

Daniel 11:21-35 – A Contemptible Person

Chapter 11 focuses on the conflicts between the kingdom to the south of Judah, the Ptolemaic kingdom (Egypt), and the kingdom to the north of Judah, the Seleucid empire (Syria). Verses 21-35 are primarily about one Seleucid king. I can't think of another human in history before this king who was a bigger enemy of Israel. As with the last study, unless you are a student of the history of Antiochus IV, this chapter will not make sense without a little history lesson.

Read Daniel 11:21-28.

In verse 21, who was the contemptible person who obtained the kingdom? Most agree that this was the little horn of chapter 8, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus IV was released from prison in Rome as a prisoner exchange with Demetrius, son of the previous Seleucid king. Antiochus IV took advantage of the death of his brother, the imprisonment of one of his nephews and the youth of another one of his nephews. With the help of the king of Pergamum, Antiochus IV became king of the Seleucid empire. (11:21)

In verse 22, some think that the armies that were swept away were Egyptian. There is not agreement on that. The "prince of the covenant" is difficult. Some think the title referred to the king of Egypt. Others think that the title referred to the Jewish high priest, Onias. In verse 23 some say that the alliance refers to the king of Pergamum. Others say the alliance was with Egypt. (11:22-23)

Verse 24 probably refers to the spoils he gave to his followers or his people. The strongholds are most likely those of Egypt. Dale Ralph Davis notes that at the end of verse 24, there is a message of hope that Antiochus would be limited "only for a time". (11:24)

Verses 25-26 probably refer to the invasion of Egypt by Antiochus IV against Ptolemy Philometer or possibly Ptolemy Physcon (Euergetes II). Antiochus prevailed. (11:25-26)

Verse 27 is about how Antiochus IV and Ptolemy Philometer pretended to make an alliance. Antiochus IV pretended to be on Ptolemy Philometer's side. Ptolemy Philometer pretended to believe Antiochus IV but knew of his deception. (11:27)

In verse 28, Antiochus IV returned from Egypt with great spoils. On his return to Syria, he set his wrath against Jerusalem. The exploits of Antiochus IV against the Jews is further detailed in verses 30-35. (11:28)

Read Daniel 11:29-35.

Verse 29 and the beginning of verse 30 refers to the final expedition of Antiochus IV against Egypt in 168 BC. It was not successful because he was met by Romans who told him to leave Egypt alone or suffer the wrath of Rome. Antiochus knew he could not take on the Romans and so abandoned all plans to conquer Egypt. Antiochus was furious that his plans were frustrated. "At the appointed time" indicates that Antiochus worked according to God's calendar. (11:29-30)

In the second half of verse 30 through verse 35, Antiochus focused his wrath against the Jews since he could not attack Egypt. Those "who forsake the holy covenant" probably refers to a number of Jews who embraced Greek culture and religion and had abandoned Judaism. Antiochus used them to execute his purposes against the Jews. (11:30)

Some take verse 31 as referring to someone other than Antiochus IV. Dale Ralph Davis and Edward J. Young understand verses 31-35 as still referring to Antiochus. Antiochus' forces took over the stronghold in Jerusalem and took control of the temple. A heathen altar was erected over the altar of God at the temple. That effectively stopped the regular Jewish offerings at the temple. Antiochus wanted to turn the Jews into Greeks both in culture and religion. (11:31)

Verse 32 speaks of two types of people in Jerusalem and Judea. There were those who went along with Antiochus' plans to turn Jews into Greeks. Encouraged by Antiochus, the apostate Jews descended deeper into heathenism. But during that time, God had a remnant that remained faithful. The Maccabees were an example of this second group who did not abandon God. (11:32)

Verses 33-35 indicate that the resistance among Jews against Antiochus grew but at great cost to those who opposed him. Edward J. Young suggested that the "little help" came from Judas Maccabeus. As the resistance to Antiochus grew, some apostates pretended to be aligned with the resistance fearing retribution from their own people. Verse 35 speaks of the intensity of this time when the faithful would be refined and purified. Dale Ralph Davis believes that "the time of the end" refers to the end of Antiochus Epiphanes' reign. (11:33-35)