

The Success and Demise of Antiochus the Great

Daniel 11:15-20

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I heard recently a very sad and unbiblical message from a famous minister to his congregation. “We [i.e. Christ’s Church] lose down here.” Think about that for a moment. King Jesus and we who follow Him lose in our battle against Satan and his kingdom before the Second Coming of Christ. Really? Does Satan actually defeat the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ before His Second Coming? How is that even possible? I submit it is only possible if Jesus is not presently the prince of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5), and if Jesus has not yet had all rulers and dominions (both spiritually and physically) put under His feet (Ephesians 1:19-22). Jesus is not waiting to be enthroned as King of kings. Peter says (Acts 2:36) when Jesus was ascended into heaven, that the Father made Jesus both Lord (Lord of all) and Christ (i.e. Messianic King).

Jesus does not lose down here even in the midst of corrupt nations, tyrannical leaders, trials, persecution, and death itself—as King, Jesus uses even His enemies to reveal His power to save us and sanctify us in the battles we face and to topple kingdoms/rulers that will not bow the knee to Him and to bless kingdoms that do so.

This is the only reason we can have a certain hope right now. It is not Satan that is King, but Jesus. Satan is only called a prince or a god of this world, not because he has a divine right to rule, but only because the world presently follows him. Jesus alone has a divine right to rule as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Whatever the trial you face, it is not the trial that rules, but Jesus that rules the trial. Jesus is King, and all the nations of this world will one day acknowledge Him to be so (Psalm 72:11).

As the Lord teaches us our next history lesson from Daniel 11, let us remember that the events related to the success and demise of Antiochus the Great are all part of our Lord’s amazing plan prophesied hundreds of years before they were fulfilled in such amazing detail. Just as He controlled history then, so He controls history now. He is the same Lord and King of all history and of your history.

Our main points are: (1) The Success of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:15-16); (2) The Demise of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:17-19); (3) The Raiser of Taxes (Daniel 11:20).

I. The Success of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:15-16).

A. In the previous verses of Daniel 11, we saw the rise of Antiochus III (the Great) of Syria and how he came to power after the assassination of both his father (Seleucus II) and his brother (Seleucus III), who reigned for only a year and a half. Antiochus III (the king of the north—Syria) recaptured what territory had been conquered by the king of the south (under Ptolemy III), and we ended in Daniel 11:14 with a major victory of Antiochus III of Syria over the Egyptian forces at the Battle of Pánium (200 B.C.).

B. Now we consider the next major victory of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:15-16).

1. Scopas, the general of the Egyptian forces fled from his loss at Pánium to the fortified city of Sidon (“the most fenced cities” — literally, the city of fortification). The victorious Syrian army of the king of the north (Antiochus III) followed the Egyptian forces and laid siege to Sidon casting up siege “mounds” around the walls of the city and ultimately bringing about starvation within the city and the surrender of Scopas and the Egyptian troops (198 B.C.).

2. When we read in Daniel 11:15 that “his chosen people” (i.e. the chosen people of Ptolemy V of Egypt) would not be able to deliver Scopas, it is again revealed in history that Ptolemy V of Egypt did in fact send three chosen generals and their armies to deliver Scopas and his forces from the siege of Sidon (Erópas, Menacles, Damóxenus). They all failed (“neither shall there be any strength to withstand”).

3. Antiochus was able to force his military will against Egypt in taking General Scopas of Egypt and his troops in Sidon captive (198 B.C.) just as it is written in Daniel 11:16. This victory gave Antiochus

III dominion over what is now Lebanon and Israel to the border of Egypt.

4. Antiochus III did in fact now stand as ruler “in the glorious land” i.e. Israel (Daniel 11:16). When the text says that by his hand Israel shall be “consumed”, we ought not to understand that he went on some campaign to consume by violence the Jews in Israel (as we will see is true of his son). Quite the opposite. The Jews opened the gates of Jerusalem to Antiochus III and assisted him in the expulsion of its Egyptian garrison. Antiochus rewarded the Jews for their help by restoring those parts of Jerusalem destroyed by the war, freeing its citizens from taxes for three years, and supplying funds for the Temple. He also permitted the Jews to have a form of government in Israel agreeable to their own laws.

5. That being the case, how did Antiochus III “consume” the land? The Hebrew word may be translated “completed” or “finished”. So, he achieved complete and total rule over “the glorious land”.

II. The Demise of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:17-19).

A. Antiochus III having now gained control over all “the glorious land”, he now set his sights on Egypt and the king of the south to enter Egypt with all the might of his military forces (Daniel 11:17). This was his purpose, but it was not carried out because as Daniel 11:18 indicates, he will turn away from any plan at that time to attack Egypt due to battles for dominance in the islands and area of Asia Minor/Greece (196 B.C.).

1. The battles in Asia Minor and Greece would be fought with the mighty Romans as they are extending their empire eastward. Now Antiochus III did not want Egypt (under Ptolemy V) to join forces with the Romans in battle against him, so he proposed a peace treaty with Egypt, sealing it with the marriage of his daughter (Cleopatra) to Ptolemy V.

2. The phrase, “and upright ones with him” probably does not refer to people, but to an agreement made between the king of the north (Antiochus III) and the king of the south (Ptolemy V). A form of the same Hebrew word is used in Daniel 11:6 to refer there to a peace treaty confirmed by a marriage in which Ptolemy the II gave his daughter, Berenice, to Antiochus II. This is what happens here in Daniel 11:17 as well. Thus, with that understanding of the words used here, it may be translated something like this, “and an agreement is with him”, which agreement follows in the rest of the verse.

3. Ptolemy V came of age to rule on his own in 196 B.C. In commemoration of his accession to power, the Rosetta Stone was made (discovered in 1799), which was written in three different languages (Ancient Egyptian in hieroglyphics, a later Egyptian script, and Greek, which opened the door to translating these ancient Egyptian scripts).

4. How did this agreement corrupt Cleopatra or does it? Ptolemy V and Cleopatra were married in 193 B.C. It was the intention of Antiochus III to corrupt his daughter, Cleopatra, by using her to influence her husband, Ptolemy V of Egypt, to do what was beneficial for Syria.

5. But as the text states, “but she shall not stand on his side, neither be with him.” She did not stand with her father (Antiochus III), but rather stood with her husband (Ptolemy V) against her father. The plan of Antiochus fell apart as he sped off to battle the Romans.

B. Antiochus III had some initial victories (“and shall take many” Daniel 11:18), but he eventually met defeat at the hands of the great Roman prince or commander, Scipio Asiaticus: first, at the Battle of Thermopylae (191 B.C.); and second at the Battle of Magnesia (190 B.C.). Scipio caused the reproach and humiliation that Antiochus III intended for him to fall back upon his own head (Daniel 11:18). Antiochus was greatly humiliated by the Romans at the Treaty of Apamea (188 B.C.) in which great portions of his territory were ceded to other kings, he was put under a huge financial burden to pay reparations to Rome, and finally, Rome took chosen hostages as collateral (among whom was the king’s son, Antiochus IV—Epiphanes).

C. After his defeat, Antiochus III returned to a greatly reduced Syrian kingdom. He was killed while pillaging a temple of Bel in Persia, in 187 B.C. to pay for the huge tax burden imposed by the Romans.

III. The Raiser of Taxes (Daniel 11:20).

A. Now there is a popular guy—the tax collector (like the tax collectors of Christ’s day or the IRS today). Why would someone be characterized as “the raiser of taxes”? For the reason just stated above and confirmed by historical records: to pay the heavy tax burden imposed by the Romans upon Antiochus III and the kingdom of Syria.

B. Seleucus IV, the oldest son of Antiochus III, succeeded his father as king of Syria. He appointed Helióдорus his chief tax collector. The Hebrew text may be translated, “Then shall arise in his place one who shall send a collector of tribute or taxes in the glory of the kingdom” (to the temple in the kingdom of Israel). 2 Maccabees 3 describes this very situation in which Seleucus IV (who succeeded Antiochus III) sends Helióдорus on a tax-collecting mission after hearing an exaggerated report of the great wealth that was in the Temple at Jerusalem. Helióдорus attempts to raid the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem, but according to 2 Maccabees 3, he is miraculously repelled and smitten by angelic beings and prevented from doing so.

C. Upon the death of Seleucus IV in 175 B.C. (whom some ancient historians claim was murdered by Helióдорus), Helióдорus seized the power of the throne a regent, but was shortly thereafter removed from power by the aristocracy, making way for Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Helióдорus was not killed in battle, but was removed, and just disappears from history (just as the angelic messenger, Gabriel, prophesies).

D. Application

1. God foils the intention of Antiochus in giving his daughter, Cleopatra, as a bargaining chip to Ptolemy V. So likewise, the Lord laughs at the many plots and plans of wicked rulers and of those who despise Christ as King and seek to unseat Him. This is why we do not fear what men shall threaten, for God brings the counsel of the heathen to nought. God and His angelic forces are at work presently in restraining so many of the plots of the wicked and bringing them to nothing, exposing their schemes when they have tried to cover their tracks. It’s God’s purposes that shall be established, not those of the enemy. Antiochus sought to bring humiliation upon his enemies, but God knows how to humble the proud and to exalt the humble.

2. The land of Israel is called “the glorious land” (Daniel 11:16), and is called “the holy land” (Zechariah 2:12). Why? Not because Israel of old occupied that land. Not because it is more fertile or more beautiful than any other land in the world. It is “the glorious land” and “the holy land” because it was promised by God to His covenant people of old, Israel, as one part of the Abrahamic Covenant. The land is not glorious because of Israel’s faithfulness to God, but because of God’s faithfulness to Israel. Though I do believe Israel will yet possess the land of Israel in peace when she turns in faith to Jesus Christ and is brought into the Visible Church of Christ, nevertheless, it is not ultimately an earthly promise land that is Israel’s hope or is our hope. With Abraham and all of God’s redeemed, we look to a heavenly promise land and a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness in the presence of our Lord Jesus. Is that your hope (not a mere wish, but a certain expectation)? Revelation 21:1-8. If we rarely think on the glory of that eternal land, we will be consumed with the fears and worries of this present world. If the glory of the new heaven and the new earth and the immediate presence of our God does not fill us, death will hold us in its power. Do we live now in trusting, loving, and obeying the Lord as if heaven is our home? Or do we live in such a way as if this world is all we have to live for. This world will perish, but the glory of that land will never perish. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

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