antiochus I fought the first of six Syrian wars with Ptolemy II. After the end of the Second Syrian War, in 248 BC, the war was concluded with a marriage treaty. Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, was given to Antiochus II. Unsurprisingly, Laodice, the replaced wife of Antiochus II, was not happy with this situation. She poisoned her husband, his new wife Berenice, and their son in 246 BC. After this coup, a branch of her, being Berenice's roots, Ptolemy III, her brother, sought to avenge her death and launch the third of the Syrian wars. He prevailed over Seleucus II, Antiochus II's successor, and got a lot of plunder. Seleucus II's attempts at retaliation failed, and he returned to his own land. Verse 10 refers to the heirs of Seleucus II. In 219 BC, the fourth Syrian war started, Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV fighting. Ptolemy IV brought up a force against Antiochus III, who was defeated at Raphia in 217 BC. The war ended in 211 BC. The Jews, being in the region between and variously controlled by these powers, was naturally caught up in these conflicts. Ptolemy IV was exalted in pride and started to persecute the Jews, who were at that time under the rule of his kingdom. Verse 13 refers to Antiochus III's regathering of his forces and forming a greater army. He was preparing for a fifth Syrian war.

[11:27] From verse 14, it seems that this period was one of failed messianic Jewish resistance to the Ptolemies. Ptolemy V became king in 205 BC. Antiochus III launched the fifth Syrian war. He took the well-fortified city of Caesarea and the territory of Judah. What is referred to as the glorious land in verse 16, came under his control around 197 BC, as he, Antiochus III, otherwise known as Antiochus the Great, took it from the Ptolemies. The Seleucid king Antiochus gave his daughter Cleopatra, not the later, much more famous Cleopatra, to the young Ptolemy V in marriage. Their wedding is actually recorded on the Rosetta Stone. He hoped by this means to subvert the rule of Ptolemy through the influence of his daughter. However, his plan failed and indeed ended up backfiring. She steered her husband towards alliance with Rome instead of Antiochus. Antiochus then turned to attack the coastal towns, Ptolemy and Greek cities. When the Greek cities appealed to the Roman Republic, they fought against

Antiochus III. He invaded Greece, but Antiochus was decisively defeated by the Romans at Thermopylae and Magnesia, who took Asia Minor from him and drove him back into his land. In the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BC, Antiochus III was forced completely to abandon Europe and had no choice but to submit to other humiliating terms. He was murdered in 187 BC while trying to plunder a temple in Susa to pay off his war debts, being removed, as it were, from the playing field, the events of verse 19. After this, in verse 20, we have the rise of Seleucus IV. He was the heir of Antiochus III, who needed to pay off his father's war debts to the Romans. He sent Heliodorus to the temple in Jerusalem to loot its treasures, but he was expelled from the temple. He claimed that supernatural powers had prevented him from entering. Later, Heliodorus assassinated his master Seleucus IV, hoping to seize the throne for himself. After the assassination of his brother Seleucus IV by the usurper Heliodorus, Antiochus IV, otherwise known as Epiphanes, another son of Antiochus III the Great, recovered the kingdom in 175 BC with the aid of the king of Pergamum. He claimed to rule as co-regent with an infant son of Seleucus IV on behalf of the rightful heir Demetrius I, his nephew, who was imprisoned in Rome, and Tarchus IV later murdered his infant co-regent.

During this period in Jerusalem, there were tensions between two factions, the Tobias and the Oniads. The former were Hellenizers, who celebrated the cultural sophistication of the Greeks, represented by Syria, and the latter were more conservative Jews, who supported Jewish nationalism or Egyptian governance. These two groups struggled for dominance over their high priesthood in Jerusalem in the years leading up to the Maccabean revolt. The high priesthood was the focal Jewish power in Jerusalem at the time. The Oniads were represented by Onias III, the high priest and descendant of Zadok. They resented the Hellenizing influence of Seleucid rule. The conflict between these two factions would play an important role in what followed. Joshua, who had taken the Greek name Jason, representing the Tobias, although he was the brother of Onias III,

was sent to Antiochus IV, and he proposed that he replace his brother as high priest in exchange for increased tax revenue and proactive Hellenization of Jerusalem. Jason was made high priest in 174 BC. Although he was the high priest, Jason encouraged his compatriots to adopt Greek culture and values. He built a large gymnasium next to the temple, and Jews participating in the games would use false foreskins to hide their circumcision as they competed naked. In 171 BC, a Tobias named Menelaus was sent to Antiochus with the tribute. He offered greatly to increase Jerusalem's tax revenue if Antiochus would only install him as the high priest instead of Jason. Sure enough, Menelaus, though having no connection with the line of Zadok or Aaron, was established as high priest by Antiochus. Menelaus raided the temple treasuries to pay tribute to Antiochus. When Ananias III, who had been deposed for Jason, Menelaus' predecessor, publicly protested against this, Menelaus had him murdered. The murder of Ananias III is likely the reference to the Prince of the Covenant in verse 22, which summarizes events of Antiochus IV Epiphany's reign. Verse 23 likely describes Antiochus' deceitful rise to power, initially presenting himself as ruling for the sake of the imprisoned Demetrius, but then seizing power for himself. Antiochus had greater wealth to employ than his predecessors, who had costly war debts to Rome. Antiochus IV used his larger funds to buy loyalty. His desire for funding is an important element of what precipitated the crisis of the period in Jerusalem. The Ananias appealed to Ptolemy to help.

A young Ptolemy VI sent a force into the south of Syria, hoping to take back Jerusalem, in 170 BC. This kicked off the Sixth Syrian War. They had lost Jerusalem to the Seleuces under Antiochus III in 197 BC. However, this force was decisively defeated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, as Ptolemy was betrayed by people close to him. Antiochus ended up taking the whole of Egypt, save for Alexandria. He took Ptolemy VI captive and reduced Ptolemy, his nephew, to the status of a puppet king. In response to this, the city of Alexandria set up Ptolemy VI's younger brother as king there, Ptolemy VIII, called Fiscon. Ptolemy VI and Antiochus ended up uniting against this common enemy, while still very much scheming against each other, speaking lies at the same table as verse 27 says. Antiochus, however, did not defeat Alexandria. Antiochus was likely concerned about how Rome would respond. After this, he returned to Syria to regroup. Passing by Jerusalem on his way back, with the help of his high priest Menelaus, Antiochus levied a tax on the people, and took tribute from the temple treasury. In his absence, Ptolemy VI, Antiochus' puppet king, was driven out by Ptolemy VIII, Fiscon, the man that Alexandria had set up. The deposed Ptolemy VI went to Rome to seek for aid. In 168 BC, Antiochus IV returned to Egypt. However, now there were Roman forces on the side of Ptolemy VI who weren't happy with this destabilizing of the region. Egypt was [18:02] Rome's breadbasket, so they were naturally concerned about Antiochus' actions in the region. The Romans sent a senator, Papilius Linnaeus, who set Antiochus an ultimatum. He drew a circle around Antiochus in the sand, requiring a response from him before he left it. Either he would withdraw from Egypt, or he would continue his expedition and face the wrath of Rome, who would declare war against him.

The Romans are the ships from Kittim referred to in verse 30. Antiochus, tailed between his legs, had to leave Egypt. In Jerusalem, news was received that Antiochus had been killed. Jason, the high priest who had been deposed for Menelaus, sought to regain control of the priesthood and of Jerusalem. Menelaus and other leading Tobias fled to the Syrians in Egypt. Antiochus, who was still very much alive, was infuriated. Crushing rebellious factions in Jerusalem would be just the way to get beyond the humiliation of his Egyptian escapades. Turning back from Egypt, he would take action against the Holy Covenant. Antiochus IV sought to humiliate the Jews, defiling and dishonoring their worship. He sought aggressively to Hellenize and paganize the city of Jerusalem, building a large fortress within it. He required the Jews to refer to the Lord as Jupiter or Zeus Olympias. He set up pagan altars throughout the city and required that the Jews offer pigs to the Lord. He prohibited faithful Jewish worship and practices such as Sabbath, circumcision and feast days. He set up a pagan altar within the temple itself, the abomination that makes desolate, offering a pig to Zeus. He plundered the temple treasury and left a force to control Jerusalem in his absence. We should recall that Antiochus' actions here, and the three-year cessation of Jewish religious worship, was earlier referred to in chapter 8, verses 8 to 14. [19:53] Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the

east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven, and some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it, together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state. The conflict with Antarchus IV was not merely an external one to the nation of Judah. It was also one bound up with internal divisions between Hellenizers and conservative Jews. While faithful Jews resisted Antarchus and his forced paganization of the land, they suffered horrific persecution, and many were martyred. Many commentators speculate that the little help received by the wise among the people, referred to in verse 34, relates to the Maccabean revolt, as Judean rebels under Judas Maccabees, a nickname meaning hammer, whose father Matathias, the Hasmonean, sparked the revolt, defeated the Syrian army and re-established the worship of the temple. He rededicated the temple in December of 165 BC. This would later be commemorated as the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah. The Maccabees were eventually successful in driving out the Syrian Greeks in 140 BC, establishing the Hasmonean dynasty and enjoying semi-autonomy in the empire. From around 110 BC, they enjoyed independence, and they expanded into surrounding regions of Transjordan, Samaria, and Idumea. They forced conversion to Judaism upon the Idumeans, descendants of the Edomites. Later they also added Galilee to the territory. This period of time, much of which is recorded in the books of the Maccabees, was a testing and refining time for the nation, a time of expectation of the Lord's visitation, as the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel and others were still awaited. The Hasmonean dynasty, arising from the Maccabees, was corrupted, however.

John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler under which Judea had gained independence, claimed both high priestly and royal office and prerogatives. It was he who had forced the Idumeans to convert. Verse 36 and following are seen by many as a portrait of Antiochus IV relative to his gods. However, the picture does not fit Antiochus well. Antiochus, for instance, is the king of the north, but the king mentioned here is attacked by the king of the north. This king also seems to be unfaithful to a covenant that he is under in some way. James Jordan, I believe correctly, argues that this figure is Herod the Great and likely the dynasty that followed him. Even though they had been forcibly converted, the Idumeans had come under the covenant. The Herods arose from an Idumean ruling family. After the Roman Pompey occupied Jerusalem in 63 BC, the Hasmoneans retained some nominal power.

[23 : 25] In 47 BC, the Romans had appointed Herod the Great's father as procurator of Judea. He had appointed Herod his son as governor of Galilee. Only a few years later, however, Herod's father was killed and Herod took over his position as procurator. To strengthen their ties with Rome, the Hasmonean dynasty gave one of their daughters to Herod in marriage. Herod later appointed his 17-year-old brother-in-law as high priest. Caught in civil war conflicts between Mark Antony and Octavian, Herod initially sided with Antony as Antony had helped him earlier. However, when he saw the tide of the conflict turning, he switched his allegiance to Octavian. These events seem to be referred to in verses 40 to 43. The king of the south is Mark Antony, the king of the north is Octavian. Herod initially fights with the king of the south, but the king of the north comes against him with a superior force and sweeps through the lands. Rome, this king of the north, ends up taking over Egypt, Libya, and then Ethiopia. However, in verse 41, reference is made to his abortive expedition against Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Herod is, as verses 37 to 39 highlight, a man of fortresses, a man who's a wily political operator. He is unfaithful to the covenant and engages in a lot of paganising practices. In addition to not paying attention to the gods of his fathers, it says that he does not pay attention to the one beloved by women. We might speculate as to what is being referred to here. Perhaps it's a reference to children. We might think about the massacre of the innocents. Others see some reference to homosexuality in the figure being referred to here. It might also refer to the Messiah as the desire of women. The concluding verses of the chapter returned from Octavian and the Romans to the character of Herod. The alarming news from the north

probably refers to messages from Antipater, his son, that two of his older sons had spoken against him to Caesar. Herod ended up killing both of them, and after them Antipater, when Antipater tried to kill him. The alarming news from the east seems to be something different. In Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 3, we read,

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. This is the troubling news from the east. Once again it leads an angry Herod to strike out with violence, in this case with the massacre of the innocents. The final verse of the chapter likely refers to Herod's two palaces within Jerusalem, one in the temple complex, and the other in the upper city. However, Herod, this violent king, would meet a sorry end. No one would come to help him.

A question to consider. What are the lessons that could have been learned from people reading this prophecy when it was first given?