

Lesson 29

Last week we had a lengthy introduction to Daniel 11, and we won't repeat all of that today, but let's recall a few key points.

First, Chapter 11 contains the longest most detailed prophecy in the Bible, which is why we are about to have a few long and detailed lessons about it.

Second, the reason we have Chapter 11 is that it confirms the major theme of the book of Daniel, a theme that Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way.

Daniel 4:32 - The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

Third, this chapter is why the liberal critics hate Daniel so much. Daniel 11 is a watershed chapter. Either this chapter is an authentic prophecy from God or it is not. Either Daniel is an authentic prophet (as Jesus told us in Matthew 24) or he is not. We know that it is and that he is, but the liberal critics disagree. We have looked at the evidence in earlier lessons.

Fourth, as we study these verses we need to keep in mind that they were written down centuries before the prophesied events occurred! In fact, we have physical copies of Daniel that predate some of the prophecies at the end of this chapter!

Daniel 11 is not like Babe Ruth predicting he will hit a home run. Daniel 11 is more like Babe Ruth pointing to the flag pole in center field, and then hitting a home run in that direction!

Daniel 11:1

1 Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him.

This verse really belongs at the end of Chapter 10, or perhaps, as some suggest, Daniel 11 should really have begun back in Daniel 10:20.

What can we say about the timing of these chapters?

Chapter 10, as we recall, was dated in the third year of Cyrus, and here we see that Chapter 11 begins with a reference to the first year of Darius.

We won't repeat all we have said about Cyrus and Darius, but we do know that the years of their reign over Babylon coincide, with the first year being 539 BC and the third year being 536 BC.

So is Daniel receiving this vision in 539? And if, so why did Chapter 10 jump ahead three years only to now jump back?

I think the solution is to read Daniel 10:21 and Daniel 11:1 back to back.

But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince. Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him.

I think what verse 1 is telling us is that this angel had been confirming and strengthening Michael since the first year of Darius - that is, since the Persians had been in power over Babylon and over God's people.

Most commentaries (I think, properly) treat Daniel 10-12 as a unit, and I think the better view is that all of these closing visions were received by Daniel in 536 BC, the third year of Darius.

One thing we see very clearly in Daniel 10-12 is that the true focus of world history is the people of God. That is the focus as far as God is concerned, and so, as I said, that is the true focus. And it must be our focus. It is certainly Satan's focus. We see that here.

Chapter 10 tells us that Satan was actively seeking to destroy the Jews so that God's plan could not proceed. How can God succeed if Satan destroys the people of God or causes them to turn from God? Do we think Satan's game plan has changed? Do we think he is any less interested in destroying us than he was in destroying the Jews?

About 50 years after this vision, during the reign of Xerxes, Haman received permission to kill all of the Jews. As we recall, his plans were thwarted by Queen Esther.

Much later, Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to exterminate the Jewish culture and religion. We looked earlier at the outcome of that attempt. In each case, we can only speculate about the spiritual battles that were occurring behind the scenes, as we saw in Daniel 10.

Does the world believe today that we in the church are the true focus of world history? No, the world

certainly does not believe that. But did anyone in the world of 536 BC believe that the Jews were the true focus of world history over the Persians and the other great powers of the time? No, they did not. But in each case, the world was wrong. The people of God are and have always been the true focus of world history.

We are why God created the world. We are why God sustains the world. We are why God will one day destroy this world. We are why God was at this time moving all the pieces into place so that he could bless the world through Jesus.

Daniel 11:2

2 And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, 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 Grecia.

When I prepare a witness for deposition, one of the first things I sometimes have to do is to get the witness to stop saying, "well, to tell you the truth!" Why do I dislike that phrase so much? Because it might suggest that the witness is not telling the truth at other times!

Is that what is happening here when the angel begins by saying, "And now will I shew thee the truth"? No, not at all. The reference to the truth here in Daniel 11:1 is a reference back to the "scripture of truth" at the end of Chapter 10. The angel is about to tell Daniel how history will unfold over the next few centuries, and the angel is in verse 2 telling Daniel the source of that knowledge - it is the truth from God as revealed in the scripture of truth!

The current king on the throne when this vision was received was Cyrus. Daniel learns in verse 2 that three more kings of Persia would follow Cyrus. The angel is not saying that only three kings would follow Cyrus because we also a fourth king in verse 2. Who were these three kings?

The three kings that followed Cyrus were Cambyses (Cyrus' elder son, who began to reign in 529 BC and who conquered Egypt in 525), Gaumata or Pseudo-Smerdis (the impostor who passed himself off as Cyrus' younger son, Smerdis, and who came to the throne in 522 BC), and Darius I Hystaspis (the cousin of Cyrus who killed the impostor and took the throne in 521 BC). Darius I is mentioned in Ezra 4:5, and it was during his reign that the temple was completed in 515 and Zechariah and Haggai preached in 520.

The fourth king after Cyrus was Xerxes (Darius' son) who reigned from 486 to 465 BC. This king is called Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, and Esther 1:4 talks about the "riches of his glorious kingdom."

Xerxes invaded Greece with a huge army that he spent four years gathering, and he was very successful until his navy was defeated by a united Greek fleet at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. He retreated to Asia, and his remaining forces in Greece were completely defeated the next year at the Battle of Plataea.

Nothing is said here about the outcome of the conflict with Greece, but verse 3 will start talking about the Greeks - so it is not hard to figure out that Xerxes would not do very well!

One text has noted:

A number of historians believe that a Persian victory would have hamstrung the development of Ancient Greece, and by extension western civilization, and this has led them to claim that Salamis is one of the most significant battles in human history.

The mighty Persians were defeated by a much smaller Greek force. Who could have foreseen such a thing? God told Daniel about it long before it happened, and we know the importance of the Greek culture and language to the plan of God. All that remained was to add Roman peace to Greek culture - and we will see that happen before we get to the end of this chapter.

Now before we move on to verse 3, let's pause and consider just how shocking these opening verses must have been to Daniel.

What if I told you that I had been visited by an angel and that he had revealed to me the history of the United States from now until it was defeated and replaced by another nation, and that I had written down everything that the angel had told me about what would happen with the United States from now until when the U.S. came to an end. And one more thing - what if I told you I had written it all down on the back of a Post It note!

Likely the most shocking thing in those statements would be the last one! That the remaining years of U.S. history could be written down on a small slip of paper! That is what Daniel is hearing in these verses about mighty Persia!

You mean to say the remaining history of Persia (as far as God was concerned) takes up all of one verse! Yes, that is what the angel is saying, and that would have been shocking, not only to Daniel, but

to anyone else who heard it at this time.

Daniel 11:3

3 And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will.

Most of the kings in this chapter are called either the king of the north or the king of the south. This king in verse 3 is different - he is just called a mighty king. (We will see another example in verse 36.)

Who is this mighty king? The Hebrew in verse 3 literally reads "a king, a hero." Who is this hero?

All agree that the mighty king in verse 3 is Alexander the Great who defeated the Persians in 331 BC.

Alexander died in 323 BC at the age of 33, and the phrase "shall stand up" in verse 3 emphasizes the brevity of his reign. It was like someone standing up for a moment and then sitting back down.

And Alexander was known for not listening to the advice of others, but rather he did according to his own will as verse 3 tells us.

Before we move on, let's note something important about the transition from verse 2 to verse 3.

Not only have we moved from Persia to Greece, but we have skipped over six Persian kings and 134 years. And notice that this skip in time occurs here without any warning. We need to remain on the lookout for other such jumps in time in this chapter.

How did we know about the jump here? It would have been difficult for Daniel to know about, but it is not difficult for us. Why? Because we can pick up a history book and compare these prophecies with what actually happened. And when we make that comparison, this forward jump in time becomes evident.

Should these jumps concern us? Of course not. Show me any history book that does not also make jumps in time, some of which being unannounced. And we need to keep in mind that Daniel 11 is not a history book but is instead a prophecy focused on God's people. That focus is what is driving the narrative, and when things start happening that are less related to God's people, the text does what we would expect it to do - it jumps over those events to get back to the focus of the prophecy.

Why the jump here? There wasn't much to say about Persia after the defeat of Xerxes, and on that point the book of Daniel and historians are in agreement.

After Xerxes, an author notes that "the Persian glory went on the decline so rapidly that hardly one of the remaining kings is worthy of notice." Persia was politically dead after Xerxes was defeated by the Greeks in the battle of Salamis.

This jump in time is also a reminder to us that when God judges a nation, he moves on to other nations, and while that earlier nation may linger on for awhile, its future has been determined, and as far as God is concerned it has already come to an end. That fact should be a sobering reminder to any modern day nation that has been greatly blessed by God but that has cast God's word behind its back.

Daniel 11:4

4 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.

Verse 4 literally begins, "while he is still rising." That is, Alexander is just standing up when he is broken, which again emphasizes his early death and his brief reign. And the standing up in verse 4 also I think tells us that Alexander had not weakened or lost power when he died, but instead he died at the height of his power.

But powerful or not, Alexander died, and his kingdom was broken and divided into four pieces.

Alexander conquered Persia in 331, but he died in 323, leaving his mentally challenged half brother Philip III and his son Alexander IV (by his Persian princess wife Roxana) in charge. Philip III was murdered in 317, and Alexander IV was murdered in 310. Alexander's kingdom did not go to his posterity and it did not remain unified, but instead it was divided up among his four leading generals: Lysimachus, Antipater (and his son Cassander), Seleucus I Nicator (Victor), and Ptolemy I Soter (Savior). (We will get some of these details on how this would occur in the verses that follow.)

As for the accuracy of this prophecy, one commentary noted:

Even after the events have taken place, it is hardly possible to give a more accurate description of what actually happened to this greatest of all the empires up to that time.

But, of course, these verses were written before the events took place!

Before we move to verse 5, let's pause and note something about the numbers we have seen, and particularly the number four, which was associated with Persia in verse 2 and which is associated with Greece here in verse 4.

We know that the number four in apocalyptic language often depicts the earthly powers arrayed against God, but this language is not apocalyptic but rather is a straightforward prophetic narrative.

Does that mean the number four is not being used figuratively here? No, all it means is that the number four is not being used only figuratively here. The number four here is certainly literal - there were literally four kings after Cyrus, and there were literally four generals who took Alexander's kingdom.

But why were there four? Who chose that number, and why do we see that number associated with Persia and Greece in the opening verses? God chose the number, and I think God chose the number for a reason. And I think this is further evidence that God is telling Daniel here what God is going to do rather than simply reporting to Daniel how history will unfold from the vantage point of one who can see into the future. Again, I am reminded of Isaiah 46.

Isaiah 46:11 - Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Daniel 11:5

5 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.

Now we start getting some of the details about how Alexander's kingdom was divided into four pieces after his death.

The king of the south is Ptolemy I Soter, one of the four generals we mentioned for the previous verse. He had taken Egypt after Alexander's death. His ambitions extended far beyond Egypt to include Palestine and the rest of Asia, but for most of their history, the domain of the Ptolemies was

restricted to Egypt and Cyprus.

Verse 5 also mentions "one of his princes" who would stronger than Ptolemy and have a great dominion.

Before we identify this person, we can already see that something strange is going on here. How can Ptolemy have a prince who is greater than Ptolemy? And how can this prince have a dominion of his own, and a great dominion at that?

This prince in verse 5 is none other than Seleucus I Nicator, another of the four generals we saw in the previous verse. But we are seeing him here before he took a fourth part of Alexander's kingdom. This verse is telling us how that came to be.

What happened is that Seleucus I had been given the province of Babylon in 321, but in 316 another general, Antigonus, seized Babylonia, and so Seleucus fled to Egypt and sought refuge with Ptolemy, becoming one of his commanders.

Ptolemy and Seleucus together defeated Antigonus in Gaza in 312, and Seleucus then returned to Babylon. In 301, at the Battle of Ipsus, Antigonus and his son Demetrius were defeated, and Syria-Palestine came under the control of Seleucus.

Seleucus's kingdom included Babylonia, Syria, and Media, and, according to Arrian, was the largest of all the divisions of the Greek Empire. His empire and authority stretched from India to Phoenicia and was ultimately much greater than that of Ptolemy.

So what do we have then? We have a prince of Ptolemy who becomes stronger than Ptolemy and who has a great dominion, just as Daniel was told would happen.

Daniel 11:6

6 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 begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times.

In moving from verse 5 to verse 6, we skip over about 60 years. And while new kings come to the

throne, they are still just called the king of the north and the king of the south.

The phrase "in the end of the years" in verse 6 just means "at the end of some number of years" or "after some years."

After the death of Ptolemy I in 285 BC, his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus (brother loving) fought with the Seleucids until 252 BC when a peace treaty was signed with Antiochus II Theos. This treaty is the joining together that we see in verse 6. Under this treaty, Antiochus II was to marry Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II.

One slight problem with this plan was that Antiochus II was already married to a very influential woman named Laodice. But he solved that problem by divorcing her and banishing her.

BUt when Ptolemy died two years later, Antiochus abandoned his Egyptian wife and took back Laodice. Not being one who was much inclined to forgive and forget, Laodice arranged to have the king assassinated. She also had Berenice and her infant son murdered. Afterward, Laodice took control as queen regent for her own young son, Seleucus II Callinicus (Beautiful Victor).

Some object to the inclusion of "he that begat her" (Berenice's father, Ptolemy) in the list of those who are given up in verse 6. But the phrase "given up" does not necessarily mean "killed" (although that is what happened to most of the people "given up" in verse 6). Being "given up" can also just mean "was unsuccessful," which is certainly true of Ptolemy, who had died and whose plans for unity using his daughter had ended in a complete failure.

Daniel 11:7-9

7 But out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, which 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: 8 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. 9 So the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land.

After Ptolemy II, his son, Ptolemy III came to power and marched off to avenge his sister Berenice's death. Ptolemy III is the "branch from her (Berenice's) roots" in verse 7.

The king of the north is now Seleucus II Callinicus, the son of Laodice.

Ptolemy III captured the capital city of Antioch and returned to Egypt with the spoil, which included long-lost idols that had been taken by Cambyses in 524 BC.

The return of these idols (along with great wealth that he also brought back) made Ptolemy III very popular with the native Egyptian populace, who named him Euergetes meaning benefactor. (At this time, the Ptolemies were not yet numbered, and so the Greeks differentiated them by these nicknames.)

Syria had suffered a defeat, but verse 9 lets us know it was not permanent.

Verse 9 is better translated, "Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land." That is, despite the KJV translation, most translations take the subject in verse 9 to be the king of the north mentioned at the end of verse 8 rather than the king of the south. As one commentary explains, this translation makes more sense grammatically and historically.

This latter king in verse 9 is the Syrian king Seleucus II Callinicus who reigned from 247 to 226 BC. It is known that he did conduct an expedition against Egypt, though without much success. Ptolemy III made a peace treaty with Seleucus II in 240 BC.

Seleucus II died in 226 BC, and Ptolemy III died in 222 BC, and so the king of the south continued more years than the king of the north, as verse 8 tell us.

#daniel