

Truth for Today

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The King of the South and the King of the North - Daniel 11

The story is told of a young man who was very interested in Bible Prophecy. Whenever he thought about it, he got very excited. You know, the Bible is the only reliable source of information about what will transpire in the future. So, the dramatic things foretold in scripture truly astonished that young man. On one occasion, on a very cold winter's evening, he was enthusing about prophetic events. The wise old gentleman, to whom he was talking, looked thoughtfully at him and then took him outside. He pointed up to the night sky. Myriads of stars shone in bright array. "Isn't it clear?" the old man asked. "Oh, yes! Wonderful!" exclaimed the young man. "Yes!" said the older man. "But isn't it cold?" Of course, the old man had a point to make, and he made it very well. It is certainly possible to look at what the Bible reveals about the future in a very cold, analytical way. Some go as far as to say that Bible Prophecy is "clear as crystal, but cold as ice". Even if that were the case, which I personally would deny, I would certainly not want to go to the other extreme, and be "warm as toast, but clear as mud" concerning what God has revealed about the future course of events. But, really, such criticism misses two major points about God's revelation of the future.

Fundamentally, altogether apart from the detail, Bible Prophecy is about the glory of Christ. God will see to it that the Lord Jesus Christ will, in God's own good time, be given the universal honour He truly deserves. As far as I am concerned, if the glory and honour of my Lord and Saviour are involved, what is said must necessarily be of great interest to me.

There is also an important challenge involved. When God tells us in advance about something He is going to do in the future, it is intended to affect the way we live at the present time. This leads me to the conclusion that prophecy, rightly understood and appreciated, has a most profound effect upon my life and service for the Lord. I cannot neglect it.

The Book of Daniel predicts coming events with great accuracy and in fine detail. So much so, that many, who do not want to be challenged by what God says to them through it, claim that it must have been written after the event. We could not have a greater tribute to the accuracy of any prophecy than such a claim. The details of Daniel's prophecy were specified many years before some of them were due to be fulfilled. Of course, some of them have still not happened. But they will happen, in God's own good time, because God says so.

In chapter 2, Daniel draws attention to the fact that, because of prolonged disobedience by the people of Israel, God found it necessary to discipline them. He allowed them to be subjugated to a succession of four Gentile empires, one after another. In turn, Israel was conquered by the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and ultimately Rome. Daniel himself, as a teenager, was one of the many Jews who were carried away captive to the land of Babylon, the first of these major empires. By the time he was given the prophecy and wrote his book, he was an old man. The Babylonian empire had been superseded by the Medo-Persian Empire. Opportunity was given to those Jews who so wished to return to their country of origin. However, God told Daniel that the right thing for him personally to do was to stay exactly where he was. His job was to deliver the word of God to his fellow-countrymen who were still in Babylon. The climax of the prophecy was that, eventually, all the kingdoms of the world would finally be placed under the personal authority and control of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When you can, please read Ezekiel 21:27; Daniel 2:44; and Matthew 24:27-31. These well-known verses, and many, many more, tell us that it will be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and none other, Who will put the world right, and keep it right, when He appears in power and great glory.

Let us try to establish an outline of the chapter as a whole. Much of the detail is taken up with the history of two major nations who shared a continuous animosity towards each other. For hundreds of years, there was a mutual antipathy between those on the thrones of these two nations. Inevitably, this animosity affected their relationship with Israel, which lay between them. Apart from outright warfare, the ruler of one or the other would occasionally use more subtle means in an attempt to gain ascendancy over the other. This included, among other things, arranging marriages between members of the two royal families. This did not really work. In some cases, it merely exacerbated the situation and caused even more aggravation between the royal families and the two countries.

The sovereigns are not referred to by their personal names. There are good reasons for this. Their long-term relationship to each other and, especially, to the nation of Israel, is more important to God than the personal name of

any particular individual. Also, it is important to see that in the narrative, geographical locations refer to their positions relative to Israel in general, and the city of Jerusalem in particular. Obviously, the term King of the South refers to the ruler of the land which lies to the south of Israel, clearly Egypt. Similarly, the term King of the North refers to the ruler of a country to the north of Israel, namely Syria. Hence, the kings of these two countries are referred to throughout the chapter as King of the South and King of the North respectively. Their long-term relationship to each other and to the nation of Israel is much more important than the personal name of any particular individual. Once we understand that, the next step is to see that the terms The King of the South and The King of the North do not refer to the same person throughout the chapter. Over a long period of time, it is the King of the South for the moment, and the corresponding King of the North at that same moment, who are seen to be in combat with each other.

So then, Daniel 11 is really an accurate summary of actual future historical events, and of future contests between successive Kings of the North (Syria) and the contemporaneous Kings of the South (Egypt). Israel was very often the battleground for the wars between these two nations, lying as it did between them. In more recent times, Flanders in World War 1 and Kuwait in the First Gulf War suffered in like manner.

Clearly, there are things recorded at the beginning of the chapter which, by now, have already happened. Other things, prophesied at the end of the chapter, have, just as clearly, still not happened. There must therefore be a split point, somewhere in the chapter, between matters which, prophesied then, have already been fulfilled, and things which are still future. The most obvious and reasonable point for the gap between the two is between verses 35 and 36.

Now, within that overall picture, let us look at the way the detail comes out in the chapter. We shall also think a little about other major characters referred to in it.

The opening verses give a forecast of events that would occur in the relatively near future from when they were foretold. The first great empire, Babylon, had already fallen. The second, which had matured into the Medo-Persian empire, was now ruling the then-known world. They, in turn, would be conquered and superseded by a third empire, Greece, under Alexander the Great. Remarkably, while he was still a relatively young man, and at the zenith of his power, he would die suddenly, taken "at a stroke". His empire would be split between four of his generals. The revelations that follow are mainly occupied with the activities of two out of the four divisions of what had been Alexander's empire. These were those which lay immediately north and south of God's earthly people and land, as we considered earlier.

After many fluctuations of fortune between these two countries, the then King of the North would flex his muscles by attacking the isles of Greece. This would bring him into conflict with a ruler from the west, identified by Daniel's prophecy as the leader of the increasingly powerful empire of Rome. He who would send the King of the North scuttling back to his own country, crushed and broken. Such would be his total subservience to Rome that his successor would be known as a mere "collector of taxes" on behalf of his overlord at Rome.

In verses 21 to 35, Daniel moves on to foretell that he in turn would give way to a totally vile, monstrous person, named in history as Antiochus Epiphanes. He would not be a rightful heir to any throne, but would scheme and deceive his way into power in the territory north of Israel. As a King of the North, he would resume battle with the then King of the South. In one of these sorties, he would be opposed and defeated by ships from a fleet of the Roman empire, which had become the fourth of these great empires. Hastening away "with his tail between his legs", as we might say, and in a bitter rage, he would vent his anger on the Jews. Crushing all resistance, he would even enforce idolatry on the Jews. He would be so vile that in many ways he would typify the last King of the North, who will be so cruel to Jews in the last days before the Lord Jesus comes again to set up His kingdom.

To the end of verse 35, we have the prophecy of events which were future in Daniel's day, but which have since then been fulfilled. From verse 36 onwards, we are told of events which are yet future, even in our day.

In verses 36 to 45, we see a vivid picture of the Jews when things are building up towards the appearance of their Messiah. They will be gathered back in their own land, still unbelieving, still rejecting Christ as that Messiah. They will, however, have rebuilt their temple and resumed their sacrificial ceremonies. Having rejected their rightful king, they will receive another who comes in his own name, as we read in John 5:43. The Apostle John names him Antichrist. Having accepted his rule, the Jews will become apostate as a nation.

The section begins by foretelling the reign over Israel of the Antichrist, designated in this chapter as "the king". He will be an apostate Jew who will assume to reign over the apostate nation of Jews after the rapture of those who are Christ's at His coming. The character of this man entirely corresponds with the description given elsewhere of the man of sin, the false prophet. He is identified in New Testament scriptures such as 2 Thessalonians 2 and The Book of Revelation, especially chapter 13. We read that he will set himself up as superior to every known god, recognising no will but his own. In particular, he will blaspheme the God of gods. He will, however, defer to the head of the

revitalised Roman Empire. It will become abundantly clear that he is the very antithesis of the long-promised Messiah of Israel, Whom we know is the Lord Jesus Christ. Antichrist will, however, be allowed to continue until God's disciplinary action against Israel, described by many of the Old Testament prophets, reaches its climax.

From verse 40 onwards, we learn that both the King of the South and the King of the North will come up against this newly introduced person. During this period, the Jews, back in their own land under the rule of Antichrist, will be attacked by both the King of the South and the final King of the North. The latter will be the most violent, coming like a whirlwind and charging through the country. Isaiah 28:18 describes this. His momentum will take him right down south into Egypt. This will be a terrible time of great sorrow and persecution for godly Jews. Nevertheless, they will be refined morally by the process. They will be duly rewarded by their God for their faithfulness in extremely trying circumstances. In their distress, they will have the consolation of knowing that God will limit this period so that they will be able to endure it.

For a time, the King of the North will be allowed to carry all before him. But, in the midst of these successes, having reached Egypt, he will be alarmed to hear "disturbing news from the north and from the east that will trouble him" (11:44). He hastens to determine what is happening. No details are given to Daniel other than being told that "he shall come to his end, and none shall help him" (verse 45). God will clearly deal with him personally without human agency. The disturbing news he hears is probably that the leader of the Roman Empire, called elsewhere "the beast" (Revelation 13:1-10) has met his end at and by the Appearing of Christ in power and great glory. The last King of the North might well indeed be alarmed that the Lord Jesus Christ, Israel's true Messiah, has appeared in person. Christ will personally deliver His earthly people and put down the arch-enemies of God, the Roman Beast and the Jewish Antichrist. He will then set up His kingdom that shall never be superseded by any other (verse 44). Other chapters such as Zechariah 12-14, and Revelation 19:11-20 spell out the way in which the dramatic details will unfold.

Now, we must return to where we began and how we began.

Properly understood, all scripture has a positive, practical effect on Christians who accept it for what it is, The Word of God. This is especially true of prophecy. It is God's revelation as to how He will eventually bring all things together in accordance with His perfect will, and His plan of the ages. He will do so for His own glory, for the honour of His well-beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the blessing of all those who have put their trust in Him. This brings a special challenge to those of us who at the present time freely confess the Name of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. May the Lord help us to respond, and live, in the light of what prophecy foretells. Others, who have not yet been brought to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, might then, through our lives and witness, be brought to repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). The prophetic stream of events foretold by Daniel and other prophets will soon bring to an end these present days, when it is still possible to say. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold! now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Let us do all that we can, right now, to bear effective witness to the truth that the Bible foretells. Others might then be encouraged to come to Christ while there is still the opportunity to do so.

Are there any listeners to this programme who do not yet rejoice in the sure and certain knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Now is the time to be fully assured as to the salvation of your precious, eternal soul. "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and ... He was buried, and ... He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Then you, too, can rejoice to look forward to the day when everyone in the universe will yield to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will then be acknowledged to be the rightful King of kings and Lord of lords. To God be the glory! Amen!

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