

Daniel 11 and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East



DANIEL 11 IS MORE THAN a record of ancient history; it's a timeline to what will soon be fulfilled in our twenty-first century. As nations converge and tensions escalate, it all has lead us to our current tensions in the Middle East and Israel's conflicts with her neighbors. The Middle East is not just a hotspot headlining our daily news—it's the heartbeat of biblical prophecy, preparing the world for the arrival of the one we call the Antichrist and for the return of Jesus.

Whereas Daniel 2 outlines the world empires spanning the course of history from the early 600s BC to the establishment of God's kingdom; and Daniel 7 outlines the empires rising up to establish the ten-region global empire in preparation for the Antichrist; here in Daniel 11, the focus narrows to the Middle East revealing a timeline that mirrors today's Middle Eastern dynamics. The chapter outlines how power shifts, rivaling empires, and foreign interference shapes the region historically, to set the world stage for the arrival of the Antichrist. Through it all, Israel remains central, surrounded by political tension and spiritual significance. As global powers continue to engage, and Jerusalem stays at the heart of the world's focus, Daniel's vision continues to unfold—not just in history books, but in our everyday headlines.

What was once the battleground between Seleucids (Northern king) and Ptolemies (Southern king) is now the contested terrain of modern states and movements. Israel, still central in the prophetic spotlight, faces ongoing tension from its northern and southern borders, while alliances and opposition mirror patterns Daniel described centuries ago.

Daniel 11 connects ancient power struggles to today's global tensions. With Jerusalem still central to current events and prophecy, this chapter urges us not just to learn history, but to witness it as it unfolds. To do so we must understand prophecy—history from God's perspective.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Daniel 11:1-4

What Daniel had revealed to him by the angel Gabriel was that **three significant Persian kings** would rise up after Cyrus, king of Persia (10:1), followed by a fourth, **Xerxes I** who would provoke Greece with a massive military campaign (11:2). History records that coming against Greece was

unsuccessful and set the stage for Alexander the Great to rise to dominance to overcome the Persian empire.

Alexander was the “mighty king” that would “stand up” (11:3). With speed and aggression Alexander conquered the Persians. Just as quickly as he rose to power, Alexander died at an early age and his empire was divided into four parts to his four generals (11:4), who history identifies as General **Cassander**, **Lysimachus**, **Seleucus**, and **Ptolemy**.

SYRIA & EGYPT

Daniel 11:5-19

The prophecy begins to take a narrower, Middle East focus identifying **the Seleucid Empire (Syria, king of the North)** and **the Ptolemaic Empire (Egypt, king of the South)** as the strongest dynasties of the four. These two would battle for more than a century for control over the region and specifically over the **land of Israel**.

These two dynasties thought that by forming an alliance they could control the region together (11:6). This is where history records that **Bernice**, daughter of **Ptolemy II**, marries **Antiochus II**. However, this alliance did not last. Bernice and her children were murdered when Antiochus returned to his first wife. This did not go well with **Ptolemy III** who then invaded Syria to avenge his sister’s death, capture Syria’s gods and treasures, and then return to Egypt victorious (11:7-9).

SELEUCUS IV, THE RAISER OF TAXES

Daniel 11:20

Syria regroups under **Antiochus III** who comes against Egypt, defeats Egypt, and regains much of the territory they lost. He tries to smooth the political waters by offering his daughter, **Cleopatra I**, to **Ptolemy V** (11:17). This failed to achieve his political goals when Cleopatra sides with Egypt and Antiochus loses his influence. History records that Antiochus’ expansion toward the West provoked the **Romans** leading to his ultimate defeat. History records, following his defeat, that his son **Seleucus IV** ruled briefly, used taxation to rebuild his father’s empire, then dies suddenly; leading to our next king (11:20).

ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES

Daniel 11:21-35

Up to this point **Antiochus IV** is Syria’s most evil king who becomes king, not as the rightful heir, but through manipulation and flattery, or as some would say, using backroom politics and bribes (11:21).

History records that Antiochus IV launches repeated campaigns against Egypt (11:25-29), but is turned back by **Rome**, which is rising as a dominant force in the Middle East. As he returns to Syria, he takes out his frustration on **Jerusalem** as he stops Jewish worship, desecrates the temple, and places in the temple an “**abomination that makes desolate**” (11:31). History records that this sparks the **Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC)**, which was a Jewish uprising against Antiochus IV for persecuting the Jews and desecrating the temple. The revolt was successful in that it restored Jewish worship and led to the rededication of the Second Temple.

THE ANTICHRIST

Daniel 11:36-45

In these verses the historical narrative becomes unclear because these verses were detailing events much further into the future when the one we call the Antichrist is in authority. These prophetic passages have gained clarity in our present day as we witness their unfolding.

These verses reveal that when the Antichrist rises to power, he will face opposition from the king of the north (Syria) and the king of the south (Egypt), both of whom he overcomes. He then launches invasions into various nations, including Libya and Ethiopia (11:42–43). He becomes concerned about threats from nations to the north (Russia) and east (China). This only intensifies his determination to establish his tabernacle in Jerusalem. Consumed with great anger, he then goes to war against those nations closer to him. Ultimately, he prevails and sets up his palace in Jerusalem, between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea (11:44–45). This would be the temple the Apostle Paul writes of in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

IN SUMMARY

Daniel 11 outlines a prophetic overview of geopolitical shifts in the Middle East. It begins with the height of the Persian Empire, which declines after the reign of four prominent kings. Alexander the Great then conquers Persia, ushering in widespread Hellenistic influence. Following his early death, his empire divides into four regions, with the Seleucid (Syria) and Ptolemaic (Egypt) dynasties emerging as dominant powers. Their prolonged rivalry—often referred to as the conflict between the "King of the North" and the "King of the South"—sets the stage for future prophetic developments.

One key figure, Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire, is portrayed as a precursor to the Antichrist. His reign is infamous for the brutal persecution of Jews and the desecration of the Jerusalem temple, also called the “abomination that makes desolate,” events that foreshadow end-time tribulations. After his death, the narrative shifts toward a future period marked by the rise of the one called the Antichrist, who will intensify persecution and ignite widespread conflict across the Middle East, affecting the entire world. The Antichrist’s eventual downfall will come through military forces from the north (Russia) and east (China).

The prophetic events in Daniel 11 have been fulfilled, with the exception of verses 36–45, which pertain to the Antichrist. Today, Great Britain, the United States, Russia, and Islam are shaping the political environment to establish the conditions necessary for this final Middle Eastern king to take authority. His emergence onto the world stage is imminent. It won’t be long.

Steve Magill, July 2025
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