

LESSON 35

Questions about Prophecy

Question #1: Is there an example in the Bible where God made a conditional prophecy when God already knew the condition would not be fulfilled at the time of the promise?

Yes, and it concerns an event we talked about last week. Samuel told Saul about what appears to have been an earlier promise to establish Saul's kingdom forever if Saul would keep the commandments of God.

1 Samuel 13:13 — *And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.*

And yet God must have known that Saul would not keep his commandments, and thus that his kingdom would not be established forever. How do we know that? Because Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and God had already told Jacob that the scepter would not depart from Judah.

Genesis 49:10 — *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

Saul had to be removed so that King David, of the tribe of Judah, could become king.

Question #2: What about Psalm 139:4?

For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

This verse supports rather than opposes the view that our free will decisions are unknowable in advance. This verse is similar to the one we studied last week in which Jesus perceived the thoughts of those around him (Luke 5:22). Words don't originate on our tongues; they originate in our heads. And God knows them as soon as they are knowable. He knows the word as soon as we think it, unlike humans, who know the word only after we speak it. Psalm 139 tells us that God knows everything that is knowable about us — from the thoughts we have at the moment we have them to the smallest details of our DNA — God knows it all.

Question #3: What about Acts 17:26?

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

This verse fits very well with Daniel 11. Three times in this one chapter we will read about a time appointed by God. The point in Daniel 11 and in Acts 17 is the same — the timing of God's actions is determined by God. He created man at a specific time, he caused events to occur at specific times as part of his plan to bless the world through Christ, and he brought Jesus into this world at a specific time.

Galatians 4:4-5 — *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

Daniel 11 is a great example of how God determined the times before appointed, as Acts 17:26 mentions. Does God do that with every event that ever has occurred or ever will occur? I think the verses we looked at last week show that he does not. Does God do that with those events he tells us will occur and those future events that are settled because God has settled them? Absolutely. When God tells us that

something will happen — that thing will happen, either because God makes it happen or because it is an inevitable and certain outcome of past causes.

DANIEL 11 INTRODUCTION

As I have said several times, we have to admit right from the start that Daniel 11 is an unusual chapter, but we should not overstate the case on that point. Here is an example of one commentator who did just that:

If this chapter were indeed the utterance of a prophet in the Babylonian Exile, nearly four hundred years before the events—events of which many are of small comparative importance in the world’s history—which are here so enigmatically and yet so minutely depicted, the revelation would be the most unique and perplexing in the whole Scriptures. It would represent a sudden and total departure from every method of God’s providence and of God’s manifestation of His will to the mind of the prophets. It would stand absolutely and abnormally alone as an abandonment of the limitations of all else which has ever been foretold.

That view of Daniel 11 is completely wrong. Yes, Daniel 11 is unusual, but, no, Daniel 11 is not out of place. The first verse of Hebrews tells us that “God ... at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.” So even if Daniel 11 were unique in Scripture, that would prove nothing. But Daniel 11 is not unique in the Bible — we see very detailed prophecies elsewhere in the Bible. Here is how one commentator described just one example:

The prophecy concerning the conquest of Babylon, Jeremiah 50 and 51, offers such exact details that history scarcely can present anything more minute—the city is to captured by the Medes and the

peoples allied with them—to be exact, by the strategy of laying bare of the bed of the Euphrates River (50:38; 51:32, 36)—during the course of a night where all within the city lie sodden with drink (51:39, 57)—the return of the Israelites to their fatherland shall come as a result of the conquest of the city—the conquest of this city marks the beginning of the utter desolation and the virtual disappearance of it.

We could also add Zechariah 9 about Alexander the Great, and Isaiah 13, Isaiah 14, and Isaiah 21.

The liberal critics' view of Daniel 11 is just another example of how you can't win with them no matter what you do. If Daniel 11 had been some general statement that wars would come somewhere sometime, then the liberals would have complained that such general language is not really a prophecy. But when Daniel 11 does just the opposite by providing very detailed descriptions of future events and wars, the liberals likewise complain that such detailed prophecies are not really prophecies. Apparently just like Goldilocks they are waiting for prophecies that are just right!

Why do we have Daniel 11?

What is the point of Daniel 11? Why did God give us such a detailed glimpse of the history between Daniel's day and the first century? And why do those details include big events (such as a famous battle) as well as seemingly minor events by comparison (such as a divorce or a tax collector)?

To answer that question, all we need to do is ask another question — what is the theme of this book? What key theme have we seen chapter after chapter and event after event in this book? GOD IS IN CHARGE! Yes, we have free will, but we are not God. There is one God, and he is in charge. And nowhere was that more evident than when it came to God's eternal kingdom and the coming of his Son into this world to usher in that eternal kingdom. No detail was too small when it came to making sure that everything was perfect for Jesus' entrance into this world and for

the subsequent spread of the gospel by which God would bless the entire world. That is the message of Daniel 11. That is why we have Daniel 11.

So, yes, we need to work our way through Daniel 11 verse by verse, examining each and every detail. But we also need to make sure we stand back and get the big picture message of Daniel 11 because it is that big picture message that would have been important to Daniel, who received these remarkable prophecies before they were fulfilled, unlike those today who study them after their fulfillment.

But were all of these detailed events necessary for God to bring about his plans to bless the world through Christ in the first century? That we can't see why a particular detail was important or necessary does not mean that it was not important or necessary. I am reminded of all the intricate details given in the old law about the tabernacle and the priestly vestments and activities. For some of them, we might have trouble explaining why this detail or that detail was so important. The short answer, of course, is that it was important because God commanded it. But the book of Hebrews gives us a longer answer.

Hebrews 8:5 — *Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.*

Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the pattern was a shadow of heavenly things; that is, Moses was copying a heavenly reality that he could not see. We have already seen in this book of Daniel a spiritual war that is related to the activities on earth. Perhaps these details are likewise related to a spiritual reality that we cannot see.

As one commentator noted, there may be another reason why we see so many details (some seemingly minor) in this prophecy:

There is another deeper reason why such details as these are worthy of the work of the Spirit of prophecy, and that is that what is foretold

here is in reality, with minor variations, the pattern into which all history falls. Is there not an appalling sameness about this business of leagues and pacts between rival nations, of disagreements, of wars, of alliances, of political marriages, of recriminations, of treachery, of temporary ascendancy, of defeat and utter downfall, of recovery through some aggressive leader; and then the same thing all over again with a slightly different sequence of events? From this point of view there is a drab sameness about history which allows us to say that, in addition to being a prophecy of a particular period of Syrian and Egyptian history, this may be regarded as a panoramic view of all history in a picture that is idealized, at least to some extent.

So were all of these events in Daniel 11 preordained before the creation of the world as part of an eternal decree of God so that God here is just reporting to us what will happen — or instead is God telling us what he is going to cause to happen as this history unfolds? For all of the reasons we just discussed in our special lesson on prophecy, I favor the latter view.

If God wants to show us that he is the one in charge, what makes more sense? That God will just report history to us from the vantage point of a passive observer who is just in a position to see more than we can — or that God will tell us what he will do before the fact and that we can then see God actively doing those things? Which of those two options better establishes that God is in charge? I think we have already shown which of those two options better fits with what we read about God in his word. Remember what we read in Isaiah:

Isaiah 46:11 — *Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.*

That one verse may be the best description in the Bible about how prophecy works.

CHAPTER 11

The focus of this vision is the history of the Jews in the latter days, where the latter days refers to the end of the Jewish age, which occurred with finality in the first century with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The focus in Daniel 11 is not the end of the world, and likewise the focus is not the many other nations that are mentioned. These other nations are important only with regard to how they are involved with the Jews.

Throughout Daniel 11 we will repeatedly see the king of the north and the king of the south. The names of the kings will differ, but for the most part north is Syria (and later, Rome) and south is Egypt — with the people of God sandwiched in between these two warring sides. The focus is not on the two sides of the vice but is rather on what is inside the vice, which in this case is Israel.

Finally, as we will see, the prophecies in this chapter are some of the most detailed found anywhere in the Bible. Further, they were given to Daniel hundreds of years before they came to pass. (The extreme level of detail, along with another issue we will discuss when we get to verse 36, is what has caused the liberals to conclude that this book must have been written after the fact.)

Today's handout (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) gives a very high level overview of the historical events we will discuss in Daniel 11. I prepared this handout about twenty years ago when I first taught Daniel, and it uses the RSV. I will instead be reading the KJV, as usual, but occasionally I will quote the ESV when it has a better translation. (If you think using three different translations is confusing, wait until you find out that most of the kings in this chapter have the same name — either Antiochus or Ptolemy!)

Daniel 11:1

1 Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him.

This verse really belongs at the end of Chapter 10. The angel, still speaking, tells Daniel that he stood up and helped Michael in his struggle with Persia.

Chapter 10 tells us that Satan was actively seeking to destroy the Jews so that God's plan could not proceed. How can God succeed if Satan destroys the people of God or causes them to turn from God? Do we think Satan's game plan has changed? Do we think he is any less interested in destroying us than he was in destroying the Jews?

About 50 years after this vision, during the reign of Xerxes, Haman received permission to kill all of the Jews. As we recall, his plans were thwarted by Queen Esther. Much later, Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to exterminate the Jewish culture and religion. We looked earlier at the outcome of that attempt. In each case, we can only speculate about the spiritual battles that were occurring behind the scenes, as we saw in Daniel 10:13.

Daniel 11:2

2 And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by

**his strength through his riches he shall stir up all
against the realm of Grecia.**

Cyrus was on the throne when this vision was received. The three kings that followed Cyrus were Cambyses (Cyrus' elder son, who began to reign in 529 BC), Gaumata or Pseudo-Smerdis (the impostor who passed himself off as Cyrus' younger son, Smerdis, and who came to the throne in 522 BC), and Darius I Hystaspis or Darius the Persian (the son of Hystaspes and cousin of Cyrus who killed the impostor and took the throne in 521 BC). The fourth king after Cyrus was Xerxes (Darius' son) who reigned from 485 to 464 BC. This king is called Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, and Esther 1:4 talks about the "riches of his glorious kingdom."

Xerxes invaded Greece with a huge army that he spent four years gathering, and he was very successful until his navy was defeated by a united Greek fleet at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. He retreated to Asia, and his remaining forces in Greece were completely defeated the next year at the Battle of Plataea. One text has noted:

A number of historians believe that a Persian victory would have hamstrung the development of Ancient Greece, and by extension western civilization, and this has led them to claim that Salamis is one of the most significant battles in human history.

The mighty Persians were defeated by a much smaller Greek force. Who could have foreseen such a thing? God told Daniel about it long before it happened, and we know the importance of the Greek culture and language to the plan of God. All that remained was to add Roman peace to Greek culture — and we will see that happen before we get to the end of this chapter.

Nothing is said here about the outcome of the conflict with Greece, but verse 3 will start talking about the Greeks — so it is not hard to figure out that Xerxes would not do very well!

Daniel 11:3

3 And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will.

In moving from verse 2 to verse 3, we skip over six Persian kings and 134 years. Note that this skip occurs without any warning. We will need to be very alert so that we will notice such jumps should they occur again. Notice also that the nation of interest has changed from Persia to Greece.

There wasn't much to say about Persia after the defeat of Xerxes, and on that point the book of Daniel and historians are in agreement. After Xerxes, "the Persian glory went on the decline so rapidly that hardly one of the remaining kings is worthy of notice." Persia was politically dead after Xerxes was defeated by the Greeks in the battle of Salamis.

This jump in time is a reminder to us that when God judges a nation, he moves on to other nations, and while that earlier nation may linger on for awhile, its future has been determined, and as far as God is concerned it has already come to an end. That fact should be a sobering reminder to all modern day nations, and particularly to one that has been greatly blessed by God but that has cast God's word away.

The mighty king in verse 3 is Alexander the Great who defeated the Persians in 331 BC. The Hebrew literally reads "a king, a hero." He died in 323 BC at the age of 33. The phrase "shall stand up" in verse 3 emphasizes the brevity of his reign. Alexander was known for not listening to the advice of others, but rather he did according to his own will as verse 3 tells us.

Daniel 11:4

4 And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.

Verse 4 literally begins, “while he is still rising.” That is, Alexander is just standing up when he is broken, again emphasizing his early death. And it also tells us that Alexander had not weakened or lost power when he died, but instead he died at the height of his power.

Alexander’s kingdom did not go to his posterity, which included his Persian princess wife Roxana and their son, Alexander IV who was murdered in 310 BC. Alexander IV’s illegitimate mentally challenged brother had already been killed in 317 BC. Thus (as Daniel prophesied), there were no blood descendants of Alexander.

Instead, Alexander’s kingdom was divided into four pieces among his four generals: Lysimachus, Antipater (and his son Cassander), Seleucus I Nicator, and Ptolemy I Soter. One commentary noted:

Even after the events have taken place, it is hardly possible to give a more accurate description of what actually happened to this greatest of all the empires up to that time.

Daniel 11:5

5 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.

The king of the south is Ptolemy I Soter whose ambitions extended far beyond Egypt to include Palestine and the rest of Asia. For most of their history, however, the domain of the Ptolemies was restricted to Egypt and Cyprus.

The prince who would be stronger than the king was Seleucus I Nicator of the Seleucid Empire, who defected to Ptolemy after the Battle of Antigonus.

A better translation of verse 5 is: "Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he." But some then object to the identification of Seleucus (one of Alexander's generals) as one of the princes of Ptolemy. But that description is certainly correct from the Egyptian point of view after Seleucus had fled there for protection. He later returned to Babylon and became king under Ptolemy's sponsorship. His empire and authority stretched from India to Phoenicia, and thus his dominion was much greater than that of Ptolemy.

Daniel 11:6

6 And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make

an agreement: but she shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times.

In moving from verse 5 to verse 6, we skip over about 60 years. And while new kings come to the throne, they are still called the king of the north and the king of the south in this chapter. The phrase “in the end of the years” just means “at the end of some number of years” or “after some years.”

After the death of Ptolemy I in 285 BC, his son Ptolemy II (Philadelphus) continued the contest with the Seleucids until 252 BC when a peace treaty was made with Antiochus II Theos. This treaty is the joining together in verse 6. Under this treaty, Antiochus II was to marry Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II.

One slight problem with the plan was that Antiochus II was already married to a very influential woman named Laodice, so she was divorced and banished. When Ptolemy died two years later, Antiochus abandoned his Egyptian wife and took back Laodice. Not being one much inclined to forgive and forget, Laodice arranged to have the king assassinated. She also had Berenice and her infant son murdered. Afterward, Laodice took control as queen regent for her own young son, Seleucus II (Callinicus).

Some object to the inclusion of “he that begat her” (Berenice’s father, Ptolemy) in the list of those who are given up in verse 6. The phrase “given up” however does not necessarily mean killed (although that is what happened to most of the people given up in verse 6). Being given up can also include just being unsuccessful, which is certainly true of Ptolemy, who had died and whose plans for unity using his daughter had ended in a complete failure.

Daniel 11:7-9

7 But out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, which shall come with an army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail: 8 And shall also carry captives into Egypt their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the north. 9 So the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land.

After Ptolemy II, his son, Ptolemy III (Euergetes) came to power and marched off to avenge his sister's death. He is the "branch from her (Berenice's) roots" in verse 7.

The king of the north is Seleucus II Callinicus, the son of Laodice. Ptolemy III captured the capital city of Antioch and returned to Egypt laden with spoil. This spoil included long-lost idols that had been taken by Cambyses in 524 BC. Their return (along with vast wealth that he also brought back) made Ptolemy III very popular with the native Egyptian populace, who named him Euergetes meaning benefactor. (At the time, the Ptolemies were not yet numbered. The Greeks distinguished them by these nicknames.)

Verse 8 is unusual because it mentions Egypt by name rather than referring to Egypt as the king of the south. Why isn't Syria ever mentioned by name in Daniel 11? Because Syria had not yet been formed when Daniel was written.

Syria had suffered a defeat, but verse 9 lets us know it was not permanent. Verse 9 is better translated, "Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land." The "latter" refers to the king of the north mentioned at the end of verse 8.

This latter king in verse 9 is the Syrian king Seleucus II Callinicus who reigned from 247 to 226 BC. It is known that he did conduct an expedition against Egypt, though without much success. Ptolemy III made a peace treaty with Seleucus II in 240 BC.