

Daniel 11 and 12

Final Rebellion and Ultimate Solution

by Anthony Buzzard (1988)

In Daniel, chapters 11 and 12, we find a report of Daniel's great last vision, which summarizes and amplifies the astonishing prophetic forecasts given him earlier in Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 9. This vision has prompted a host of conflicting interpretations — a surprising fact, since the vision is written in simple narrative style without the symbols of beasts, heads and horns found in the earlier revelations.

The reason for the many differing views of the final vision of Daniel can be traced to the assumptions held by commentators before they arrive at chapters 11 and 12. With a clear idea of what we are looking for, it is all too easy for us to read into the text what we think ought to be there. This is the very opposite of sound method. We must make every effort to ask the question: What does the text actually say, according to the ordinary rules of language? Applying this criterion of simple attention to the grammatical sense of the passage before us, we may be surprised that it has caused expositors so much difficulty.

First we should note that in the introduction to the vision of Daniel 11 and 12 the angel declares that the content of the revelation has to do with the “**last days**” (10:14), an expression which elsewhere in the Bible describes the times just before and just after *the establishment of the Kingdom of God worldwide at Jesus' return*. In Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 the “last days” are those in which the government or Kingdom of God will be established in Jerusalem and the nations “learn war no more” (Isa. 2:4), a state of affairs which evidently has not yet come to pass! In Deuteronomy 4:30 the latter days are the times of a *final* calamity upon Israel *leading to their repentance*. This evidence ought to prevent us from imagining that Daniel 11 ends with a description of Antiochus Epiphanes (2nd century BC) or with events in AD 70. The resurrection of the dead obviously did not occur when Antiochus Epiphanes died, nor did it happen in AD 70. Proof of this fact is that the living Christians were not caught up together with the resurrected believers in AD 70. Paul taught that, at the resurrection, those alive in Christ “will be caught up to meet him in the air” (I Thess. 4:17).

THE RANGE OF THE VISION

Very clearly, what Daniel saw stretched into the far future. He was writing in the 6th century BC, yet he predicts the resurrection of the dead: “Many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the ground [literally, ‘dust-land’] shall awake, some to eternal life... [literally ‘life in the coming age’]” (Dan. 12:2).

When they awake, the righteous “shine like the sun in its strength” — a prediction which Jesus, as the great interpreter of Daniel, places at **the end of the age** (see Matt. 13:43). This resurrection, of course, is the resurrection to occur at the second coming of Jesus (I Cor. 15:23, 51, 52; I Thess. 4:13ff; Luke 14:14; Rev. 11:18, 20:1-4).

Just prior to this resurrection Daniel foresaw a “time of trouble such as never was” (Dan. 12:1). **This period of unparalleled distress features prominently in Jesus' own prediction of the events leading up to the end of the age (Matt. 24:21 — “For then shall be a time of trouble such as never was...”)**.

Obviously Jesus took this last vision of Daniel with the utmost seriousness, seeing in it an inspired forecast of the calamitous events destined to occur on earth just prior to his return. There is much more to the vision besides the announcement of the great tribulation and the following resurrection of the faithful. The remaining material is most instructive, because it tells of the difficult times associated with the period of final tribulation *immediately prior* to the resurrection and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

A SIMPLE NARRATIVE

For those not familiar with the account of the future given in Daniel 11 and 12, it will be helpful to take a Bible and read straight through the entire revelation noting particularly 11:21-12:13. It is important to observe that the resurrection (Dan. 12:1-2) follows *immediately upon the death of the tyrant whose career is described in Daniel 11:21-45*. We emphasize again: The wicked ruler in question obviously cannot be Antiochus Epiphanes who died in 163 BC! He did not die just before the resurrection. Nor can it be Nero, whose death, in the first century AD, was also not followed by the resurrection of the dead.

A very basic law of language dictates that a pronoun — “he” in our passage — describes a single individual unless there are very clear reasons in the context to show otherwise. We have no difficulty in discerning that a new personage appears on the prophetic screen in Daniel 11:21. He replaces his predecessor who dies in the previous verse (11:20). Once on the stage, the “vile person” forms the subject of a long passage extending to his death in 11:45.

Unfortunately many commentators have disregarded the normal laws of language and proposed that we are dealing in these verses (21ff.) with a long span of time far beyond the lifetime of a single individual. Fortunately the data we are given allows us to be absolutely sure that the climax of the career of the “vile person” (Dan. 11:21) occurs just 1290 days before the end of the age (12:11). *This limits the events of 11:31 onwards to a period of about 3½ years.*

In order to get our bearings we must note carefully the critically important time information supplied by the revealing angel in Daniel 12:7, 11. Remember that chapters 11 and 12 contain a single vision. Daniel 12:5ff. form a postscript to the vision. Daniel is allowed to ask some important questions about the length of time allotted to the activities of the “vile person” presented to him in 11:21-45.

The answer to Daniel's question about the duration of the awful events of chapter 11 is most enlightening. The information is simple and clear: **“From the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away and the Abomination of Desolation is set up there will be 1290 days”** (12:11).

In order to grasp the point we naturally look back at the events of the vision to see where in the account the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation took place. We find this crucial event in 11:31 at the height of the career of the “vile person” who came on the scene in verse 21.

1290 days is a little over 3½ years. We can be sure, then, that from the moment the Abomination of Desolation is set up there will be a final time of trouble, at the end of which “all these things” (Dan. 12:7), including, of course, the resurrection (Dan. 12:2), will be accomplished.

THE VILE PERSON

The single individual described as the “vile person” (Dan. 11:21) is seen in conflict with another ruler — the King of the South. The “vile person” is designated throughout the vision as the **King of the North**. These two rulers struggle for power in the area of Israel and even sit at a conference table and lie to each other! (Dan. 11:27). Ships from the West have recently troubled the Northern King and this stirs him into a rage. He then receives cooperation from some who forsake the faith (11:30). This in turn leads to his causing the interruption of sacrifices and the placing of the Abomination of Desolation (Dan. 11:31). This **King of the North** then harasses “those who have understanding,” marches southwards, and following a final battle with the King of the South *comes to his end in Israel between the Mediterranean sea and the holy mountain* (Jerusalem) (11:32-45). (Again, this is not a description of Nero!)

This relatively simple account of the evil **King of the North** (Dan. 11:21-45) has received strange treatment at the hands of expositors. Frequently the invaluable time information given in Daniel 12:7, 11 has simply been ignored. This has allowed commentators the liberty of placing centuries of time between what they think was the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation and the end the age. However, careful attention to the remarks of the angel reveals that from the arrival of the Abomination to the end of “all these things” (Dan. 12:7) there are 1290 days (12:11). This fact naturally proves that the events described from Daniel 11:31 (where the Abomination appears) still lie in the future.

BREAKING THE THREAD OF THE STORY

For various reasons expositors have been unhappy with the straightforward narrative presented by Daniel 11:21ff. It may come as a surprise to readers to know that the pronoun “he” referring to the King of the North (11:21ff.) has been made to apply to a completely new subject, namely a third power **in addition to** the Kings of the North and South. Some thought they had discovered Julius Caesar in verse 18! Once slipped into the narrative Julius Caesar's career was found also in 11:19. The same commentators then maintained that in verse 20 Augustus Caesar is in view. The one who replaces him in verse 21, the “vile person,” on that theory, would then have to be Tiberias Caesar.

Other students of this prophecy were not satisfied with what seemed to be an entirely arbitrary insertion of Julius Caesar at Daniel 11:18. Moreover the story which develops in verses 23-30 appeared to have no connection at all with the successors of Tiberias who according to the theory was to be found in 11:21. A second school of interpreters, therefore, thought they had detected a third power in verse 31. Sir Isaac Newton, amongst others, suggested that this new power appearing, as he thought, in verse 31, was the Roman Empire of the first century BC. But the King of the North is still the “operator” in Daniel 11:31.

The Maccabean theory, which applied the Abomination of Desolation (Dan. 11:31) exclusively to the Syrian leader Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC), **ran into the obvious difficulty that Jesus himself spoke of the Abomination of Desolation as future to his own time!** This view “virtually challenges the authority of the Master” (Clarence Hewitt, *The Seer of Babylon*, p. 340). It was a failure to note how Jesus understood the prophecy. **Jesus referred this Abomination to a time still in the future (Matt. 24:15).** We are here at a crucial point in our discussion. **Why, when Jesus says that Daniel prophesied the arrival of the Abomination of Desolation just before the Second Coming, do some commentators insist that Daniel did not see beyond the career of Antiochus Epiphanes? The fundamental question revolves around the acceptance or non-acceptance of the Truth of Jesus' words.**

WHAT DOES JESUS SAY?

The application of Daniel 11:31 to a Syrian ruler in BC times does indeed challenge the authority of Jesus himself. Speaking around 30 AD Jesus declared that those living in Judea were to flee “when you see the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel standing in the holy place” (Matt. 24:15). This authoritative understanding of the prophecy of Daniel is the only one that should have been allowed by expositors. Strangely, this has not been the case. Jesus' very simple *directed link* between Matthew 24:15 (the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation) and its appearance in the vision of Daniel (Dan. 11:31, 12:11) has been almost entirely disregarded.

Furthermore the information supplied by the angel in Daniel 12:7, 11 should have prevented all attempts to stretch the contents of Daniel 11:21ff. over centuries of time. **The angel expressly says (12:11) that 1290 days will be the length of the persecution inflicted by the wicked tyrant who sets up the Abomination of Desolation in Daniel 11:31.** Then “all these things will be accomplished” (Dan. 12:7). This plain information should have warned expositors against treating the pronoun “he” (vv. 31ff.) as a piece of elastic and stretching it over hundreds of years!

Jesus places the Abomination of Desolation of Daniel 11:31 at a time in the future. He connects it with the fall of Jerusalem **immediately preceding** his return (see Matt. 24:15, 21, 29-31). A final fulfillment in AD 70 is therefore ruled out, because Jesus did not return immediately after the events of that year. The angel (Dan. 12:11) places the Abomination 1290 days from the end. Even apart from this data we could have known that the Abomination was a feature of the very close of this age, because the pronoun “he” — the King of the North, 11:21ff. — very obviously refers to a single individual, as a repeated pronoun always does in a narrative passage.

A distinguished professor of the Old Testament wisely said of Daniel 11:
It is contrary to all sound principles of exegesis to suppose that, in a **continuous** description, with no indication whatever of a change of subject, part should refer to one person and part to another, and “the king” (Dan. 11:36) should be a different king from the one whose doings are described in verses 21-35 (S.R. Driver, *Commentary on Daniel, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, p. 193).

Henry Cowles, D.D., who taught the book of Daniel for 25 years to young men preparing for ministry, expressed his conviction that Daniel 11:21-45 describes the career of a single **King of the North**:
“The bonds of philological connection are of the strongest kind. It would seem to be simply impossible for one accustomed to study, observe and obey the laws of philology, and to interpret language in view of what it is, to have even the least doubt on this point” (*Daniel, with Notes Critical, Explanatory and Practical*, p. 448).

The professor’s remarks are a pointed and much needed corrective to much exposition of Daniel 11 and remind us that we are first and foremost bound by the normal rules of language when we read the Bible. We are also bound, if we claim to be Christians, to accept **the interpretation which Jesus puts on a given passage**. Fortunately his express reference (Matt. 24:15) to the Abomination of Desolation found in Daniel 11:31, 12:11 (as well as 9:27) removes all doubt as to how Daniel’s words are to be applied. Certainly they cannot refer to Antiochus Epiphanes (except, perhaps, as a type) when Jesus refers them to the future!

Space does not permit a demonstration of the various other attempts which have been made to insert a third power into the narrative of Daniel 11:21-45. A straightforward reading of the passage leads us to believe that the future will reveal an end-time struggle between the tyrannical **King of the North** (i.e., from Syria or Iraq, the northern division of the ancient Kingdom of Greece, see Dan. 11:4-6[1]) and the King of the South (presumably Egypt). Inserting into the narrative powers from other geographical regions breaks the thread of the story which formed Daniel’s crowning vision. Surely this ultimate revelation given to Daniel and the church, as recipients of Holy Scripture, must inspire us to vigorous evangelism before the dark days of the final enemy of God arrive.

[Since this article was written in 1988, events in the Middle East have focused attention on the area of ancient Assyria (Iraq). It is precisely from this part of the world (**and not the European Common Market, not specifically mentioned in the Bible**) that the Bible expects the evil tyrant of the latter days to arise. See my article “The Assyrian in Messianic Prophecy,” 1986. However, nothing in the Bible known to this writer tells us *when* the end-time events will begin. Hence the need for watchfulness — AB, Jan. 1991] [As I edit this again in Oct., 1994, the Middle East is still very unsettled.]

1 It is interesting to note that the distinguished premillennialist, Theodore Zahn, states (c. 1900) that the final evil ruler in Revelation (much of which is based on Daniel) is “without question” derived from “**the Graeco-Macedonian [kingdom] and its typical pre-Christian antichrist, Antiochus Epiphanes**” (*Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 441). In Daniel 11 and 12 it seems clear that Antiochus is a “type” of the yet future tyrant. Antiochus was a Syrian king. A Latin church father, **Lactantius** (c. 250-330 AD), clearly expected the Beast [antichrist] to arise in **Syria**: “Another king shall arise out of **Syria**, born from an evil spirit,...and he will constitute and call himself God, and will order himself to be worshipped as the Son of God, and power will be given him to do signs and wonders. Then he will attempt to destroy **the temple of God** and persecute the righteous people; and there will be **distress and tribulation** such as there never has been since the beginning of the world” (*Divine Institutes*, Book 7, ch. 17). In ch. 16 Lactantius speaks of the tyrant arising “from the extreme boundaries of the **northern region**.” Another ante-Nicene father, **Victorinus** (c. 280 AD) refers Micah 5:5 to the antichrist: “There shall be peace for our land...and they shall encircle **Assur [Assyria], that is antichrist**, in the trench of Nimrod” (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 7th chapter). Assyria is the approximate equivalent of modern Iraq. (Victorinus also speaks of Babylon as the Roman state.)

It is not always recognized that the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27 is taken by Jesus to be a period *just before his return*. Jesus places the Abomination shortly before his Second Coming (Matt. 24:15ff). Matthew 24:29 says that “**immediately after**” the tribulation initiated by the Abomination, he will come back in power and glory. This fact is crucial to a fair reading of prophecy. Daniel expects the Abomination to appear in the seventieth “week” (Dan. 9:27). Jesus expects the Abomination (and therefore the seventieth week) just before his return. That the seventieth “week” was future and close to the end of the age was understood in 243 AD by **Hippolytus** (*De Pascha Computus*). This fact is noted in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. III, p. 606: “**The one ‘week’ is taken off as belonging to the eschatological period in the future.**” Irenaeus also expected a 3½-year tribulation and a rebuilt temple (*Against Heresies*, Book 5: chs. 25, 26): “For three and a half years, during which time, when he [antichrist] comes, he will reign over the earth.” Irenaeus sees the antichrist, not just Antiochus, in the eighth chapter of Daniel and quotes Dan. 9:27 as a prophecy of the final reign of the antichrist “for three years and six months.”

The seventieth week of Dan. 9 was seen as future and close up to the Second Coming by the earliest church fathers who wrote in detail on prophecy. Montgomery (*ICC on Daniel*, p. 394) notes that this “apocalyptic” reading of the last period of seven years is the one found in the gospels, and it is adopted by Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Commodianus refers to a future and final antichrist in these words: “Isaiah said, ‘this is the man who moves the world and so many kings and under whom the land will become a desert’...Then, doubtless the world will be finished when he appears. He himself will divide the globe into three ruling powers, when however, Nero will be raised up from hell, Elijah will first come to seal the beloved ones; at which things the region of Africa [King of the South?] and the northern nations [King of the North?], the whole earth on all sides will tremble *for seven years*. But Elijah will occupy half of the time and Nero the other half. Then the whore Babylon, being reduced to ashes, its embers will then advance to Jerusalem; and the Latin conqueror will then say, ‘I am Christ whom you always pray to.’ And indeed the original ones who were deceived combine to praise him. He does many wonders since he is the false prophet. Especially that they may believe him his image will speak. The Almighty has given it power to appear such. The Jews, recapitulating Scriptures from him, exclaim at the same time to the Highest that they have been deceived...Moreover, when the tyrant will dash himself against the army of God, his soldiery are overthrown by the celestial terror; the false prophet himself is seized with the wicked one, by the decree of the Lord. They are handed over alive to Gehenna” (*The Instructions of Commodianus*, chs. 41, 42).