

Daniel 11:7-20 – Conflicts of the North and South

Chapter 11:7-20 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). The roots of these two kingdoms were two Greek generals under Alexander the Great. Ptolemy I Soter founded the Ptolemaic kingdom in Egypt. Seleucus I Nicator founded the Seleucid empire in Syria and beyond. These two kingdoms were important because Judah was caught in between the two. In verse 6, Ptolemy II Philadelphus gave his daughter, Berenice, in marriage to Antiochus II Theus with the hope that Berenice's son would then rule the Seleucid empire. Two years later when Ptolemy II Philadelphus died, Antiochus II Theus replaced Berenice with his former wife, Laodice. Laodice poisoned her husband and had Berenice and her son killed. That sets the stage for verse 7. This study guide will be different from the usual study guide. Unless you are a student of the history of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms, this chapter will not make sense without a history lesson.

Read Daniel 11:7-13.

In verse 7, the "branch from her roots" was the brother of Berenice, Ptolemy III Euergetes. He got revenge for Berenice's death by attacking the north and executing Laodice. He won a decisive victory over the north. After a successful campaign against the Seleucid empire, Ptolemy III was largely content to return to Egypt and deal with issues in his own kingdom. (11:7-8)

In verse 9, the one who attacked the south was Seleucus II Callinicus. He was unsuccessful in his campaign. (11:9)

In verse 10, the two sons of Seleucus II Callinicus were Seleucus III Ceraunus and Antiochus III the Great. These two sons waged successful campaigns against the south. Seleucus III Ceraunus died first and Antiochus the Great continued to battle the south and take territory. The fortress mentioned is either Raphia or Gaza. (11:10)

In verse 11, the king of the south was Ptolemy IV Philopator. His forces moved to stop Antiochus the Great near the border of Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula. Raphia was near modern Rafa. Antiochus the Great was defeated by Ptolemy Philopator in a decisive battle. In verse 12, according to Polybius, a Greek historian, Ptolemy Philopator took 4,000 prisoners from the battle. 10,000 Syrians were killed in battle. Dale Ralph Davis says that 17,000 from the north were lost in battle. Ptolemy Philopator did not take advantage of the situation. He did not press northward after the great victory. (11:11-12)

In verse 13, about 13 years after the battle at Raphia, Antiochus the Great gathered a large army. Ptolemy Philopator was dead and his son and successor, Ptolemy V Epiphanes, was only four years old. (11:13)

Read Daniel 11:14-20.

Verse 14 refers to Antiochus the Great. “Many” may refer to Antiochus and his allies. Antiochus moved against Egypt’s holdings in Phoenicia and Palestine. “The violent among your own people” may refer to Jews who aligned themselves with Antiochus against Egypt. (11:14)

Verse 15 probably refers to when Antiochus drove General Scopas and the Egyptians into Sidon. After a siege, Scopas and the Egyptians surrendered. Verse 16 refers to the fact that Judah, as a result of the victory at Sidon, came under Seleucid rule. (11:15-16)

Verse 17 is about how Antiochus the Great gave his daughter, Cleopatra, in marriage to the young Ptolemy V Epiphanes. The idea was for his daughter to make Egypt pro-Seleucid. Instead, Cleopatra generally sided with her husband over her father and therefore made Antiochus the Great’s strategy a failure. (11:17)

Verse 18 is about how Antiochus the Great invaded some Mediterranean islands and coastlands and had some success. According to Dale Ralph Davis, the Romans told Antiochus to stay away from Greece but he invaded Greece anyway and was defeated at Thermopylae. The Romans drove him back to Asia and defeated Antiochus at Magnesia. In verse 19, the defeat exacted such a toll that Antiochus was in need of funds. He resorted to robbing temples. He was killed by an angry mob when he tried to rob the temple at Elymas / Elymais. (11:18-19)

In verse 20, Seleucus IV Philopator succeeded Antiochus the Great. Roman required tribute from Seleucus Philopator. Seleucus sent the prime minister, Heliodorus, to gather funds. He tried to rob the temple in Jerusalem. Dale Ralph Davis says that Heliodorus poisoned Seleucus. (11:20)

What can we learn about God from this passage? There are some “scholars” who don’t believe that God knows the future and can reveal it to his people. Therefore they insist that Daniel was written after all these events took place. How sad it must be to believe in a god who doesn’t know any more than we do. Or do they believe in God at all?