

Daniel 11:1-45

The Historical Run-up to Messiah

The unnamed angelic being is still speaking, in continuation from chapter 10.

Rashi left him nameless in chapter 10, but here identifies him as Gabriel.

Daniel 11 picks up its historical narrative after the death of Alexander and the division of empire into four regions. This chapter foretells a 130-year history of six wars between the "Kings of the North" - the Seleucids, who ruled Syria and Persia, and the "Kings of the South" or the Ptolemies, who ruled Egypt.

Why does Daniel need to know this? Why would Daniel care? Why should we?

Whoever got the upper hand at any given time in these wars also controlled the Holy Land and had dominion over the Jews and Jerusalem.

This prophecy uses obscure language, but it matches historical events perfectly. So perfectly that an ancient pagan author Porphyry of Tyre argued that Daniel must be a 2nd-century B.C. forgery rather than a 6th-century B.C. prophecy. A lot of scholars agree with him.

The cast of characters includes lots of rulers named Ptolemy either attacking or bargaining with other rulers named Antiochus. The great grandmother of Cleopatra (also named Cleopatra) is in there too, along with plenty of wife swapping, political intrigue, broken alliances, assassinations, betrayals and assorted inter-familial treacheries. The whole story is fascinating but very confusing.

Meanwhile at one point Antiochus III is aided by Hannibal, the famous general of Carthage, and in the background the Romans are gaining strength and influence in the Mediterranean, and eventually take over.

Importantly, this chapter puts the Antichrist symbol Antiochus Epiphanes into his historical context.

We are also prophetically introduced to Herod the Great, another Antichrist-type character, whose penchant for treachery and cruelty rivaled Antiochus, and whose opposition to the coming of Messiah took the form of a massacre of hundreds of Jewish children.

To go over the meaning of every prophetic event in Daniel 11 would take forever.

If you want to read the whole historical interpretation of each verse, you can find a pretty good version here:

<https://www.letusreason.com/daniel-11>

We will pick up the story with Antiochus IV, who added THEOS EPIPHANIES to his name, meaning, "God manifest."

Daniel 11:21 - "And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries."

The successor of Seleucis III was Antiochus IV, described here as a "vile person." He did not come to the throne legitimately because it was strongly suspected that he murdered Seleucis III his older brother. He flattered regional kings and the Romans by delivering late tribute payments. He flattered his own Syrian people by distributing plunder to all.

The next few verses describe an effort by Antiochus to invade Egypt. But Egypt had an alliance with Rome. Rome was interested in Egypt because it could supply them with much needed grain.

The Roman Navy (the "ships of Chittim") defeated the navy of Antiochus Epiphanes. After the battle, a Roman general drew a circle around Antiochus in the dirt and demanded to know if he would surrender and pay tribute to Rome — and he wanted his answer before he stepped out of the circle. From that point on there was no doubt: Antiochus Epiphanes took his orders from Rome and was under Roman dominion.

Daniel 11:27 - "Both these kings' hearts shall be bent on evil, and they shall speak lies at the same table..."

i.e. There were no good guys in any of these scenarios.

Antiochus was humiliated by the Romans. He was "grieved" and angry, so he turned his anger against "the holy Covenant." His armies encircled Jerusalem and then attacked. All those Jews who resisted were executed. Antiochus IV is said to have killed 80,000 Jews, taken 40,000 more as prisoners, and sold another 40,000 as slaves.

Antiochus sold the office of High Priest and persecuted the Jewish people to conform to Greek culture. On one hand he used persuasion and flattery to entice some Jews to forsake the faith and traditions of their fathers. It says he would "have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant." Meaning he would honor them if they betrayed the faith.

On the other hand, he used force to forbid reading Torah, circumcision and Temple worship, killing tens of thousands who defied his orders.

Daniel 11:31 - "And arms shall stand on his part, (or "His forces will rise up") and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate."

In Daniel 9 it says that Messiah would "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" by fulfilling it with the sacrifice of Himself. As a symbol of the Antichrist (or the "instead-of" Christ) Antiochus also "took away the daily sacrifice," but by polluting the altar with pig's blood and then replacing it with a statue/idol of Zeus.

Daniel 11:32 - "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."

"The people that do know their God" refers to the family of Judas Maccabaeus and those who joined him in what was called the Maccabean revolt. They did "exploits" in a three-year guerrilla war that eventually defeated the much larger army of Antiochus. Maccabaeus was a nickname meaning "the Hammer."

In memory of the Jewish victory and rededication of the Temple, Judas Maccabaeus decreed that the Feast of Dedication (called Hanukkah in Hebrew) was to be observed every year thereafter for eight days, beginning on the 25th of Kislev.

Daniel 11:35 - "And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed."

The Maccabean victory caused some of the surrounding nations who were in sympathy with Antiochus to begin their own persecution of local Jews. Jews who had forsaken their traditions joined in to fight against the Maccabees.

Eventually the family of the Maccabees became known as the Hasmonean dynasty, named after their grandfather Asmoneus. Although not of the true royal line of Israel through David, they ruled from 168 until 37 B.C.

The words "until the time of the end" refer to the end of this second period of Jewish sovereignty. The "appointed time" refers to the seventy weeks of years that Gabriel had earlier told Daniel about (**Daniel 9:24-27**), which (after the first sixty-nine), led to the appearance of the Messiah.

The narrative continues on into chapter 12.

There is controversy about whether the remaining verses from verse 36 on are talking about Antiochus or someone else. Commentators have tried to fit in these verses to match the events concerning Antiochus, since the previous verses fit so well. But none of the explanations are convincing. Antiochus has already died, the Maccabees won, and the rise and decline of the Hasmonean dynasty is described.

Others interpret these verses as a leap into the future to describe a far-future antichrist or "man of sin" analogous to the Beast of Revelation whose number is 666, etc.

So what is this part of the chapter discussing?

The general description fits any number of antichrist-types from history.

Rome and Herod the Great

But if we match this prophecy of Daniel with his others, we would expect a mention of the fourth beast, and the iron legs of the image, the Roman Empire, which appears just at this point in history to interact with Israel.

I believe we are introduced here to a second antichrist type from history - Herod the Great.

Instead of "the king of the north," verse 36 only mentions "the king." This is a king of Israel - not of the north or south, but in the middle between them, where Judea is.

Daniel 11:36 - "And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done."

Herod the Great is also referred to as "the king" in the Gospels (**Matthew 2:1, 3, 9**, and **Luke 1:5**)

"And the king shall do according to his will" - This is the opposite of Jesus' saying, "Not my will but thine." But in a more general way, Herod was "willful" - successful at carrying out his will, achieving and retaining power and ruthlessly destroying whoever was in his way.

Herod was an Edomite, the descendants of Esau who spawned the Amalekites as well as Agag, Haman and other enemies of Israel. But the Edomites had been conquered and forcibly converted to Judaism under the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus around 130 B.C.

Roman Rule

Judea came under Roman rule in 63 B.C. The Roman general Pompey was asked to intervene in a dispute over succession to the Hasmonean throne. He besieged Jerusalem, finally breaking through and entering the Temple.

Pompey himself entered the Temple's Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest was allowed to enter, and thus desecrated it. He did not remove anything, neither its treasures nor any funds, and the next day, he ordered the Temple cleansed and its rituals resumed. Pompey then returned to Rome.

But that was the end of an independent Jewish state.

Herod's father was made procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar, and in 47 B.C. he

named his son Herod as governor of Galilee at age 25. Herod ingratiated himself with Rome after Julius Caesar's assassination. He married into the Hasmonean royal family. The Hasmonean ruler recommended Herod to Roman ruler Mark Antony to become tetrarch over Judea.

But the Parthians invaded Judea and overran the country in 40 B.C. Herod had to flee to Rome, where he was appointed king of Judea. He returned to Judea with an army, and reestablished Roman sovereignty. Along his road to power he killed off almost the entire Hasmonean line. He had his wife executed on a trumped-up charge of adultery. He killed three of his sons because he suspected them of conspiring to take his throne.

Herod was disliked by his people. His profession to be a Jew was not trusted, since his lifestyle was that of a pagan. He filled the land with building projects honoring himself and his Roman overlords, as well as temples dedicated to Roman gods. His decades-long project to expand and beautify the Temple was an unsuccessful attempt to curry favor with the people.

Herod certainly knew how to "exalt himself." But how did he "magnify himself above every god, andspeak marvelous things against the God of gods"?

Paul says there is a spiritual dimension to Edom. The struggle between the brothers Jacob and Esau represents the inner contest between the Spirit and the flesh. See **Romans 9:13** - "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," quoting **Malachi 1:2-3**.

Herod, as a representative of the flesh in this struggle, tried to prevent the coming of Jesus.

Alerted to his birth by the Wise Men, Herod killed all the male babies under two years old in the area of Bethlehem.

Daniel 11:37 - "Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all."

Herod knew the birth of this new King of the Jews was prophesied in the scriptures, but he disregarded it, even though he trusted its details - like the birthplace of Bethlehem. That shows enormous pride and self-regard. He was in effect challenging the God of the universe.

"The desire of women" refers not to his own desires. The "desire of women" especially in ancient times was to have a child. For Jewish women, they all hoped to be the mother of the longed for Messiah. And like the Amalekite King Agag, he had "made many mothers childless."

"nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all." - Despite building temples for Roman gods, he had no more regard or belief in them than he had of the God of Israel, the "God of his father."

Daniel 11:38-39 - "But in his estate shall he honor the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain."

Even though he didn't believe in them, Herod honored the Roman gods, and the Emperor who took the title of divinity, The temples and buildings he built in their honor were beautifully appointed. He regularly sent priceless gifts to the Emperor in Rome.

Herod actually worshipped "the god of forces" or "fortresses." Sheer power was what Herod was interested in, and he devoted himself to it. Actual fortresses - built by forced labor of his own people - were part of that.

Caught in a Roman Civil War

Daniel 11:40 - "And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over."

The king of the south is Mark Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt, who were pursued by the "king of the north" Octavian (soon to become Caesar Augustus). This war was fallout from the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.

Herod at first supported Mark Antony and sent him supplies. Antony dispatched him and his troops to fight the Nabatean king Malichus I. Instead of depending on his overwhelming infantry, Mark Antony took a suggestion of Cleopatra and confronted the navy of Octavian in a sea battle at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. . But Mark Antony was badly defeated.

Herod immediately switched sides, and sailed to meet with Octavian on the island of Rhodes. After groveling before Octavian, he was forgiven and allowed to continue his rule over Judea.

Still talking about the "king of the North" Octavian:

Daniel 11:41-42 - "He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, even Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon. He shall stretch forth his hand also upon the countries: and the land of Egypt shall not escape."

After his sea victory, Octavius advanced his troops through Judea (the "glorious land") and Egypt while skirting Edom, Moab and Ammon. Mark Antony committed suicide, as did Cleopatra later.

Daniel 11:43 - "He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all

the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels."

Octavius captured the accumulated riches of Ptolemaic Egypt with his victory over Antony and Cleopatra, and celebrated his triumph in Rome in 29 B.C. So much Egyptian treasure entered the Roman economy that interest rates plummeted. Octavius was named Caesar Augustus, and his general, Cornelius Balbus, later conquered Libya and Ethiopia for Rome, exactly as the prophecy predicted.

These verses show how Roman rule was solidified over Judea and Egypt, and set the stage for the coming of the Messiah as prophesied in the 70-weeks prophecy of Daniel, as well as the prophecy of the Messiah as the "stone cut without hands" striking the world system during the time of the Roman Empire. (**Daniel 2:43-48**)

The Wise Men from the East

Daniel 11:44 - "But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many."

The news from the "north" here refers to Antipater, Herod's son, who was residing in Rome (the "north"). He warned Herod that his two other sons were conspiring to replace him on the throne. Herod eventually had them killed.

What was the "news from the east?"

When the Wise Men from the east arrived looking for "one who had been born King of the Jews" (**Matthew 2:2**) Herod was disturbed: "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (**Matthew 2:3**). The description uses the same wording - "troubled" - as in the prophecy in Daniel.

Herod became furious and commanded that all the male children in Bethlehem and in all of its districts, from two years old and under, be slain, "annihilating many" (**Matthew 2:16**).

Herod also murdered other members of his own family, his political enemies and others who got in his way. He had placed a golden image of the Roman eagle on the gate to the Temple, which incensed the people. A group of zealots had pulled down the image - which probably seemed close to the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel - but they were rounded up and burned alive by Herod.

Daniel 11:45 - "And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him."

Herod's winter palace was at Jericho, which was located "between the seas" on the Jordan River - between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and about 45 miles east of the Mediterranean sea. His renovation of the Temple was mostly completed on "the glorious holy mountain" although the whole project took 80 years.

In his last days he retired to this winter palace and tried to commit suicide but was stopped by his cousin. Just before his death, he ordered the murder of his son Antipater. After years of suffering from a painful disease - probably syphilis - Herod finally succumbed in 4 B.C. at about age 70.

A Final Word:

The story of Daniel and the prophecies he gives us are a great comfort. They tell us that God watches over His people, that evil will be overcome in the end, that unseen angelic forces are operating all around us, and that the coming of Messiah has overthrown the world system - Babylon has fallen along with all the AntiChrist types we studied. We need not fear!

God knows our struggles and is present with us in them. Tribulation comes to try us, to purge out the leaven.

In Daniel 11:35 it says the tribulation brought by Antiochus was "to try them, and to purge, and to make them white."

- Malachi 3:3 - "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

Other times the strife comes to destroy in judgment, as Jesus prophesied concerning the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 24. In both situations, we can know that God is sovereign.

Like the song says, "Although the wrong, is off' so strong, God is the ruler yet, this is my Father's world."