

Daniel 11: The Kings of the North and South

(Preface based on Daniel 10)

Preface Context — “The Vision Concerning Daniel’s People” (Daniel 10:14)

- **Timeframe of Vision Given:** 3rd year of Cyrus the Great, ≈ 536 BC
- **Scope of Events Foretold:** From the Persian kings following Cyrus through the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 — the close of the Jewish age.

Before we step into Daniel 11, remember that the vision in chapter 10 served as the introduction. The angel told Daniel this revelation concerns **“what will happen to your people in the latter days”**—that is, what would take place concerning Israel leading up to the end of the Jewish age. These events are not about a far-off future beyond our lifetime; they describe what unfolded before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, bringing the Jewish era to its close.

The Kingdom of Greece (Daniel 11:1–4)

Approx. 539–323 BC

(v. 1) *“And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.”*

This begins with the angel still speaking—the same messenger from chapter 10—who continues to reveal what was written in the ‘Book of Truth.’

(v. 2) *“Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece.”*

These are the Persian rulers who followed Cyrus, in whose third year Daniel is receiving this vision. The next three were Cambyses, Smerdis, and Darius I Hystaspes. The fourth, wealthier than them all, was Xerxes I (also known as Ahasuerus in Esther 1), famous for his lavish kingdom and his campaign that provoked Greece.

(v. 3) *“Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases.”*

This ‘mighty king’ clearly describes Alexander the Great, who overthrew the Persian Empire and established the vast Greek dominion. His rise was swift and unstoppable, fulfilling earlier visions Daniel received in chapters 7 and 8.

(v. 4) *“After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.”*

After Alexander’s untimely death, his empire fractured into four parts—divided among his generals rather than passed to his children. None of them inherited his strength or worldwide dominion. The once-unified Greek kingdom splintered,

setting the stage for the coming conflicts between its northern and southern divisions.

The Kings of the North and South (Daniel 11:5–20)

Approx. 323–175 BC

(v. 5) *“The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power.”*

The “king of the South” refers to Egypt under Ptolemy I Soter, one of Alexander’s generals. Yet one of his officers, Seleucus I Nicator, rose to even greater prominence—founding the Seleucid Empire in Syria and Mesopotamia. This began a centuries-long rivalry between the southern (Egyptian) and northern (Syrian) branches of Alexander’s divided empire.

(v. 6) *“After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last.”*

This describes the ill-fated marriage of Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, to Antiochus II Theos of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus was already married to Laodice, who later had both him and Berenice (along with her child) murdered. The political alliance dissolved in bloodshed, just as the prophecy foretold.

(v. 7–8) *“One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress; he will fight against them and be victorious. He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North alone.”*

Berenice’s brother, Ptolemy III Euergetes, avenged her death by invading the Seleucid kingdom and capturing vast amounts of treasure—including idols and sacred vessels—which he returned to Egypt. His successful campaign brought temporary peace to his realm.

(v. 9–10) *“Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own country. His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.”*

Seleucus II Callinicus tried to retaliate but failed, retreating in defeat. His sons, Seleucus III Ceraunus and Antiochus III (known as ‘the Great’), renewed the fight. Antiochus proved formidable, advancing southward with immense strength.

(v. 11–12) *“Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated. When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant.”*

This reflects the Battle of Raphia (217 B.C.), where Egypt's Ptolemy IV Philopator achieved a massive victory over Antiochus III. Yet Ptolemy's pride swelled, and his success was short-lived. He returned home rather than consolidating his gain, leaving Syria to recover.

(v. 13–14) *“For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped. In those times many will rise against the king of the South. Those who are violent among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.”*

Years later, Antiochus III recovered and invaded again. Some among the Jews sided with him, perhaps hoping his victories would bring them freedom from Egypt's rule—but their uprising only caused greater hardship.

(v. 15–16) *“Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it.”*

Antiochus III conquered key fortresses such as Sidon and took control of Palestine—called here ‘the Beautiful Land.’ The Jewish people once again came under the power of Syria. This shift in control prepared the stage for the rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, whose persecution would be far worse.

(v. 17) *“He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him.”*

To strengthen his dominance, Antiochus III arranged for his daughter Cleopatra (not the later famous Cleopatra VII) to marry Ptolemy V Epiphanes of Egypt. His intent was to use her influence to control Egypt from within—but she remained loyal to her husband, frustrating her father's plan.

(v. 18–19) *“Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back on him. After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more.”*

After his failed intrigue, Antiochus III launched campaigns in Asia Minor and Greece. The Roman general Lucius Scipio defeated him at Magnesia (190 B.C.), forcing him to surrender territory and pay heavy tribute. Humiliated and impoverished, Antiochus returned home, where he was later killed while attempting to plunder a temple to repay Rome's demands.

(v. 20) *“His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle.”*

Seleucus IV Philopator, son of Antiochus III, took the throne and sent his minister

Heliodorus to collect taxes for the Roman tribute. His reign was brief—Heliodorus later poisoned him, seeking to seize power himself.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Rise of Rome (Daniel 11:21–45)

Approx. 175–164 BC

(v. 21) *“He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.”*

This vile successor is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who usurped the throne instead of the rightful heir, Demetrius I Soter. Through flattery and manipulation, he won allies in Asia Minor and maneuvered his way into power, though he had no legitimate claim to it.

(v. 22) *“Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed.”*

Antiochus IV crushed all opposition, including Egypt’s forces under Ptolemy VI Philometor. The ‘prince of the covenant’ likely refers to the Jewish high priest Onias III, who was deposed and later murdered—an act that would open the floodgates of persecution against God’s people.

(v. 23–24) *“After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time.”*

Antiochus IV used diplomacy as a weapon, forging false alliances while plotting betrayal. His strategy was cunning and opportunistic: striking unexpectedly, enriching his supporters with stolen wealth, and consolidating power through corruption. Yet his dominion was temporary—allowed only for a season within God’s plan.

(v. 25–26) *“With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king’s provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle.”*

Antiochus IV again attacked Egypt, defeating Ptolemy VI. The southern king’s downfall came partly from betrayal within his own ranks—his own officers conspired against him. The victory inflated Antiochus’s pride and deepened his cruelty.

(v. 27) *“The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.”*

Antiochus and Ptolemy attempted peace talks, each scheming for advantage. Their false promises meant nothing; God's timeline, not human deceit, would determine the outcome.

(v. 28) *"The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country."*

Antiochus IV returned north from Egypt enraged, turning his fury toward Jerusalem. He plundered the temple, outlawed Jewish worship, and defiled what was sacred—his hatred for the covenant people fully unleashed.

(v. 29–30) *"At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant."*

On his next campaign toward Egypt, Antiochus was stopped by Roman envoys who arrived by ship from Cyprus and demanded his immediate withdrawal. Humiliated before his troops, he turned his rage once again toward Judea. He favored apostate Jews who compromised their faith, rewarding them for betraying their people.

(v. 31) *"His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation."*

Antiochus IV's troops desecrated the Jerusalem temple, ending its sacrifices. They erected an altar to Zeus and sacrificed swine within God's sanctuary—an act so vile it epitomized the 'abomination of desolation.'

(v. 32–33) *"With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered."*

Antiochus IV seduced many into apostasy through bribery and fear, yet faithful Jews—like the Maccabees—stood firm, teaching others to hold fast to the Lord. Their courage inspired many, even as they faced imprisonment and death.

(v. 34–35) *"When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time."*

Though the faithful faced immense persecution, God used this trial to purify His people. The Maccabean revolt brought brief relief—a 'little help'—yet also drew opportunists. Even in suffering, God was refining His remnant for His redemptive purpose.

The Roman Empire (vv. 36–45)

Approx. 168 BC – A.D. 70

(v. 36–37) *“The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all.”*

This final ruler represents the rise of Rome’s emperors, who exalted themselves as divine and blasphemed the true God. The description mirrors the arrogance and idolatry seen in Revelation 13—the worship of empire and emperor replacing worship of the Lord.

(v. 38–39) *“Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his ancestors he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him.”*

Rome’s “god of fortresses” was its obsession with military power. Conquest and control were its idols. Rome elevated those who pledged allegiance to Caesar and punished those who would not bow.

(v. 40–43) *“At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Cushites in submission.”*

This depicts Rome’s sweeping conquests under leaders like Octavian (later Augustus). Egypt’s last Ptolemaic ruler, Cleopatra VII—ally of Mark Antony—was defeated at the Battle of Actium, bringing Egypt under Roman rule. Rome expanded across the known world, subduing nations and amassing vast wealth.

(v. 44–45) *“But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”*

Even Rome’s power would not endure forever. Though it crushed Jerusalem in A.D. 70—fulfilling this vision’s tragic climax—its own empire would eventually collapse. Human kingdoms rise and fall, but God’s kingdom stands forever.

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