

## Daniel 11: The Most Detailed Prophecy in the Bible

by David Treybig

The prophecy of Daniel 11 includes amazing details about great empires, political developments and end-time powers that would affect the Jewish people.

The introduction to the prophecy of Daniel 11 is given in the preceding chapter. This introduction is quite extensive—all of chapter 10. It begins: “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision” (Daniel 10:1).

According to *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, the third year of Cyrus was “535/534, in all probability just a few years before Daniel’s death” (comment on Daniel 10:1). Through Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams (Daniel 2:1) and through Daniel’s vision of four beasts (Daniel 7), God had already revealed that there would be four world-ruling empires followed by the Kingdom of God.

Now God was going to reveal to Daniel some amazing details about major world powers, beginning with the Medo-Persian Empire and continuing through the time of the end just prior to Christ’s second coming. The angel that came to help Daniel understand the vision told him that its focus was on “what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come” (Daniel 10:14).

What would happen to the people of God both in Daniel’s time and in the future was of great interest to him, as by then 42,360 Jews had returned to Jerusalem following a decree by Cyrus allowing them to go back to their homeland (Ezra 2:64).

Because of the many intricate components of the prophecy in Daniel 11, some scholars have suggested that the book of Daniel was written several hundred years later, during the 160s B.C., after these events had already transpired. But foretelling the future is not difficult for God. As God stated, “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, *declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done*” (Isaiah 46:9-10, emphasis added throughout).

Since other prophecies found in the book of Daniel, such as the 70-year prophecy of Jeremiah and the 70-weeks prophecy (indicating the year of the appearance of the Messiah), were fulfilled exactly as predicted, we can have confidence that God also provided the details found in this prophecy in Daniel 11 long before they took place. For further study of fulfilled prophecy, see “Fulfilled Prophecy Is Evidence of God’s Existence” and “Daniel’s Prophecies: Proof of God’s Existence.”

The initial aspects of the prophecy of Daniel 11 have taken place precisely as God predicted. A comparison of secular history with the biblical record will reveal the fascinating details. Other parts, including the identity of the end-time king of the North and the end-time king of the South, are yet to be fulfilled. These unknown portions of the prophecy have been sealed “until the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4).

An interesting point regarding this prophecy is that it appears to have been delivered orally. Unlike the preceding dreams and visions in the book of Daniel, which contained images that needed to be interpreted, this vision simply gave Daniel the “words” regarding what would happen to the Jewish people from this time forward (Daniel 10:7, 9).

## **The Medo-Persian Empire to be conquered by Greece**

The prophecy of Daniel 11 begins with the prediction that “three more kings will arise in Persia” followed by a fourth who would “stir up all against the realm of Greece” (verse 2). Biblical resources, such as *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, provide the historical explanations for this prophecy. Regarding this verse, *Expositor’s* states, “The Persian king who invaded Greece was, of course, Xerxes, who reigned 485-464 B.C.”

Daniel 11:3-4 speaks of the appearance of “a mighty king,” whose kingdom would “be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven.” *Expositor’s* explains, “Verse 3 introduces us to the next phase in world empires: the rise of Alexander the Great. Although this verse does not make it altogether clear that this ‘mighty king’ would inaugurate a new empire in place of the Persian one, verse 4 leaves us in no doubt that he was the ruler predicted here. ...

“In seven or eight years he accomplished the most dazzling military conquest in human history. But he lived only four years more; and after one of his drunken bouts, he died of a fever in 323 in the imperial capital of Babylon. Verse 4 foretells the division of Alexander’s domains among four smaller and weaker empires.”

Following Alexander’s death, his empire was divided among four of his generals. These four kingdoms and their rulers were Macedonia-Greece under Antipater and his son, Thrace-Asia Minor under Lysimachus, the rest of Asia except lower Syria and Palestine under Seleucus Nicator, and Egypt and Palestine under Ptolemy.

The remainder of Daniel 11:5-39 then documents the actions of the last two of these kingdoms—Egypt to the south of Jerusalem (the location of Daniel’s people, the Jews, Daniel 10:14) and Syria to the north of Jerusalem. In this section of Scripture the rulers and their successors are referred to as the “king of the North” and the “king of the South.”

## **The king of the North versus the king of the South**

Located geographically between ambitious kingdoms to the north and south, the Jewish people during postexilic times were often caught in the rivalries for power between Egypt and Syria. While space does not permit a detailed exposition of every verse in Daniel 11:5-39 and its historical fulfillment, here are a few highlights:

Verse 5: *Expositor’s* explains, “‘The king of the South’ (verse 5) was to be Ptolemy I (Soter), son of Lagus, whose ambitions extended far beyond the borders of Egypt (over which Alexander had placed him in charge) to Palestine and the rest of Asia.”

The prince under Ptolemy I who would become stronger than Ptolemy I was “Seleucus Nicator of the Selucid Empire” (ibid.).

Verse 6: The “agreement” was a proposed peace treaty that called for Antiochus II to marry Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II. But “Antiochus already had a wife, a powerful and influential woman named Laodice. She did not take kindly to being divorced. ... She therefore organized a successful conspiracy. ... She managed to have both Berenice and her infant

son, whom she had borne to Antiochus, assassinated. Not long afterward the king himself was poisoned to death (247 B.C.), and the pro-Laodice party engineered a coup d'état that put her in power as queen regent during the minority of her son, Seleucus II (Callinicus). In this manner, then, the prophecy was fulfilled concerning Berenice, that she would be 'handed over,' ['given up' in the New King James Version] along with the nobles who supported her in Antioch" (ibid.).

Verse 7: "Ptolemy III (Euergetes) organized a great expeditionary force against Syria, in order to avenge his sister's death. This war raged from 246 to 241. ... Finally he returned to Egypt laden with spoil. ... He succeeded on other fronts as well, for he reunited Cyrenaica (at the western end of Libya) with the Ptolemaic domains, after it had enjoyed twelve years of independence. He also recovered all his father's conquests on the coasts of Asia Minor and temporarily gained control of some portions of Thrace" (ibid.).

Verse 8: Ptolemy III recovered the idols of Egypt taken by Cambyses in 524 B.C.

Verse 9: Although he did not enter Egypt itself, Seleucus II regained control of northern Syria and Phoenicia.

Verses 10-12: This passage "foretells an important new development in the struggle between the two great powers, with the advent of Antiochus the Great [Antiochus III] and his conquest of the Holy Land. ... Antiochus III next launched an expedition against Phoenicia and Palestine (219-218) that ended in a serious setback at the Battle of Raphia, where he was soundly beaten by the smaller army of Ptolemy IV. ... But finally in 203, Antiochus saw his opportunity to strike at Egypt again, since Ptolemy IV had just died and had been succeeded by Ptolemy V (Epiphanes), who was a mere boy of four" (ibid.).

Verses 13-16: These verses document the eventual wresting of the Holy Land from Egyptian control by Antiochus the Great.

Verses 17-19: Hoping to gain advantage over Egypt, Antiochus the Great gave his daughter, Cleopatra, in marriage to Ptolemy V in 195 B.C. But Antiochus' daughter sided with her husband and no advantage was gained. Antiochus then lost a battle against Roman forces.

After his defeat, "he had to surrender his entire elephant brigade, all his navy, and twenty selected hostages. Finally he was obliged to pay an indemnity of fifteen thousand or twenty thousand talents over a period of several years. Antiochus's second son, who was named after him, was among the twenty hostages taken to Rome, where he spent the formative years of his life. He later became the dreaded persecutor of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanes" (ibid.).

Being unable to make his indemnity payments, Antiochus the Great was killed while trying to pillage a temple in Elymais.

Verse 20: The brief 12-year reign of Antiochus III's eldest son, Seleucus IV, was marked by heavy taxes throughout Palestine. Seleucus was soon poisoned to death by his minister, Heliodorus.

Verses 21-34: These verses document the tyrannical oppression of the Jewish people by Antiochus Epiphanes, who by force tried to make the Jewish people forgo their religion in favor of all things Greek. This was the time of the Maccabees, who resisted this Hellenistic influence. (For a brief explanation of Antiochus' actions against the Jewish people and how they

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fulfilled prophecy, see “Abomination of Desolation: What Is It?”)

## Dual fulfillments

Verses 35-39: The reference to “the time of the end” in verse 35 offers a challenge in interpretation. Some understand this as referring to the time just before Christ’s return, and others see it as the end of the Maccabean struggles. Some of the actions can be attributed to Antiochus Epiphanes, and some seem to be prophecies of the beast power that will exist at the end of this present age. These verses apparently have dual fulfillments, spanning from the time of the Maccabees until the return of Christ.

The preceding verses in Daniel 11 represent extremely detailed prophecies that have been fulfilled exactly as they were revealed to Daniel. It is important to note that the Roman Empire defeated Seleucid Syria in 65 B.C. and that it defeated Egypt in 30 B.C. Thus the first identities of the king of the North and the king of the South came to an end.

## The time of the end

In verses 40-45 we read of actions of a king of the North and a king of South “at the time of the end” (verse 40). The end-time identities of these nations are yet to be determined. The establishment of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 seems to be a key development that allows for the fulfillment of these end-time verses. From the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 until 1948, there was no Jewish nation.

Now, with a Jewish nation once again existing in the Middle East, there is relevance to identifying major world governments as a king of the North and a king of the South in reference to Jewish people living in Jerusalem. Click the following links to learn more about who this future king of the North and future king of the South are likely to be.

## Significance for us

When we consider the many prophetic details of Daniel 11 that were fulfilled as predicted, we can have confidence that the remaining prophecies of this chapter and others in the Bible that are yet to be fulfilled will likewise occur as God has ordained.

Through a dream, God revealed to ancient King Nebuchadnezzar and us today that eventually the kingdoms of this world will be replaced by the Kingdom of God. As Daniel explained to the king: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up *a kingdom which shall never be destroyed*; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). To learn more about this future, world-ruling government and how you can be part of it, see the section on the “Kingdom of God.”

## About the Author



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