

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 25, Number 41

October 18, 2009



God's Prophecy of Kingdoms: Setting the Stage

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. (Daniel 11:5)

Following verse four, the remainder of Daniel chapter eleven is generally about the push-pull between two of the four kingdoms that came out of the division of the empire of Alexander the Great. These two kingdoms – the kingdom of the north and the kingdom of the south – were Syria and Egypt. (The other two were Thrace, or Turkey, and Greece.) Of course, the land that lies between Syria and Egypt is the promised land of Canaan. Thus, God's people were constantly caught in the tug-of-war, and constantly harassed by both factions.

Following the demise of Alexander and his family, there was no heir-apparent. Thus, the "four generals" of Alexander's army came to an agreement to divide up the kingdom. Turkey was ruled by Lysimachus, and Greece by Antipater Cassander. Seleucus I Nicator took Syria, while Ptolemy headed Egypt. But remember that this vision covers more time than just these rulers and extends into those who succeeded them. It is the conflicts between Syria and Egypt which the angel now shares with Daniel throughout the remainder of chapter eleven.

Seleucus was actually once a subordinate to Ptolemy, but the "King of the North" amassed an empire which would have rivaled that of Alexander himself. (v.5) Later, Bernice, the daughter of Ptolemy II married Seleucus' successor Antiochus II. This arranged political marriage required Antiochus II to put away his wife, Laodice. But after Ptolemy II died, Antiochus II brought Laodice back, who then promptly killed them all. (v.6) Bernice's brother, Ptolemy III, then rose up and, to avenge her murder, invaded & took over Syria. (v.7-9)

Eventually the son & grandsons of Seleucus rise up and push Egypt back and out of Syria. (v.10) But Ptolemy III doesn't just sit still, but "moved with choler" (i.e. bitterness) he fights back and prevails. (v.11) As a result, Ptolemy becomes prideful and destroys thousands of others – mainly Jews – "but he shall not be strengthened by it." (v.12) May we pause for a moment to reflect on God's disdain for arrogance, and also His love for His people? A "ruler" in this world may think that he/she is "the best" or "the strongest" or "the smartest", etc. But God...!

Eventually one of those grandsons of Seleucus – Antiochus III – emerges as the leader of Syria and continues to war against Ptolemy IV of Egypt. (v.13) He is joined by others, including a group called "the robbers of thy people" who have "exalted themselves" in an effort "to establish the vision." Daniel is told that they will fail. (v.14) These "robbers" were actually Jews who had sided with Egypt and then switched sides when they believed Syria would prevail. I believe they were trying to do an "end run" around God's providential plan in an attempt to re-establish the decimated nation of Judah by "buddying up" to the "guy on top." Compare this to faithful Daniel, who was receiving this vision of prophecy, and who had spent his entire life waiting on God's timing in ending the captivity and establishing His kingdom. Antiochus III prevails against Egypt and its leader, Ptolemy IV (v.15) and further decimates "the glorious land" of Canaan (v.16).

After a period of time, Antiochus III has thoughts about totally taking over Egypt, where Ptolemy V is now "the king". Instead, Antiochus offers to Ptolemy, who accepts, an arranged marriage with Antiochus' daughter, Cleopatra. (v.17 - This is not the "famous" Cleopatra, but no doubt where the name is introduced into Egypt!) Antiochus, thinking that Cleopatra will help him control Egypt (she doesn't!), then turns his attention to conquering the Greek isles. (v.18) This move leads to his undoing, as it stirs up Rome – in particular a Roman by the name of Scipio – who leads an army against Antiochus, defeats him, and chases him back to Syria. (v.18) Additionally, to add insult to injury, Scipio makes Antiochus agree to pay him a tax, or fee. Antiochus, angry about this, decides to pay it by plundering a Syrian temple. The folks got upset about this and, in the process, killed Antiochus. (v.19) Seleucus IV Philopater took the throne and, instead of trying to plunder his own temple to pay off the Romans, decided instead to take it from Jerusalem. (v.20) He didn't last long, however, as he was poisoned (i.e. "neither in battle, nor in anger") by Heliodorus.

No one knew Heliodorus had poisoned Seleucus, and in order to control the Syrian

kingdom he quickly moved to have Seleucus' infant son (instead of the eldest son) named as king – and, of course, Helidorus as the chief advisor! However, Seleucus' brother Antiochus IV Epiphanes had different plans and chased Helidorus from the annals of history. Thus Antiochus peacefully ascended to the throne. But he was a vile person (v.21) whom someone artfully “renamed” from Epiphanes (i.e. illustrious) to Epimanes (the Madman).

Antiochus immediately began a crusade of annihilating his enemies. He even deposed the High Priest, Onias III, “the prince of the covenant”. (v.22) He then put Jason in as High Priest, but soon took a bribe from Jason's brother Menelaus to put him in as High Priest. (v.23)

Antiochus IV was an avid spender. He lavished the riches of Syria and political privileges upon his Hellenist friends. (Hellene is the Greek word for the Greeks. Before taking control, Antiochus had been living in Greece.) He bestowed magnificent presents upon the old seats of Hellenism in Asia Minor and Greece, and threw open to their craftsmen and artists lucrative employment in Syria. (v.24) However, his thoughts soon turned south to Egypt.

When his sister Cleopatra I of Egypt died, Antiochus heard that Egypt might be on the verge of invading Syria. Antiochus advanced promptly with a force as far as Joppa to repel a possible invasion. After satisfying himself that things were safe for the moment, he returned north. Nevertheless, old quarrels concerning the ownership of Palestine were still unresolved (NOTE – they remain unresolved today!), and Antiochus was sure that it would be only a matter of time before Egypt would again try to recover it. (v.25)

Indeed, in 170 BC, Egypt went on the offensive to recover Palestine. The army was under the command of two joint regents, Eulaeus and Lenaeus, who had seized control of Egypt following the unexpected death of the young Cleopatra. The legal heir to the southern kingdom, Ptolemy, son of Cleopatra and Ptolemy Epiphanes, was only fifteen years old at the time of his mother's death.

Antiochus met the Egyptian invaders before they had crossed the desert and won an enormous victory. Then, by some ruse, probably through treachery, Antiochus seized Pelusium. The young King Ptolemy of Egypt was given bad advice, probably again by traitors, and was packed aboard a ship to escape from Egypt. The ship was intercepted by the Syrian fleet, and the young Egyptian king became the prisoner of Antiochus king of Syria.

Following the defection and capture of their young King, the citizens of Alexandria revolted

against their incompetent regents Eulaeus and Lenaeus, brought the younger brother of Philomater to the throne, and gave him the auspicious title of Ptolemy Euergetes II, in imitation of his successful great grandfather.

Antiochus pretended to take the side of the young Ptolemy Philomater against his brother. They made a joint agreement, but they were trying to deceive one another. (v.27) Antiochus continued his invasion of Egypt and moved up the Nile to Memphis. Lower Egypt, except for Alexandria, was soon entirely in the hands of Antiochus. For the first time since Alexander the Great, Egypt had been successfully invaded from Palestine. Having created havoc on the Egyptian political scene, Antiochus retired from Egypt laden with spoils. (v.28) However, later the Romans stepped in (see v.29 below) and made Antiochus surrender Egypt, so neither Antiochus or Philomater prospered from it.

After a lengthy negotiation between Alexandria and Memphis, it was agreed that Ptolemy Philomater and Ptolemy Euergetes II would rule as joint kings in Egypt. This precipitated a second successful invasion of Egypt from the north in 168 BC. This time, however, Rome was now free to exercise her authority over the Near East, having just recently conquered Macedonia at the battle of Pydna (June, 168 BC). (NOTE the rising of the Roman empire as prophesied to Daniel years earlier!) By ship, Rome sent her ambassador Popillius, who met Antiochus somewhere in the desert east of Alexandria. (v.30) He ordered Antiochus to leave Egypt completely.

Now, since Antiochus could no longer protect Palestine by holding any Egyptian territory, it was imperative that he consolidate Palestine. *The weak spot was Jerusalem, which had resisted all efforts to amalgamate into the general Hellenistic system that he had envisioned for Syria.* He was determined to abolish the religion of Jehovah, even if it required the extermination of recalcitrant Jewish residents and their replacement by Greek colonists. (v.30)

Our next installment will reveal what Antiochus then did relative to the Jews. And remember, none of this had yet happened, but was being revealed to Daniel because he was concerned for and desired to know what would befall his people, the Jews.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor