

Emperors in Daniel 11

Background

It is interesting to notice that we need all three chapters, Daniel 10, 11 and 12, to fully understand this last and important vision. These chapters each add their own piece of information to the picture. Daniel 10 gives the *focus*, the *background information* and *circumstances* for this vision. Daniel 11 gives us the specifics to know the *timing* for the fulfillment of the prophecy by giving us details about the emperors, mostly the one who reigned during this time. Only when we have this information in Daniel 10 and 11, can we fully appreciate the message given in Daniel 12.

It is amazing that God gave this information to His faithful believers, more than 500 years before it was fulfilled. Unless clearly stated the whole prophecy in Daniel 10-12 will be kept as *one* unit. The most common mistake with interpretations of this prophecy, and any other prophecy for that matter, is to cut it in pieces and then place some pieces here and some pieces there. If that is what the text tells us to do, we certainly will do so, otherwise we will make every effort to keep it together.

I, Even I

The Man Dressed in Linen continues to speak and in the first verse of Daniel 11 he says something astonishing. Well, it is only astonishing if we have a wrong concept of who the “speaker” in this vision is, Daniel 11:1:

Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, even I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him. (NKJV)

In Daniel 11:1 the word “I” is written twice. If this is an angel speaking, it is quite a boastful one; an angel that truly wants to emphasize his own importance. But if this is spoken by Christ, it is very appropriate. When Christ steps into history and acts, the expression, “I, even I” is very fitting. If you search for this phrase in the Bible, you will find that it several times is used by God when He refers to Himself. One instance is found in Isaiah 43:11:

I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. (NIV)

Thus, it is very unlikely that Daniel 11:1 refers to words coming from the mouth of an angel but more likely from Christ Himself. When something is repeated in Hebrew writings it has special meaning; it becomes the focus of the passage. “I even I” therefore is the emphasis in this passage describing the active One, in this case as the “Man Dressed in Linen.”

Truth

We already studied the word “truth” as an eternal symbol of God and especially Christ. For the third time, in this prophecy, the word “truth” is mentioned. Daniel 11:2:

*Now then, I tell you the **truth**... (NIV)*

A more direct and precise translation would have been, “And now the truth.” This confirms again that this word is not primarily *about* “truth” as the opposite of falsehood, but about Christ. In the rest of the explanation you will be able to see the Truth as Daniel’s Messiah.

The World Order

The vision in Daniel 10-12 has similarities to Daniel 2, 7, and 8. We will, for example, see the same order of the world-powers. So, why is the Bible repeating itself? There is a good reason for it. God wants to make sure we understand it well. At the same time every vision has a specific touch and direction, just like the four gospels. Daniel 2 shows the whole world's history from Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar to the second coming of Jesus. In that chapter we will get the overview and will be able to see how this world will end.

If you, however, compare Daniel 2 with the vision in Daniel 11, you will be amazed right away at how detailed the explanation in Daniel 10-12 is. In Daniel 2 one world-power is followed by another world-power and hundreds or even thousands of years go very quickly. In Daniel 11-12 we will rather read about one king after another and later on you will find some kings described even more extensively. So we can already summarize that the prophecy in Daniel 10-12 is very detailed.

Therefore, the biggest mistake we can make is to run too quickly in history in regard to "time" in Daniel 11-12. Why should a detailed prophecy just of a sudden make "jumps" of a thousand years or so? It does not make sense! Those big "jumps" we rather anticipate to find in Daniel 2, which covers the whole world's history in five verses. This concludes that we will take the historical route for our study. Daniel 11:2 talks about the Kingdom of Persia and about more kings that will come, Daniel 11:2:

Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. (NIV)

No names are given here but it is important to show the accuracy of the prophecy. In Daniel 10:1 we read that Cyrus was the King of Persia and if "three more kings will appear" they ought to be Cambyses, the False Smerdis and Darius I Hystaspes. These names can be found in many commentators' books.

Greece

The next Persian king, the "fourth" one, "will be far richer than all the others." According to the same historical sources this king was Xerxes, also described in the book of Esther. He truly was wealthier than the other three kings and stirred up everyone against Greece, which is the next kingdom to be described. Daniel 11:3:

Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others. (NIV)

The next verse is about Greece, and there we find its first king described. It refers to Alexander the Great. He was very powerful and conquered the world rapidly. At the peak of his victories, something tragic happened. He died very young, in his early thirties. His kingdom was not given to any relatives but was divided into four parts and given to four of his generals, everything exactly according to the prophecies.

Four Became Two

As time went on, Greece was declining and the power was concentrated more and more to two areas. Towards the north there was Syria and towards the south we had Egypt. "North" and "south" in the Bible usually has Israel as reference point. In Syria there was a king named Seleucus I, and the dynasty was named Seleucids, and it is probably referring to him when, in verse 6, it mentions "the king of the North."

In Egypt the king was Ptolemy I, and his dynasty was named Ptolemies, and he is named "the king of the South" in verse 5. If you have more historical interest, please look up historical resources and many of the

commentators seem to agree in this passage.

Daniel 11:5-15 gives us quite detailed descriptions of the king of the South and the king of the North. It appears that the explanation is getting more and more detailed the further into Daniel 11 you read. That is an important observation for us. Therefore, we should not run too quickly in history, when we do our interpretation of this passage. The historical details of Daniel 11:5-15 will not be discussed further in this newsletter.

The Invader

The next world power according to the chronology would then be the Roman Empire. If that is true, we should be able to identify the upcoming Roman emperors. In Daniel 11:16 this power will come against the King of the North. That means a new power appears on the scene. The NIV uses the word “invader” and many other translations, “he who comes.” We are dealing with a very powerful nation since the phrase, “The invader will do as he pleases,” is used.

The phrase “do as he pleases” was also used when the Greek Empire was introduced in Daniel 11:3 and now very fittingly when the next world power, the Roman Empire, comes to power. Some commentators continue to write about different rulers of the Kings of the North, but some don’t. Keep an open mind for very soon you will see clear indications that this new power refers to the Roman Empire. Daniel 11:16:

*The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will **establish himself in the Beautiful Land** and will have the power to destroy it. (NIV)*

The Roman Empire conquered the so-called Beautiful Land or Judea in 64/63 B.C. and it certainly had the power to completely destroy it. From the other prophecies in Daniel we know that this empire, or the Fourth Beast, was “terrifying,” “frightening,” “very powerful,” “crushed and devoured its victims,” “trampled underfoot,” etc., Daniel 7:7, 19, 23. This will become more obvious to us later on.

The Roman Emperors

After the power has been identified it is common in the Book of Daniel to describe one or several kings. This is exactly what now takes place and in the next passage one emperor is described, Daniel 11:17-19:

*He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will **make an alliance with the king of the South**. And he will give him a **daughter in marriage** in order to overthrow the kingdom, but **his plans will not succeed** or help him. Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back upon him. After this, he will **turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more**. (NIV)*

The king who fits best to this description is Julius Caesar. He made an alliance with Cleopatra of Egypt, the Queen of the South, and she bore him a child named Caesarian. In spite of Julius Caesar’s plans, he was not successful with this alliance which verse 17 supports. Verse 18 describes his warfare, which we will ignore right now.

Later in his life Julius Caesar returned to Rome, toward “his own country,” as it is written in verse 19. There he was supposed to be safe but then something dramatic happened. When he was among his own a coup took place. He was killed by his friends and was “to be seen no more.”

Caesar Augustus

Julius Caesar is described in these three verses. It is amazing how much information that is given out in so few words. He is introduced as the invader and then some essential things in his life are described and the passage

ends with his death. It is important for us to recognize this pattern. The next verse starts with “His successor” or “Then shall arise in his place” and clearly indicates that the next emperor will follow, Daniel 11:20:

*His successor will send out a **tax collector** to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be **destroyed**, yet **not in anger or in battle**. (NIV)*

The expression “his successor” indicates a new emperor but *not* a new world power. After Julius Caesar’s death there was a time of civil wars. The next selected emperor was Caesar Augustus. He came to power in 31 B.C. and reigned until 14 A.D according to most commentators. Caesar Augustus made himself famous through his tax collection, certainly with the purpose to “maintain the royal splendor.” It is interesting to see how this phrase is translated differently in the NKJV, Daniel 11:20:

*There shall arise in his place one who imposes **taxes on the glorious kingdom**. (NKJV)*

This translation is also possible and then we see the focus on the “glorious kingdom” that refers to Judea. With this translation our thoughts go directly to Luke 2:1:

*In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the **first census** that took place while **Quirinius** was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. (NIV)*

In this passage you find the well-known introduction to the birth of Messiah. This was the “first census” and “the entire Roman world” was included. We know that due to this census, Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. We also realize that with this act, another prophecy would be fulfilled.

Prophecies Fulfilled

Because of the census Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not in Nazareth, Micah 5:2. It is amazing that a census initiated by a heathen nation and emperor came at *exactly* the right time. Through this perfect timing Jesus was born in the “right” place. This is a wonderful sign of God’s providence, isn’t it?

The devil probably did everything he could to destroy this plan – but he was not successful. We can see that God is the strongest force in world history, not only in spiritual history but in all history. Imagine if the taxation would have come a short time later, and Messiah would have been born in the “wrong” place!

He Is Named!

What is even more interesting is that Luke gives the emperor’s name, “Caesar Augustus.” That is not a coincidence! If we go back to Daniel 11:20 the next selected emperor after Julius Caesar was Caesar Augustus and he certainly was the one who imposed “taxes on the glorious kingdom,” here referring to Judea.

Not so many years after, according to the text, Caesar Augustus died. Historically we know that he did not die “in anger or in battle,” but of a disease on August 19, 14 A.D. The facts revealed in the Bible text match very well to the Caesar Augustus the historians know.

But then you might say, “My Bible does not say ‘years’ but ‘days.’” That is correct. Most versions have “in a few days” instead of “in a few years.” If you look up this Hebrew word, English words like “days,” “time” or “years” can be used. In other words, the used Hebrew word refers to a non-specific time period and therefore should be translated according to the context. If that time period is *not* known it is better to write, “After some time” or “some time later.” But the expression “in a few years” is the best translation, if we believe that Daniel 11:20 refers to Caesar Augustus.

The Pattern

The most important issue is that we realize the “pattern” we have seen so far. This realization will help us understand the rest of the prophecy. These verses tell us:

- 1) When a new king begins to reign.
- 2) Then his life and achievements are described.
- 3) Finally we find a statement regarding his death.

This was the pattern used for Julius Caesar, verses 17-19, and exactly the same was found in regard to Caesar Augustus, verse 20! If we follow this pattern we certainly are faithful to the context and it will be easier to understand the next passage.

Caesar Tiberius

Historically, the emperor that followed Caesar Augustus was Caesar Tiberius. He reigned from 14 A.D. to 37 A.D. according to most commentators. That means he was the emperor during the time of Christ’s baptism, ministry and crucifixion. He was also in charge of Israel when the 490 year prophecy given in Daniel 9:24 ended in 34 A.D. Let’s see if this can be confirmed in the next Bible passage. Let’s start to read what happened after the death of Caesar Augustus, Daniel 11:21:

And in his place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty; but he shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue. (NKJV)

That is exactly what happened! Caesar Augustus’ son did not become the next emperor, which would have been the natural succession. Instead Caesar Augustus’ adopted son, Tiberius, took the reign “by intrigue.” In that sense Tiberius did not have the “honor of royalty,” and it is also true that he came in “peacefully,” without any violence. Historically it is also well-known that Tiberius was a vile, sadistic, and contemptible person. Thus, the description in the Bible prophecy fits very well to Caesar Tiberius.

If we assume that Caesar Tiberius is the fulfillment of Daniel 11:21, the question is when the next emperor will step onto the scene. How many verses describe Caesar Tiberius’ life, actions and where is his death portrayed?

The Next Emperor

The last passage, Daniel 11:22-45, is loaded with information and the interpretations are many. It appears that those who have tried to understand this passage by historical research have failed. Many are the ideas who this emperor might be. I read 10 books about this subject and found 11 explanations concerning this contemptible emperor.

In one book “this evil emperor” was supposed to be “Communism.” But in the footnote I read that Communism just fell and therefore, the footnote continued, it must refer to Saddam Hussein instead. Well, for us living today, only a few years later, we know that even Saddam Hussein is gone. The point is that we cannot look at the news media and decide who fulfills a certain prophecy. We have to find the explanation in the Bible and from its context!

But why would God make it so difficult that hardly any consensus can be found? Is it possible that many have misunderstood the last part of Daniel 11 because they have trusted the historians too much? Is it possible that the Bible alone might solve our problem? We have already said that 10:1, 14, 21 and 11:2 have showed the direction of the vision and its interpretation. Let us take these texts to heart and see what happens if we follow the biblical directions very carefully.

Follow the Pattern

In regard to Julius Caesar, Daniel 11:17-19, we read 1) about him as the emperor 2) then we read the essence of his life and accomplishments, and finally 3) the details concerning his death. The pattern is the same concerning Caesar Augustus, Daniel 11:20. 1) First, he is the “successor,” 2) then follows his accomplishments and eventually 3) his death is described. Therefore, it would be logical to find the same pattern in Daniel 11:21 and onwards. There are 25 verses left of Daniel 11, and we have to consider these questions:

- After Daniel 11:21, is any other emperor introduced as a “successor?”

The answer is NO!

- Does Daniel 11:21-44 lists accomplishments without indications of a timeline?

The answer is YES!

- Where is the death of an emperor described in Daniel 11:21-45?

It is described in the last verse of Daniel 11, in verse 45!

After answering these questions we realize that Daniel 11:21-45 describes one and the same emperor. His death is described as follows: “Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.” That certainly fits to Caesar Tiberius. He died slowly from a chronic disease and he was hated by his own people. A celebration of his death actually took place *before* he was dead. Therefore the final phrase in Daniel 11:45 fits very well to him. No one had any interest to come and “help him.” Everybody was eagerly awaiting Tiberius’ death.

In summary, it appears that the whole passage from 11:21-45 refers to the life and accomplishments of Caesar Tiberius. To make this clear I have taken these verses from the NIV and when “he,” “him,” “the king,” etc. refer to Tiberius, a new line is started. The reason is to show that *no new emperor* is introduced in this passage. The names within [] are added by me and occasionally a verse number () is added to help you in your personal Bible study.

Daniel 11:21-45

He [Caesar Augustus] will be succeeded by **a contemptible person** [Tiberius] who has not been given the honor of royalty.

He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and

he will seize it through intrigue. Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before **him**; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. After coming to an agreement with him,

he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people

he will rise to power. When the richest provinces feel secure,

he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did.

He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers.

He will plot the overthrow of fortresses — but only for a time. (25) With a large army

he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the

South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time.

(28)

The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but

his heart will be set against the holy covenant.

He will take action against it and then return to his own country. At the appointed time

he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and

he will lose heart. Then

he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant.

He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. (31)

His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery

he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist

him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time. (36)

The king will do as he pleases.

He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard – of things against the God of gods.

He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.

He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will

he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them,

he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers

he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. (39)

He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him.

He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.

(40) At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and

the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships.

He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood.

He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. (42)

He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape.

He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and

he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. (45)

He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet

he will come to his end, and no one will help him. (NIV)

When Daniel 11:21-45 is displayed in this way, we have to realize that:

1) No new emperor is introduced in this passage.

2) His life is extensively described.

3) His death occurs in 11:45.

4) The pattern in these verses is the same as in the passages concerning the previous emperors! His starting point, his achievements, and finally his death!

5) If this is true, there is no jump of hundreds or thousands of years anywhere within this passage! Emperor Tiberius reigned from 14 A.D. – 37 A.D. and this must be the time referred to in Daniel 11:21-45.

Thus, God has made it possible to understand this passage *without* extensive historical knowledge. We simply need to follow the pattern given in this passage! Later in Daniel 12 we will see more indications that support this view.

Summary

- In contrast to previous prophecies, Daniel 11-12 gives a very detailed description of the emperors.
- This prophecy starts with the kings of Persia, continues with Greece and Alexander the Great and eventually with the emperors of the Roman Empire.
- The first Roman emperor described is Julius Caesar, Daniel 11:17-19.
- The second Roman emperor depicted is Caesar Augustus, Daniel 11:20.
- The third and last Roman emperor described is Caesar Tiberius, Daniel 11:21-45.
- The typical pattern is that Daniel 1) introduces a successor, 2) writes about his life and accomplishments and 3) describes his death.
- Caesar Tiberius reigned from 14 A.D. – 37 A.D according to most commentators.
- The reasons that Caesar Tiberius accomplishments are so detailed will be seen in Daniel 12.

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