

A Complete Exegesis of the Historical Section of Daniel Chapter 11

Part I Daniel 11:1-4

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INTRODUCTION

Chapter 11 is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Old Testament. It predicts many detailed future events which find their fulfillment in the years from Cyrus the Great through the Maccabean revolt and all the way to the eschaton in the career of the Antichrist. Verses 2 through 35--that part of the chapter already fulfilled in history--contain approximately 135 detailed prophetic predictions!

The details of those parts already fulfilled are so minute and numerous that it is important to remember that the entirety of this chapter is spoken by the interpreting angel to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus (535/534). It is not *vaticinium ex eventu*, "the prophecy from the event." This standard, higher critical view of the book of Daniel meets with a serious problem in chapter 11.

According to liberals Hartman and Di Lella,¹

The sacred author, who doubtless composed this apocalypse sometime before the tyrant's death [Antiochus IV Epiphanes] late in 164 B.C. . . . skillfully employs the device of fictional prophecy (*propetia post eventum* [prophecy after the event] to convey to the recipients of the book the solemn and infallible assurance that history and its outcome fall under the sovereign and almighty sway of "him who lives forever" (12:7).

The problem is what to do with 11:40-45: "The trouble is that nothing in these verses matches the actual course of history as it is known from other sources" (p. 303). Therefore, in giving the outline of chapter 11, Hartman and Di Lella regard 11:40-45 to be "an imaginative prediction of his death" (p. 294). By "imaginative prediction" they of course mean an incorrect prediction--Antiochus did not die where the text, according to them, states that he will die. They go on to claim,

That the explanation [of the death of Antiochus in 11:45] does not correspond to the known data of history in no way detracts from the author's confident faith and sure hope that the Lord of history holds unquestioned control also over such powerful men as Antiochus IV Epiphanes.²

The use of the description "sacred author" in connection with this higher critical theory is a travesty. One of the several explicit tests of a true prophet of God is that his predictions come true:

But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And you may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD [Yahweh] has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of

1 Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel in The Anchor Bible*, p. 294.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 303.

the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.³

How can an author who makes a false prediction about the death of Antiochus be a "sacred author"? By the test of Scripture itself, such an author is a false prophet, and no comparisons with some special genre of extra-biblical literature can save the author of Daniel from being one.

What is the real answer to the problem posed by 11:36-45? The problem arises only when one adamantly maintains the philosophical position that true supernatural, divinely-inspired predictive prophecy is impossible. Daniel wrote the book in the sixth century B.C. Chapter 11 is a revelation given to him by an angel. From Daniel's standpoint the entire chapter *was* predictive prophecy when written. Verses 11:2-35 describe events which have now been fulfilled during the Ptolemaic and Seleucid era, ending with the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt. His death is not explicitly described in chapter 11, although it is accurately predicted in 8:25. Since predictive prophecy is possible through divine revelation, 11:36-45 proceed to describe the career of the eschatological antitype of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Antichrist.

This view, however, is not open to liberal higher critics. Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that chapter 11 was composed in 164, this pseudo-Daniel cannot be interpreted as giving an accurate prediction of something yet to come, future even to our point in time today. The reason is that such an interpretation contradicts the presupposition that forms the strongest argument for the 164 date in the first place, namely, that true predictive prophecy is impossible. The liberal critic is left simply with a false prediction and therefore a false prophet. For the agnostic or atheistic critic, this poses no problem. For a misguided evangelical, who would like to continue using such phrases as "the sacred author," this poses a very serious problem.

The history of the Greek era from Alexander the Great to Antiochus IV Epiphanes is very complex. Therefore, the only way to study this chapter is through a careful, verse-by-verse exposition imbedded in a somewhat complete narrative of the history of that period, at least as regards the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms. The reader will find my sources for this history at the end of this exposition.

FROM CYRUS TO THE DIADOCHI: 11:1-4

Most scholars agree that verse 11:1 belongs to the preceding section and that an entirely new section of the book begins with verse 11:2.

1. The Persian Empire: 11:2

And now I will tell you the truth. Behold three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece.

The "three more kings" are the three kings after Cyrus the Great: Cambyses II, Gaumata, and Darius I. Cyrus died about 530 or 529 in a battle on the eastern front of his empire against the Massagetae and was succeeded on the throne by his oldest son Cambyses II (529-522). Cambyses conquered Egypt, but while on that campaign the throne was seized by Gaumata (523-522), an imposter pretending to be Smerdis, a younger son of Cyrus whom Cambyses had secretly killed. Cambyses died under questionable circumstances on his return to Persia. Darius I, or Darius [son of] Hystaspes (522-486), who was a cousin of Cyrus through his father Hystaspes, was satrap of Parthia.

³ Deut. 18:20-22.

He assassinated Gaumata and assumed the throne. An excellent administrator, Darius spent his first two or three years putting down revolts in various parts of the empire and reorganizing the empire itself. He claims to have extended his rule to the east over the Scythians. He definitely reestablished control over the Greek cities of Ionia, conquered earlier by Cyrus before his campaign against Babylon. However, he met defeat at the Battle of Marathon in his attempt to take the Greek mainland in 490.

The fourth king of Persia after Cyrus, who gained great riches, was Xerxes (486-465), the Ahasuerus of Ezra and Esther. In 480 he began another campaign against Greece with an army, according to Herodotus, of a million men. He reduced Athens to ashes and successfully conquered all of Greece down to the Isthmus of Corinth. However, the Greeks defeated the Persian fleet at the Battle of Salamis, near Miletus, and Xerxes was consequently forced to retreat from Greece. An army of 100,000 men, left on the Greek mainland by Xerxes prior to the defeat at Salamis, was cut off and completely crushed in the following year. Xerxes had to relinquish everything beyond Asia Minor. He was assassinated in his palace in 465.

2. Alexander the Great: 11:3

And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority and do as he pleases.

A period of decline followed the death of Xerxes, and the remaining kings of the empire are passed over in Daniel's vision. The first three kings, Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-424), Darius II Ochus (423-404), and Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-359) managed to hold the empire together, but more by the payment of gold than by their skills as kings. Artaxerxes II Ochus (359-338) followed. Ruthless and brutal, he put down various revolts and restored Egypt to the empire. After about a twenty-year reign, he was poisoned by Bogoas (338-336), who was himself poisoned by Darius III Codomanus (336-331), the last of the Persian kings (the Achaemenian kings, beginning with Cyrus) and a distant cousin of Artaxerxes III. He might have saved the Persian empire had he not overestimated his own strength and underestimated that of Alexander the Great and the growing power of Greece.

Philip, a Macedonian, united all of Greece; and in 336 he prepared for an invasion of Persia. However, just as his troops began their campaign, Philip was assassinated. Alexander the Great, Philip's son born in 356, was his successor. He was the "mighty king" who "will arise." Alexander first secured his northern and western borders before crossing into Asia. Once his thrust against Persia began, it actually required three separate encounters to fully crush the Persian empire.

Alexander's First Encounter

The Persian forces were first encountered and defeated at Granicus in 334. Before proceeding further into Persia, however, Alexander first completed the conquest of Asia Minor.

Alexander's Second Encounter

He then learned that Darius had assembled an army of half a million men for the purpose of engaging him. To gain the advantage for his smaller army, Alexander moved with great haste to encounter him. The battle was fought in 333 in the narrow plain of Issus, with the Persians again defeated. Darius fled before Alexander, and his army to a great extent was destroyed. At this point, before further invading Persia, Alexander proceeded southward along the seacoast of Syria to Egypt. Most of the cities wisely opened their gates to him; but Tyre and Gaza stubbornly resisted and fell, only after rather lengthy sieges. According to Josephus, it was during these campaigns that Alexander is greeted by the high priest in Jerusalem. In order to spare the city, the people welcome Alexander, and the high priest shows him Daniel's prophecy of him. So impressed was Alexander that he bestows great favor on Jerusalem, even granting any man who desires it induction in his army.

Moving on, Alexander enters Egypt which submits to him without any resistance. Realizing that he could best rule Egypt from the seacoast, he founds Alexandria. One event of interest occurs in Egypt:

The most memorable event of Alexander's stay in Egypt was his expedition to the oracle of Jupiter Ammon (Amen-Ra), where he was declared the son of the god. To the Egyptians this meant no more than that he was regarded as a lawful monarch, but he pretended to take this declaration as assigning to him a divine origin like so many Homeric heroes. Henceforward there appeared on coins Alexander's head adorned with the ram's horn of Amen-Ra. This impressed the Eastern imagination so deeply that Muhammad, a thousand years later, calls him in the Koran *Iskander du alqarnein*, "Alexander of the two horns." In the fact of the universal attribution of the two ram's horns to Alexander, it seems impossible that the author of Daniel could represent Persia, the power he overthrew, as a two-horned ram (Dnl. 8:3, 20), unless he had written before the expedition into Egypt.⁴

Alexander's Third Encounter

After establishing his rule in Egypt, Alexander in 331 again turned toward Persia. Darius had sent him a proposal to share the empire with him, but Alexander was set on complete conquest. Darius had no choice but to prepare for what was to be the final conflict. He assembled a greater army than he had at Issus. The Persians were on the plain of the Tigris near Gaugamela, about 75 miles northwest of Arbela. Alexander hastened to meet them. The plain was advantageous to the Persian troops, which consisted largely of cavalry. Nevertheless, they were defeated--overwhelmingly and with another great slaughter. Darius once again fled taking refuge in Bactria, one of the eastern satrapies. Perhaps seeking to gain Alexander's favor, the satrap Bessus murdered Darius. No favor, however, was to be gained, and Alexander continued to move eastward through Bactria, killing Bessus.

After completely breaking the power of Persia, Alexander invaded India, conquering everything before him until reaching the Indus River. At this point his troops refused to follow him further. Indeed, they were weary of war, but there were other reasons as well, such as Alexander's demand that his troops and officers prostrate themselves before him in conformity with Oriental custom, and his granting equality to his Persian subjects--even taking the Persian princess Roxana as his queen and designating his son by her as his successor to the Greek empire. After his troops refused to go further, Alexander was forced to turn back. Nevertheless, as Archer writes, "In seven or eight years he accomplished the most dazzling military conquest in human history."⁵

Alexander returned to Babylon in 327 and intended to make it the capital of his new empire. However, just four years later, in 323, he was taken with malaria, which, compounded by his reckless eating and drinking, took his life at the age of 33. In fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 11:4, his son never ascended to the throne. Kept for a time in the custody of Cassander, he was murdered in 310.

3. The Period of Division: 11:4

But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward

4 J. E. H. Thomson, "Alexander the Great," *ISBE*, I:89. It is unfortunate but sometimes the case that a contributing scholar to *ISBE* does his best to come as close as he can to liberal, critical views while still claiming to be conservative or evangelical. "The author of Daniel" was *Daniel* who wrote in the sixth century B.C. Moreover, Daniel did not "represent" Persia "as a two-horned ram" in chapter 8. He received a vision of a two-horned ram, viz. divine revelation, (8:1), which was then interpreted by the angel Gabriel to be Persia (8:15,16, 20).

5 Gleason Archer, *Daniel*, in *EBC*, 7:128.

the four points of the compass, though not to his descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded; for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them.

From 323 until 301 there were several attempts to retain the unity of the empire. Shortly before his death, Alexander had appointed Ptolemy, one of his most trusted generals, satrap of Egypt. At Alexander's death Perdiccas, another general under Alexander, became regent. However, as Perdiccas was bringing the body of Alexander from Babylon to Macedonia for burial, Ptolemy attacked him and had Alexander buried in Egypt. Consequently, Perdiccas launched an attack against Ptolemy in Egypt. But Perdiccas was murdered in 321 by his own generals, led by Seleucus who then defected to Ptolemy. Antipater, another of Alexander's generals, was subsequently elected regent, and the satrapies were reorganized with Seleucus gaining Babylon, Laomedon obtaining Syria, and Ptolemy retaining Egypt.

In 320 Ptolemy deposed Laomedon and claimed Syria and Palestine for himself. Apparently no action was taken against Ptolemy, and Antipater died shortly thereafter in 319. However, when Antipater died, one of his generals, Antigonus, tried to reunite the empire by removing those who opposed him. His first goal was Seleucus in Babylon. Fleeing to Ptolemy in 316, Seleucus warned him of the threat posed by Antigonus. This resulted in a four-fold alliance between Lysimachus, Seleucus, Ptolemy, and Cassander (Antipater's son).

Antigonus successfully invaded Syria and Palestine in 315, while his son Demetrius was left in charge of the area at Gaza. In 312, however, Ptolemy and Seleucus attacked and defeated Demetrius. This decisive victory again gave Seleucus rule of Babylonia under the sponsorship of Ptolemy, while Ptolemy seized Jerusalem without resistance.

After a complicated series of battles, temporary treaties, and shifting of fortunes, a pact was made in 303 between Ptolemy, Seleucus, Lysimachus, and Cassander to overthrow Antigonus, with Ptolemy promised Syria and Palestine in addition to Egypt. The decisive battle was fought at Ipsus in Phrygia in 301. However, Ptolemy withdrew from the battle after hearing a rumor that Antigonus had defeated Lysimachus, the principal general of the alliance. Antigonus was eventually defeated, and the empire was officially divided into four parts among these four ruthless and powerful generals, called the *Diadochi* or "Successors."

Since Ptolemy had deserted them, it was decided to give Syria and Palestine to Seleucus. However, Ptolemy quickly occupied Palestine and lower Syria before Seleucus gained possession of them. This act was the bone of contention between the Ptolemaic and Seleucidian kingdoms for decades to come, and it was this antagonism that formed the background to the continual fighting between these two realms predicted in Daniel 11:5-20. The actual four-fold division was therefore as follows:

<i>Cassander</i>	Macedonia and Greece
<i>Lysimachus</i>	Thrace and Asia Minor
<i>Seleucus Nicator</i>	the rest of Asia except lower Syria and Palestine
<i>Ptolemy I Soter</i> (son of Lagus)	Egypt, Palestine, and lower Syria

Due to extensive fighting between these parcels, the Greek dominion never again had the strength it did under Alexander the Great, again in complete agreement with the prophecy in Daniel 11:4.