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2-C: Superpower Rivalry: Kings of the North and South (11:5-20)

After the death of Alexander the Great, four of his generals took over the Greek empire. In time two powerful empires emerged who dominated the Mid East world and the Israeli nation for a number of years prior to the rise of the Roman empire.

~ **First generation: Ptolemy I Soter (Egypt) and Seleucus I Nicator (Syria)**

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Verse 5 “Also the king of the South shall become strong, as well as one of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion.”

“*King of the south*” refers to the dynasty of Ptolemy I Soter of Egypt. At this stage in the dynasty’s history, Ptolemy I was already Egypt’s governor and the first to “*become strong*” after the death of Alexander.

◇ The fourteen kings of this dynasty were all called Ptolemy and are numbered by modern historians I to XV (Ptolemy VII never reigned). A remarkable aspect of the Ptolemaic monarchy was the prominence of women (seven queens named Cleopatra and four Berenices), who rose to power when their sons or brothers were too young. This was almost unique in Antiquity. Another intriguing aspect was the willingness of the Ptolemies to present themselves to the Egyptians as native pharaohs... (from “Ptolemies” by Jon Lendering, 2002)



Ptolemy I Soter



Seleucus I Nicator

“One of his princes.” Another general under Alexander, Seleucus Nicator, had been the governor of Babylon but was forced to seek refuge for a time as an officer (satrap) under Ptolemy I because of the aggressive activities of another powerful general, Antigonus, who was trying to unite the Greek empire under himself. In the Battle of Ipsus, 301 B.C., Antigonus was defeated, and all hope that Alexander’s empire could ever reunite collapsed; it was then formally ***“divided toward the four winds of heaven”*** as illustrated in the map from the previous post and mentioned in verse 4.

Seleucus then became king of Syria and eventually, the most powerful of Alexander’s successors: ***“he shall be strong above him”*** (above Ptolemy I, king of the South), ***and have dominion.”*** (KJV translation) Seleucus I expanded his empire to include Babylonia, part of Turkey, Persia, and even right to the border of India: ***“His dominion shall be a great dominion.”***

In the region of Syria Seleucus Nicator founded the city of Antioch near the seacoast. Because of its strategic location as an opening to the Mediterranean Sea, Antioch became the nerve center of the empire and in

time rivaled Alexandria, Egypt, as the chief city of the Mid East.

And so arose these two ruling families, the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt and the Seleucid dynasty of Syria - known as the *“king of the South”* and *“king of the North”* respectively - who controlled the Middle East, and later struggled with each other continually for the upper hand and possession of the Holy Land that lay between them.

The passage in Daniel 11 now becomes a remarkable pre-documentation of various intrigues, wars, alliances between these two superpowers. The events, predicted here in such detail, came to pass just as they were foretold according to the records of secular history. Such remarkable, accurate foresight into future events certainly provides convincing evidence of the supernatural origin of this message, which, as we can gather from chapter 10, was delivered by none other than Gabriel, the archangel of God.

~ 2nd Generation: Ptolemy II Philadelphus (Egypt) - Antiochus II Theos (Syria) ~

Verse 6 *“And at the end of some years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in those times.”*

Telescoping through the years, Gabriel’s message here takes us on to the next generation of kings: Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Ptolemy I’s son, was perhaps one of the more enlightened rulers of his day. Under his patronage the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek. This became known as the *Septuagint* and was originally intended as an addition to the king’s library. Copies of it were made, of course, and the *Septuagint Bible* spread throughout the ancient Greek-speaking world, with the result that many Gentiles converted to the Hebrew religion in those days.

“And at the end of some years they shall join forces.” In ancient times it was a common practice of kings to form political alliances by sending

their daughters as marriage partners for the king of another nation. For example, the Medes and the Persians had united together, and much of that unity was spurred along by marriage alliances made between the two nations. So this was the type of deal that Ptolemy II attempted to make with Antiochus II Theos in 249 B.C. He hoped to form an alliance with and even draw Syria into his kingdom by giving his daughter Berenice in marriage to the new Seleucid king. *“For the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement.”*

However, she and her husband Antiochus ended up getting murdered by the latter’s jealous ex-wife in the land of Syria. *“But she [Berenice] shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand.”* And so, with this rather nasty turn of events began decades of bloody conflict between future generations of kings of the North and South.

~ 3rd Generation: Ptolemy III Euergetes (Egypt) versus Seleucus Callinicus (Syria) ~

Verses 7-9 *“But from a branch of her roots one shall arise in his place, who shall come with an army, enter the fortress of the king of the North, and deal with them and prevail.*

“And he shall also carry their gods captive to Egypt, with their princes and their precious articles of silver and gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the North.

“Also the king of the North shall come to the kingdom of the king of the South, but shall return to his own land.”

It was left to the next generation of Ptolemies to avenge the death of Berenice. Ptolemy III Euergetes, brother of Berenice, and thus *“a branch of her roots (her parents)”*, successfully invaded Syria as far as the Tigris River. He brought back the *“gods”*, the idols which the Medo-Persians had carried off from Egypt several generations earlier, along with a vast amount of wealth (*“their precious articles of silver and gold”*).

“To Egypt.” This phrase, of course, serves to identify the *“king of the South”* as the ruler of Egypt. But interestingly, the land of Syria is not mentioned in the prophecy. At the time of Gabriel’s message (534 B.C.), Egypt was a prominent, long-established nation in the Mid East, but Syria

(based in Antioch, not the former Assyrian empire based in Nineveh) was just a small backwater region. And here lies a small clue regarding the genuineness of this prophecy: had these words been written after the events took place (as some critics say), then likely, “Syria” would have been mentioned somewhere as the king of the North’s headquarters. But it is not mentioned, and this suggests that the prophecy came at an early date - before Syria became prominent during the reign of the Seleucid dynasty. “Egypt” was a word that Gabriel could easily use to communicate on the level of Daniel’s understanding, but “Syria” might have been more puzzling than helpful in his dialogue with Daniel.

“He shall continue more years than the king of the North.” Ptolemy III outlived his Syrian counterpart, Seleucus Callinicus, by four years. Eventually, Ptolemy III returned to Egypt because of a sedition that had broken out there. At this time the *“king of the North”* (Seleucus Callinicus) tried to invade *“the kingdom of the king of the south”* but was forced to *“return to his own land”*.

~ 4th Generation: Ptolemy IV Philopater (Egypt) versus Antiochus III the Great (Syria) ~

Verse 10 *“However his sons shall stir up strife, and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through; then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife.”*

Seleucus Callinicus had two sons who were intent on recovering the losses incurred during the reign of their father. After only two years on the throne, the elder son died and the younger son, at the age of only 15 years, ascended the throne and became known later as Antiochus III the Great. By the end of his 37-year reign, the Seleucid empire had not only recovered their losses from Egypt but also gained the land of Palestine.

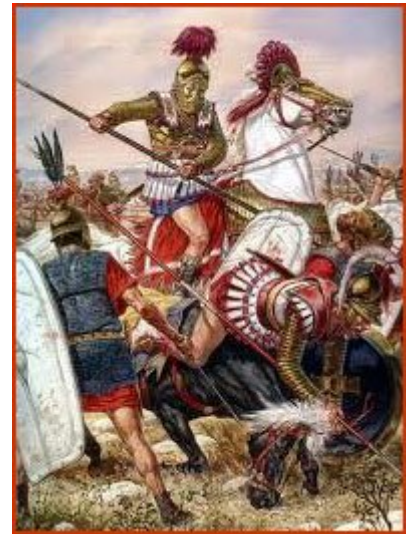
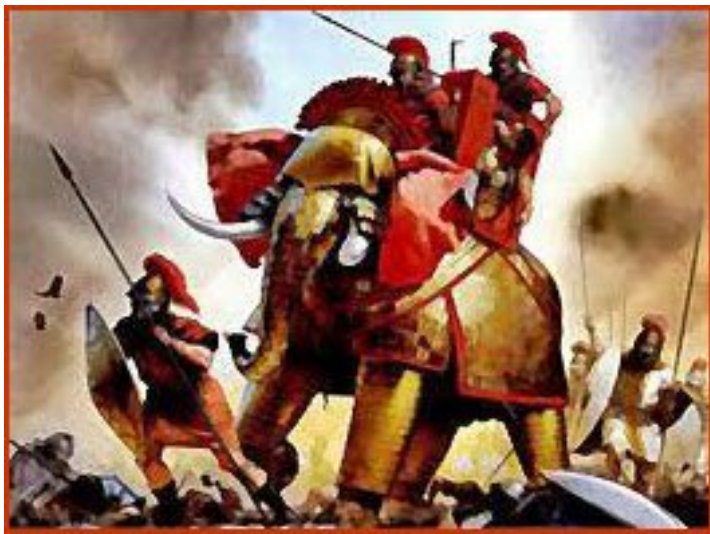
“One shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through.” This refers to the surviving son of Seleucus Callinicus, Antiochus III, who did indeed *“overwhelm”* the forces of Egypt and *“pass through”* the land of southern Syria, Lebanon, and Israel.

“Then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife.” This could be translated better as *“he again shall carry the war as far as his fortress.”*

(from ESV Bible) After a temporary retreat Antiochus continued the war right up to *“his (the king of the South’s) fortress”*, that is, right to the very edge of Egypt at the border-post of Raphia.

Verse 11 *“And the king of the South shall be moved with rage, and go out and fight with him, with the king of the North, who shall muster a great multitude; but the multitude shall be given into the hand of his enemy.”*

“Moved with rage.” Naturally, Ptolemy IV was angered over having lost his territory in Syria and Palestine. Although Antiochus III, the *“king of the North”*, did *“muster a great multitude”*, a huge army a little larger than Ptolemy’s, he was defeated in the Battle of Raphia (217 B.C.) with a great loss in dead and prisoners: *“the multitude shall be given into the hand of his enemy.”* And thus Palestine swung back into the hands of the Egyptians for awhile longer.



War in Ancient Times

Verse 12 *“When he has taken away the multitude, his heart will be lifted up; and he will cast down tens of thousands, but he will not prevail.”*

Although it was a triumphant victory for the king of the South, he did *“not prevail”*. First of all, he got *“lifted up”* in pride - a common reaction to success in those whose thoughts are not sufficiently grounded in humility. As a result Ptolemy IV failed to consolidate his victory, but

instead returned immediately to Egypt where he could indulge in his luxuries and idle pastimes.

Furthermore, unlike his enlightened grandfather, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, he had earned himself a rather bad reputation; for example, he had killed his father, mother, and brother - most likely for the purpose of confirming his position as absolute ruler. As a result Ptolemy IV was falling out of favor with many of his Egyptian subjects; they were becoming disillusioned with their foreign Greek king who was obviously frittering away the opportunity to become ruler over Syria. And if all this wasn't enough, while in Palestine, Ptolemy IV profaned the Jewish temple by entering its most holy place.

~ **5th Generation: Ptolemy V Epiphanes (Egypt) versus Antiochus III the Great (same king as above from Syria) ~**

Verse 13 “For the king of the North will return and muster a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come at the end of some years with a great army and much equipment.”

In contrast to Ptolemy IV, Antiochus III busied himself with strengthening his huge, far-flung empire, and 14 years after his defeat at Raphia, (*“at the end of some years”*) he returned in 203 B.C. *“with a great army and much equipment”* to invade Egypt. By this time a new king sat on the Egyptian throne, Ptolemy V Epiphanes, who was then just a child of age 5.

Verse 14 “Now in those times many shall rise up against the king of the South. Also, violent men of your people shall exalt themselves in fulfillment of the vision, but they shall fall.”

“Many shall rise up against the king of the South.” Because of Ptolemy IV's misrule and now with a young king on the throne, Ptolemy V, this unstable situation gave rise to some attempted insurrections in Egypt. In addition, the Greek king, Philip V of Macedon, joined forces with Antiochus III, and they were hoping to divide Egypt up between themselves.

Furthermore, some of the Jews (*“violent men of your people”*) were agitating for independence from Egypt. Having experienced at least one

period of rule under the Seleucid dynasty, there was a desire among certain Jews to want to shift their allegiance towards Syria. These particular Jews rose up in violent rebellion.

“But they shall fall.” At this time the Egyptian general Scopas came with a great army; and, while Antiochus was engaged in other parts of his realm, Scopas subdued the rebellions in Phoenecia (modern Lebanon) and Palestine.

“Exalt themselves in fulfillment of the vision” (or KJV: ***“exalt themselves to establish the vision”***). It is difficult to understand exactly what is meant by ***“vision”*** here: most interpreters consider it to be a reference to the general vision and warning in the Old Testament about the Jews’ troubles that would befall them if they should forsake the worship and principles of their God. The actions of these ***“violent men”*** were opportunistic and self-aggrandizing, and thus not in line with God’s will. Their insurrections did nothing more than help to open the door for the Syrians to rule over Palestine. And in the years following, the Syrians began to introduce, even force on the Jews, the Greek cultural system of Hellenism and its pagan rites of worship.

It was a difficult time for the Jewish people, and they experienced much persecution and trouble as a result of cozying up to the Syrians and the Hellenism that was becoming popular in those days. However, the persecution did have the beneficial result of strengthening the Jews’ faith. Eventually, the Jewish Maccabees rose up - with the right motives - and threw off the Syrian yoke in 165 B.C. And Judah became, for about 100 years, an independent state until the Romans came along in 63 B.C.

There is much we can learn about the influence of Hellenism and its similarity to what is going on in our world today. In those days Hellenism had begun to exert a strong pull on the Jewish imagination, and there was a tendency to want to “modernize” Palestine by introducing Greek culture; many Jews forsook their beliefs in order to adopt this enticing cultural alternative, something that seemed on the surface at least to be more exciting than their traditional, and maybe over-traditional, Jewish culture.

Perhaps we could compare this situation to how Christian people today

(and Jews) experience a strong pull away from their traditional values and beliefs, and it can become a great struggle to resist the secular, humanist, and materialistic mindsets that prevail in our modern times. When people swallow these beliefs, whether ancient Hellenism or modern materialism, it boils down to an exaltation of self, of man, of this world, rather than exaltation of God.

It has happened often in history that a religious movement, through time, can become too traditional and compromised and thereby lose its vibrancy and relevancy. As a result would-be seekers may perceive the established worship system as too outmoded, and thus end up getting sidetracked into what they think are reasonable, more exciting alternatives. This is unfortunate, and it behooves those who call themselves Christians to stir themselves up, to shake off the cobwebs of compromise and worn-out approaches while embracing God's new viewpoints and methods that can better relate to and attract others.

◇ The believers of each time period [in the history of the Christian church] had to be prepared to adapt to the world around them to some degree, in order to reach people and to be relevant to their world. Whenever the church tried to halt the process of change or was unwilling to adapt to the times, it ran into trouble and either became too rigid and controlling, or it became irrelevant and people lost interest in Christianity. (from publication of [The Family International](#) - August, 2010)

Another possible interpretation of this passage: These *"violent men"* may have been hoping to bring about the restoration of Israel as a great nation (which would have been an indirect way to *"exalt themselves"*); and there are many predictions along this line in the prophetic books about Israel's future (in the next Age). This could have been the *"vision"* they had in mind. They may have thought that somehow, through their alliance with the Syrians, this would be a step on the way to actually accomplish this. But it was the wrong way to go about it. Jesus taught, *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* and *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."* (Matthew 5:5,9)

Israel had already become a great nation under king David and king

Solomon. And the future great “Israel” that many prophecies refer to should be understood as referring to the new “Israel”, consisting of those who are genuine followers of Christ; *“the meek”* and *“the peacemakers”*, they are the ones who are destined to take over the government of the world after the Battle of Armageddon.

That is a big subject, and so is the question of how the New Testament explains that the inheritance or mantle that once belonged to the Jewish people has been transferred to the followers of the greatest Jew of all, Jesus Christ. More information on this can be found in this [Post 5 about Daniel 9 and the Second Coming](#).

To conclude, it is difficult to understand the meaning of every last detail of prophetic messages, much as we might like to understand them. And this particular detail about the *“vision”* in verse 14 may be one of those details that, for now, will have to remain with a question mark attached to it - at least until some fairly air-tight interpretation can be made of it.

Verses 15-16 “So the king of the North shall come and build a siege mound, and take a fortified city; and the forces of the South shall not withstand him. Even his choice troops shall have no strength to resist.

“But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and no one shall stand against him. He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power.”

By the end of the 14-year gap in hostilities, Antiochus III the Great had strengthened his armed forces, while during the same time, the Ptolemaic kingdom was hobbling along under its young and inexperienced king, Ptolemy V Epiphanes. At the Battle of Panium (198 B.C.) in northern Israel, the Syrian army won a major victory. The Egyptian army fled to Tyre on the coast (*“a fortified city”*), and were again defeated. In spite of sending *“his choice troops”* - a reference to the dispatch of three top generals to assist in the conduct of the war - the Egyptians had *“no strength to resist”* and were forced to surrender and return to Egypt.

“According to his own will.” Again we see this phrase which seems to be reserved for those political-military leaders who achieve a very large measure of authority in the world of their day: Alexander the Great, or the

future Antichrist, and here Antiochus the Great, who now had gained undisputed control of *“the Glorious Land”*, meaning the land of Israel. As so many conquerors have done, upon reaching the stage where they could operate unhindered, Antiochus the Great over-extended himself, and this became his undoing.

“He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power.” After 100 years of peaceful Ptolemaic rule, Israel now found herself under the rule of the Syrians who soon proved to be far more ruthless than their former Egyptian-Greek and Persian overlords. The Seleucids ruled Palestine for the next 30 years or so until a revolt led by the Maccabee family brought independence to Israel in 165 B.C.

Over the years, Israel - the land that lay between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties - had become quite exhausted from the back-and-forth struggles between the two superpowers. That, and the Syrian policy of harsh repression and persecution, brought *“destruction”* to the land of Israel from which she would have been spared had she remained in the hands of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

Verse 17 *“He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do. And he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it; but she shall not stand with him, or be for him.”*

Having conquered Phoenecia and Palestine, Antiochus III was about to invade Egypt, a much larger enterprise that would have required him to use *“the strength of his whole kingdom”*. There were *“upright ones with him”*. This seems to be a reference to a force of Hebrew mercenaries who thought that it would be beneficial to cooperate with their new ruler, the Syrian conqueror Antiochus.

At about this time, however, Antiochus decided to change plans and *“turn his face to the coastlands”*. (verse 18) These were territories in Asia Minor (along the Turkish coast) that used to belong to the Seleucid dynasty but were now being taken over by the Romans.

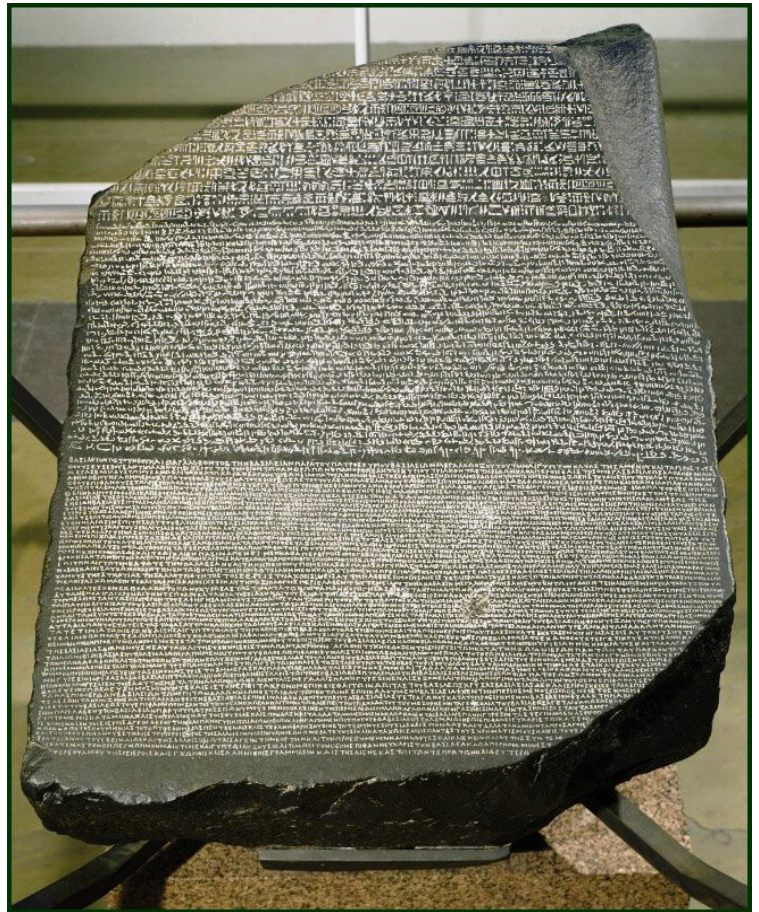
“Thus shall he do.” Rather than use his army to invade Egypt, Antiochus had up his sleeve what he thought was a better, more devious

plan: he would create an alliance with Egypt by marrying off his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V with a promise of a large dowry (the lands of Phoenecia and Palestine).

“He shall give him (Ptolemy V) the daughter of women.” The young king was only 13 years of age at the time of this proposal in 197 B.C. When the marriage took place in 193 B.C., Antiochus was busy making preparations for war with the Romans. The marriage, he expected, would neutralize the Egyptians in the upcoming war. At that time the Egyptians were all too eager to align themselves with the new rising power. (News of Rome’s victory against the forces of Hannibal and the destruction of Carthage had by now swept through the Mediterranean world; and nations were falling all over themselves to gain Rome’s favor.)

The marriage, therefore, was not in the best interests of Egypt but was intended as a way ***“to destroy it”*** - to bring Egypt under Syrian rule. The plan, however, backfired because Cleopatra (the first in a long line of queens by that name) was faithful to stand by the side of her new husband, and not betray him. ***“She shall not stand with him*** (her father Antiochus III), ***or be for him.”***

She is called here ***“the daughter of women”***, a title of honor perhaps because of her royal standing, or perhaps because of her great beauty and accomplishments. (The last Cleopatra became well known in history as the lover of Mark Antony, governor of the eastern Roman empire after 44 B.C., the year of Julius Caesar’s assassination.)



1) Elizabeth Taylor acted as Cleopatra in the movie *Cleopatra* (1963) 2) The Rosetta Stone

◇ The origin of the Rosetta Stone can be traced back to this era of history: The Stone was discovered in 1799 by Napoleon's troops in Memphis, Egypt. It was engraved with decrees issued for the occasion of Ptolemy V's official coronation in 196-197 B.C. at the age of 12. Because three languages were used - Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Demotic (a later Egyptian language) - the Rosetta Stone provided the linguistic clues that enabled scholars to decipher the hieroglyphic inscriptions of ancient Egypt.

Verse 18 "After this he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall take many. But a ruler shall bring the reproach against them to an end; and with the reproach removed, he shall turn back on him."

In this verse is foretold Antiochus' war with the Romans. The Mediterranean islands around Greece and off the western coast of Asia Minor (Turkey) had come under Roman protection. Antiochus III, wanting to expand the Seleucid empire to its original borders, set out to reconquer some of these outermost districts in Asia Minor and Greece (*"the coastlands"*). At first he was quite successful, and this brought *"reproach"* because it mocked the seeming invincibility of the new rising Roman power.

But Rome soon came to the aid of these small territories; and roundly defeated Antiochus III at the Battle of Magnesia (190 B.C.) in what is now western Turkey. Besides losing all of maritime Asia Minor and Greece, the terms of peace required Syria also to pay for the war, a huge debt which lasted for some years afterwards. In this way the *"reproach"* that Antiochus had brought was *"removed"* by the Roman general (the *"ruler"*) who turned the tables on Antiochus by forcing him to withdraw in ignominious defeat. The wording in the translation is a little confusing, but basically it's just saying that the Romans caused Antiochus' *"reproach"* against them to *"turn back on"* himself.

As a matter of interest, one of the generals responsible for the Roman victory, General Scipio Asiaticus, was the brother of Scipio Africanus who, a few years earlier, had vanquished the armies of Hannibal of Carthage. A bitter and vengeance-seeking Hannibal had in the meantime fled to the east Mediterranean and was hoping to enlist the help of Antiochus III to rise up with him against Rome itself, a move that Antiochus was sensible enough not to consider.



(Click to enlarge)

The “Diadochoi” is a name for the successors to Alexander the Great’s empire. The map shows (a little more than 100 years after the death of Alexander) the Seleucid kingdom with its now extended rule over Israel, plus the location of the major battles fought around this time. (Map used by permission)

Verse 19 “Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found.”

Having suffered such spectacular defeat before the Romans, Antiochus had no other choice but to retreat and seek refuge in “*the fortress of his own land*” - his own empire where it should have been safe for him to carry on. However, during an expedition to plunder a temple of Zeus in the eastern districts, Antiochus was caught and murdered by the enraged inhabitants of the region in 187 B.C. To offend a people’s religious sensitivities can bring on dire consequences; and we frequently hear, even nowadays, about seemingly minor infringements that, because of

enflamed religious passions, end up having tragic consequences.

Verse 20 *“There shall arise in his place one who imposes taxes on the glorious kingdom; but within a few days he shall be destroyed, but not in anger or in battle.”*

Antiochus III’s son, Seleucus IV Philopater (*“one who imposes taxes”*) spent an uneventful reign trying to pay off the war debt of his father. He sent his envoy, Heliodorus, to the richer regions of the kingdom to levy taxes, which included the *“glorious kingdom”* - Israel and the temple.

“Within a few days he shall be destroyed.” Seleucus IV’s reign was 11 years, relatively short compared to the reigns of the other Seleucid kings. He was poisoned by Heliodorus who was hoping to usurp the kingdom from Seleucus’ older son Demetrius, the rightful heir (who had just been sent away to Rome as a captive). The murder was done *“not in anger or in battle”*; it was a cold, calculated move by an ambitious member of the government.

◇ So what can we learn from this extensive yet microscopic glimpse at post-Alexandrian history, this detailed cataloguing of the bloody wars, treacheries, deceptions, and so on between the kings of the North and South? If nothing else, it exposes for us how thoroughly corrupt are the games of power politics that go on in the world. And this account was not some kind of deviation from the normal run of things but is typical of mankind’s conduct throughout history, even in our modern times.

Although there are a few bright spots and there have been a few wise and benevolent rulers, for the most part the history of the elite power-brokers has been a dismal account of brutality, treachery, and greed. There can be no false optimism that man, on his own, will ever achieve lasting peace or harmony in the world.

Nevertheless, we can look forward to a bright future. God’s plan along these lines is laid out clearly in the Revelation Book and elsewhere in the Bible. As much as Daniel 11 highlights the world’s depravity and great need for a Savior, other portions of the Sacred Book highlight the great salvation and restoration of Paradise on Earth that God has promised for the future through the work of the Savior.

Another purpose accomplished by these detailed predictions of Gabriel: they authenticate the rest of what he has to say about the more distant future. If he's able to so accurately predict the future of the Jewish people in inter-Testament times, then it's obvious he knows what he's talking about. And so we can rest assured that the remainder of the unfulfilled predictions about the distant future will also come to pass.

Continue to **Part 3: Gabriel's "Telescope" Zooms Out into the Distant Future; Section A - The "Vile Person"**