

Basic Orientation to Daniel 11

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Introduction

Daniel 11 consists of Dan 11:2-12:4. This material has bookends around it. The first of these says, I'm going to tell you the truth (11:2a). The second one says, Those true things I just told you? Seal them up (12:4). Everything between these two beginning and ending points is the prophecy itself – all the true things the angel relates to Daniel on this occasion.

We have to bear in mind that what the angel says in Dan 11 in the present prophecy is the summing up or culmination of everything he has told him earlier. In this prophecy all the points he conveyed earlier come into sharper focus, and what it all focuses on is Jesus.

When I say all, I don't mean that every verse mentions Jesus' name, but rather that everything that goes to make up the prophecy is oriented toward Him in one way or another. Think of a target with a bullseye on it. What makes this a target is not just the dot in the middle, which could be quite small, but rather the rings that surround the dot. The dot is the main thing; the rings just call attention to it. That's the way Dan 11 is. Christ is at the center of the chapter (literally at the center, in 11:22), but what makes Him so prominent is all the supporting information that calls attention to Him. We need the history that Dan 11 conveys. If we remove the Roman period, for example, we remove Christ, because that's when He lived His life on earth. All of the many details have their place, so that Christ can assume His rightful place at the center of everything.

The only three places in the chapter that speak directly of Jesus are Dan 11:22 ("the Prince of the covenant"), 11:37 ("the One desired by women"), and 12:1 ("Michael . . . the great Prince who rises to protect your people"). The first reference points to Christ's death on the cross. This provides a starting point for all antitypical ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Every priest must have something to offer (Heb 8:3), and what our great High Priest, Jesus, offers is the blood He shed on the cross. So before the cross He could not minister in the heavenly sanctuary. Shortly after the cross Christ starts ministering before God in the first apartment. Then in 1844 He moves, with the Father, into the second apartment, where He is today. Then He returns to the earth in power and glory.

First Section: Greece (11:2-15)

The first section has to do with Greece (empire III). The references to Persia in vs. 2 have the function of placing the rise of Greece in its Persian context.

There are many wars in these verses, but let's drop down to Dan 11:14. The word "vision" in 11:14 points back to 8:13, where the same word is used. The "violent ones among your people" are the Maccabees, whose exploits are celebrated to this day in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. The Greek king of Syria, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, tried to destroy the Jewish religion and, in aid of doing this, had pigs sacrificed on the altar. The followers of Judas Maccabeus thought that by cleansing the temple of these abominations they were fulfilling the prophecy of Dan 8:13-14. The problem is that the prophecy of Dan 8:13-14 is not talking about the temple in Jerusalem, but about the temple in heaven at a much later time ("it refers to many days from now," 8:27). So they failed to fulfill the vision, even though they succeeded brilliantly in pushing Antiochus out of Judea.

Second Section: Secular Rome (11:16-28)

There are three main sections in Dan 11, and we now discuss the middle one. It has to do with secular Rome (empire IVa), from two points of view. First, it shows us Rome in relation to Jerusalem; then it shows us Jerusalem in relation to Rome. All of this comes together to form one section – the one at the center of the chapter.

In Dan 11:16-28 there's a lot of violence, but in the two verses on either side of 11:22 violence is absent. Thus, there is no violence in 11:20-21 or 11:23-24. With six verses before 11:22 and six verses after, if we take the two verses closest to the center on each side, that makes an interesting pattern. What we have is four verses of [+violence], two verses of [-violence], one verse of [+violence], two verses of [-violence], and four verses of [+violence]. We could simplify this by saying + - + - +. And the number of verses in each case also makes a pattern, i.e., 4 2 1 2 4. The one verse at the center of the section, which is [+violence], portrays Christ at the time of His death on a Roman cross. All the rest has the primary function of calling attention to what happens to Jesus at the center. But there's no center if there isn't something on both sides. The supporting material in all those other verses – the ones leading up to and away from the center – is an important part of this.

There's more. In the one verse to the left of center and the one verse to the right, the angel uses a Hebrew word that means "in peace," or "peaceably." This is like our bullseye illustration, where the pattern of withholding violence in the two verses on either side of center and using the word "peaceably" in the one verse on either side of center calls attention all the more forcefully to the violence done to Jesus. Without getting all this background information lined up right, we can't appreciate how hard the angel is trying to ensure that the supremely important fact of Christ's death on the cross receives all possible attention and emphasis – in the center verse, of the center section, of the center chapter, of Daniel's last and culminating prophecy.

Third Section: Spiritual Rome (11:29-12:3)

This section can be divided into three subsections. All three deal in one way or another with spiritual Rome (empire IVb).

Before the wound

When I refer to a wound here, I mean the “deadly wound” (KJV), or “mortal wound” (ESV), of Rev 13:3. This is the period of “a time, times, and half a time” or “1,260 days” during the middle ages.

The relationship of Dan 11:29-35 to 36-39, which describe this period, is similar to the relationship of Dan 7:25b and 7:25a. Dan 7:25 has four clauses, of which three have counterparts in Dan 11 and 12. These deal with the little horn’s proud words (“He shall speak words against the Most High), violent acts (“and shall wear out the saints of the Most High”), the law of God (“and shall think to change the times and the law”), and the timeframe in which all of this occurs (“and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time”).

In Dan 7:25 the little horn’s proud words come first, then his violent acts. In Dan 11:29-35 and 36-39 the king of the North’s violent acts come first, then his proud words. So the reversed (A then B, B then A). And in both cases the timeframe is “a time, times, and half a time” (7:25; 12:7). This time period brings us to 1798, when Pius VI was taken into exile by Napoleon’s general, Berthier.

The wound

When the pope was taken into exile, that’s what Rev 13:3 calls a “mortal wound.” In Dan 11:40 the king of the South launches a major attack on the king of the North, who had ruled supreme over the previous 1260 years, but now finds himself weak and defenseless. Over the next 200 years things got worse before they got better. In 1870 the papacy was even weaker than in 1798. Then things started to improve. Sixty years later (1928) Al Smith (a Catholic) ran for president of the United States. He was soundly defeated by Herbert Hoover, but he ran. Thirty years later (1960) another Catholic candidate ran for president, and won. That was John F. Kennedy. Twenty years after that (1979) John-Paul II addressed the United Nations General Assembly. In 2015 Francis I addressed the General Assembly and also a joint session of Congress. In 2016 he went to Sweden where he helped preside over the commemoration of the 500 year history of the Protestant Reformation.

If this is not a recovery, what is a recovery? The prophecy uses military terms like “chariots,” “war horses,” and “ships.” The papacy obviously has none of these. What it does have is the ability to influence public opinion. The above terms show that the king of the North fights back with every resource available. The question then is, what

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resources does it have available? Whatever they are, those are the resources it used. And the results are continually being reported to us in the news media today.

After the wound

In Dan 11:44-45 things change and the king of the North becomes livid with rage. At this point he has all power and no longer needs to be nice. If you've ever wondered where we are in the prophecy of Dan 11, you can get an accurate answer by asking another question: How angry is the king? If he's not angry yet, we're not in 11:44-45 yet. When we do get there, we won't remain long. The chapter's final verses describe earth's final events. After this it only remains for Christ to return in glory as He promised.

In vs. 45 the king of the North has conquered everything there is to conquer, so we should be reading, "and no one will be able to oppose him." But what the text says is, "and no one will be able to help him." Why is this? The answer is given in the next verse. "Michael will arise" (Dan 12:1). He will arise from what? From His Father's throne. One of the last questions brought before the heavenly court at the end of the judgment is whether God was fair to His Son. Christ answers this question in Rev 19:5, not with a simple yes, or no, but with a command to all present. "And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.'" Only Christ could speak "from the throne" and call God "our God."

What Christ does next is to get up from the throne, mount a white horse (an animal of conquest), and bring all the angel armies of heaven with Him to the earth. It is time now to claim His kingdom and rescue its subjects. When He appears, in His glory, "and all the angels with him" (Matt 25:31), who could withstand a display of power like that? Answer: Not the king of the North. He comes to his end, "and no one will be able to help him" (Dan 11:45). Jesus has all power and would be equally happy to help us now. We will have to wait in order to see Him, but to receive His help and His blessing we don't have to wait until He comes. He can do that now.

Conclusion

Dan 11 (11:2-12:4) is at once the most literal and the most spiritual of all the prophecies of Daniel. I said nothing about the description of the Son in Dan 10:5-6, but as an exercise, compare those verses with Rev 1:12-16. Do this with pencil in hand. On one side of a sheet of paper write down how the angel describes Christ to Daniel in Dan 10 and on the other side compare that, clause for clause, with what John sees in Rev 1. This description gives us a vision of Jesus at the outset. Then in the middle of the chapter we have a reference to Jesus on the cross. And at the end of the prophecy we have Michael standing up and coming to the earth in power and glory. (It's not just that He stands up, it's what He does next.) This is Christ-centered material. All of Daniel is Christ-centered, but this is the summing up of everything revealed to Daniel in his earlier visions and dreams.