SUMMARY OF DAN. 11:2-35:

Daniel 11 unveils the rise and fall of empires, from Persia and Greece to the bloody rivalry between the kings of the north and south. These two kingdoms emerged from the fourfold division of Alexander the Great's empire and exerted the greatest influence over Israel. From their rivalry emerges a wicked ruler who desecrates God's sanctuary and persecutes his people. Yet those who know their God stand firm, take action, and instruct many. Their suffering will purify them.

STRUCTURE:

I. The Rise and Fall of Kings (2-20)
II. The Rise and Fall of Israel's Worst Nightmare (21-31)
III. The Rise of the Wise (32-35)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

In just thirty-five verses, Daniel foretells the rise and fall of nearly twenty kings, dozens of battles, assassinations, political marriages, and betrayals—containing more than a hundred historical details that correspond precisely to what happened. This is so insanely precise that some biblical scholars have suggested this was "prophecy after the fact." They cite Ancient Near Eastern examples of this "genre" of, well, fake prophecy.[1]

However, just because that genre existed among pagans—whose inability to predict the future required them to fake it—we shouldn't dismiss Daniel's predictions in a way that militates against the purpose of the book: to declare the supremacy of God over human history. Daniel shows us that Yahweh knows the future because he wrote it. He alone is the "revealer of mysteries" (Dan. 2:28-29, 47). And he discloses the future to whomever he pleases.

After an angel details ongoing conflicts in the spiritual realm (Dan. 10), he shifts toward their relationship to earthly conflicts. Daniel 11:2-20 exposes the familiar sins of empires: kings swollen with wealth and pride (vv. 2-3, 12), endless wars of conquest (vv. 10-16, 18), palace intrigue and assassination (vv. 6-7, 20), political marriages designed to secure power (vv. 6, 17), alliances corrupted by betrayal (vv. 6, 17), and God's people caught in the crossfire of rulers who do whatever they please (vv. 3, 16).

In response to these godless patterns, God has his own pattern: divine judgment of proud kings. For example:

- Xerxes' wealth stokes imperial ambitions, provoking Greek vengeance against a later generation of Persians (v. 2)
- Alexander's empire is shattered and divided among non-heirs (vv. 3-4)
- Ptolemy IV's arrogance precedes his decline (vv. 11-13)
- Antiochus III's schemes backfire (vv. 17-19)
- Seleucus IV's reign ends abruptly (v. 20).

Though God is not explicitly named as the agent of these reversals, the pattern recalls Daniel's earlier declaration that the Most High "removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2:21). We do not have to wait for the end of the age before God judges wicked politicians and the countries they rule. God intervenes "according to his will" (4:35). The will of tyrants was never ultimate.

But it is painfully real. In 11:21-31, a "contemptible person" will arise and become Israel's worst nightmare. Antiochus IV Epiphanes would set up the original "abomination that causes desolation"—a sacrilege in the Jewish temple. It would become the prototype for future generations. Daniel 11:36-45 appear to speak beyond Antiochus toward a future "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3)—a final Antichrist—which will be our subject for next week.

After the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms, verses 32-35 offer hope: the rise of the wise. Through sword, flame, captivity, and plunder, they physically "stumble," but they do not fall. Daniel's vision continues into chapter 12 showing how "the wise" will triumph in resurrection.

Before that, however, they rise to "instruct many" about the kingdom of God. Whatever they suffer will purify them "until the time of the end" (v. 35). The wisdom Daniel modeled in the first half of the book has become an entire class of Danielic sages. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall, "but the people who know their God shall stand firm" (11:32).

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[1] They also base their argument on how verses 36-45 seem to speak beyond Antiochus IV, venturing into predictive prophecy versus retelling the past. I agree it speaks beyond Antiochus, but that doesn't require one to believe that the prophecies before that were faked. I believe verses 36-45 telescope the end of the age.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

Most of Daniel 11:1-35 consists of detailed predictions about the rise and fall of kings. Rather than dissecting every historical reference, I have provided a historical succession chart, followed by a retelling of the passage in its original sequence, supplying the names of rulers and historical events where they can be identified with reasonable confidence (For instance, instead of "king of the north," I might fill it in with, "Antiochus"; instead of "daughter," I might say, "Cleopatra."). Where identifications remain uncertain, I have indicated as much in brackets. Following each retelling, I will offer selective exegetical observations on passages of particular theological significance. I will slow down in the final section (vv. 32-35), providing a full commentary on these verses because they resolve the escalating tension of pagan powers.

The fall of the godless is eclipsed by the rise of the wise.

Historical Succession Chart:

Daniel 11 traces the rise of Persia and Greece before narrowing its focus to two rival dynasties that emerged from the fourfold division of Alexander the Great's Greek empire: the Seleucids in Syria (north) and the Ptolemies in Egypt (south).

Note: While the biblical exegesis is my own, the historical research for both the chart and the retellings relies on the work of Dr. Tremper Longman III.[2]

Daniel	Date (BC)	North: Syria / Seleucids	South: Egypt / Ptolemies	Key event or alliance
11:2	486–480	—	—	Persian king Xerxes launches unsuccessful invasion of Greece
11:3–4	336–323	—	—	Alexander the Great conquers Persia; after his death, his empire divides among four successors
11:5	c. 305–281	Seleucus I (312–281)	Ptolemy I (323–285)	Rival dynasties emerge, competing for territory including Judea
11:6	c. 250–246	Antiochus II (261–246)	Ptolemy II (285–246)	Marriage 1: Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II, marries Antiochus II. His former wife Laodice arranges their deaths
11:7–9	246–241	Seleucus II (246–226)	Ptolemy III (246–221)	Berenice's brother invades Syria to avenge her murder
11:10–12	226–217	Seleucus III (226–223), succeeded by Antiochus III (223–187)	Ptolemy IV (221–204)	Antiochus III invades the south but loses at Raphia (217)
11:13–16	c. 200	Antiochus III the Great	Ptolemy V (204–181)	Antiochus defeats Egypt at Panium; Judea comes under Seleucid control
11:17	c. 193	Antiochus III	Ptolemy V	Marriage 2: Cleopatra I, daughter of Antiochus III, marries Ptolemy V; her father's political scheme fails
11:18–19	191–187	Antiochus III	—	Rome defeats Antiochus at Thermopylae (191) and Magnesia (190); he dies in 187
11:20	187–175	Seleucus IV (187–175)	—	Antiochus III's son succeeds him, seeks tribute through Heliodorus, and dies mysteriously
11:21–24	175–171	Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164)	—	Brother of Seleucus IV seizes power; Onias III loses the high priesthood amid political corruption
11:25–28	170–169	Antiochus IV	Ptolemy VI (181–146)	Antiochus defeats Egypt near Pelusium; subsequently plunders Jerusalem's temple
11:29–31	168–167	Antiochus IV	Ptolemy VI	Rome forces Antiochus out of Egypt (168); he suppresses Jewish worship and establishes the abomination of desolation (167)

[2] Tremper Longman III, *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 272–83.

11:32–35	167–164	Antiochus IV	—	Faithful Jews resist apostasy; the wise instruct others and suffer persecution, which refines God's people

HISTORICAL RETELLINGS AND SELECTIVE EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS:

1. THE RISE AND FALL OF KINGS (11:2-20)

11:2: Three more kings will arise in Persia [possibly Cambyses II, Smerdis, and Darius I], followed by a fourth, probably Xerxes I (486–465 BC), who will accumulate extraordinary wealth and use his military power against Greece. Xerxes will invade Greece, but his campaign will end in defeat, setting the stage for a long struggle between Persia and the Greeks.

11:3-4: Then Alexander the Great will arise, conquering Persia and establishing an enormous empire. But at the height of his power, he will die in 323 BC. His empire will not pass to his descendants. Instead, after years of conflict, it will be divided among four of his leading generals, none of whom will exercise the authority Alexander possessed.

11:5: Two of these kingdoms will become particularly significant for God's people. In the south, Ptolemy I will establish his rule over Egypt. In the north, Seleucus I, once an ally of Ptolemy, will establish an even greater kingdom centered in Syria. Their successors will battle for control of the lands between them, including Judea.

11:6: Years later, Ptolemy II of Egypt will seek peace with Antiochus II of Syria through a political marriage. Ptolemy will give his daughter Berenice to Antiochus, who will divorce his first wife, Laodice, to marry her. But the alliance will collapse. Antiochus will return to Laodice, who will arrange the poisoning of her husband, Berenice, and Berenice's young son. The marriage intended to secure peace will instead produce bloodshed.

11:7-9: Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III, will ascend Egypt's throne and retaliate against the Seleucid kingdom, now ruled by Laodice's son, Seleucus II. Ptolemy will invade Syria, achieve significant victories, and carry away treasures and images of the gods to Egypt. Seleucus II will later campaign against Egypt but fail to conquer it, eventually returning to his own land.

11:10-12: Seleucus II's sons, Seleucus III and Antiochus III the Great, will renew the struggle against Egypt. Antiochus III will assemble an enormous army and advance southward. In 217 BC, Ptolemy IV of Egypt will confront him at the Battle of Raphia and win a decisive victory. Thousands will fall, and Ptolemy will grow proud of his success. Nevertheless, his victory will prove temporary. He will fail to press his advantage, allowing Antiochus to recover.

11:13-16: Years later, Antiochus III will return with an even greater army. Egypt will face internal instability, while certain factions within Judea will also become entangled in the conflict. Antiochus will defeat the Egyptians at the Battle of Panium around 200 BC and pursue their forces to the fortified city of Sidon. The Egyptian army will be unable to withstand him. As a result, Judea—the Beautiful Land—will pass from Ptolemaic control into the hands of the Seleucids. This change of power will prepare the way for the terrible events that follow.

11:17: Antiochus III will attempt to secure his advantage through another political marriage. He will give his daughter Cleopatra [Cleopatra I, not the more famous Cleopatra VII] to Ptolemy V of Egypt, hoping she will advance her father's interests from within the Egyptian court. But his plan will fail. Cleopatra will side with her husband rather than serve as her father's instrument of control.

11:18-19: Antiochus III will then turn toward Asia Minor and the Greek islands, extending his conquests and provoking a new imperial power: Rome. The Romans will defeat him at Thermopylae in 191 BC and again at Magnesia in 190 BC. Humiliated, Antiochus will retreat to the remnants of his kingdom. He will die in 187 BC, bringing his ambitious reign to an end.

11:20: His son, Seleucus IV, will succeed him. Burdened by the enormous tribute owed to Rome, he will seek additional revenue, even attempting to extract wealth from Jerusalem's temple through his official Heliodorus [likely the tribute collector in verse 20]. But Seleucus's reign will end abruptly in 175 BC, not through open warfare, but under mysterious circumstances.

Select exegetical observations

"Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece" (11:2).

- The angel just finished informing Daniel about a "book of truth," which symbolizes God's sovereignty over human history (10:21). Suddenly, inside of one verse, the angel describes the rise and fall of four Persian kings and the nascent rise of the next empire in line.
- Also in 10:21, the angel revealed a conflict in the heavens: one involving territorial demons over Persia and Greece. Now, we observe the kingdoms of Persia and Greece. This is no coincidence. War on earth can be traced back to war in the heavenly realms. Spiritual warfare and earthly conflicts are "umbilically connected." Ultimately, however, the battle belongs to the LORD; its outcomes are written in Yahweh's book of truth (10:21).
- Most commentators identify this fourth wealthy king as Xerxes I. Scripture portrays his vast wealth as though it makes him proud. The strength he gains through riches incites him "against the kingdom of Greece." Although Greece will not conquer Persia for another 150 years, Alexander the Great will later invoke this historic injustice to justify his conquest.
- To be clear, I am inferring Xerxes' pride—it is not explicitly stated. But I have reasons to believe the author implied it:
    - *The immediate context*: Daniel 11:2 connects Xerxes' massive wealth with his military aggression. Wealth becomes the instrument of imperial ambition.
    - *Daniel's theology*: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5), and the little horn (Dan. 7-8) establish a recurring pattern of royal power swelling into arrogance.
    - *Deuteronomy 17:16-20*: Israel's kings were forbidden from accumulating excessive riches, horses, and wives. The passage culminates with the warning that a king's heart must not be "lifted up above his brothers." Wealth and pride are closely connected in biblical royal theology.
- Pride comes before the fall. This is true for kingdoms, not just kings.
- History culminates not with the proud rise, but the humble descent, of a city: the New Jerusalem. The city of God is humble, pure, and eternal. The city of man is proud, corrupt, and temporary.

"Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these" (11:3-4).

—These verses are significant because they reveal the rise of Greece over Persia.

—"mighty king": Alexander the Great.

—"do as he wills":

- As we have noted throughout Daniel, he highlights the pattern of "self-willed" kings and kingdoms, which are, in fact, subject to God's will. Some verses:
    - Nebuchadnezzar raises and lowers whom he wills (5:19).
    - Darius appoints rulers as it pleases him (6:1-3).
    - Persia [the ram] "did as he pleased" (8:4).
    - Alexander "shall do as he wills" (11:3).
    - Later kings "do as [they] will" (11:16, 36).
- But God alone "does according to his will" with no one able to restrain him (4:35).
- A "self-willed" king is not merely decisive. That is a good trait. This ruler is unaccountable. He does what he pleases because nobody tells him no. Flatterers get access; dissenters get crushed.
- Considering that all four kingdoms display characteristics of self-willed rule, it seems that Daniel is giving us more than ancient history. He's showing us a pattern.
- "as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken": Alexander died suddenly. Here were my comments on this from Daniel 8: *"Alexander rose to power at the age of 20, after his father Philip was assassinated. By age 30, he had established one of the largest empires in history. It extended south into Africa and east into India, and it included the Medo-Persian kingdom, which he devoured. Alexander was undefeated in military battles. But only two years later—"when he was strong, the great horn was broken." Alexander died unexpectedly. Some have suggested foul play; others say he died of natural causes. Nobody knows. Still, the prophecy was fulfilled of a great Greek conqueror dying in his prime."*

—Alexander's kingdom will be divided "toward the four winds of heaven"—historically, the four dynasties arising from Alexander's unified Greek empire were:

- Ptolemies (Egypt, sometimes Judea)
- Seleucids (Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, sometimes Judea)
- Cassander (Macedonia, much of Greece)
- Lysimachus' kingdom (Thrace / Asia Minor, aka modern Turkey)

—Since Judea lay between the Ptolemies and Seleucids, sometimes changing hands between them, the rest of the story will focus on them. The "king of the north" is Seleucid; the "king of the south" is Ptolemaic.
—"not to his posterity": These four kingdoms would not be ruled by one of Alexander's sons.
—"nor according to his authority": They would be less powerful than Alexander.
—"for his kingdom shall be plucked up": Alexander's sudden death and the division of his kingdom to non-heirs are portrayed as another humiliating reversal for a self-willed king. In light of Daniel's larger theology, this strongly suggests divine judgment.
—Not only would the proud king perish; his kingdom would diminish gradually until it died.
—Daniel 11:3-4 resembles these from chapter 8:

- Dan. 8:5-8: The male goat (Greece) defeats the ram (Persia). Its great horn (Alexander the Great) is broken at the height of its power, and four horns replace it.
- Dan. 8:21: "The goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king." (Alexander)
- Dan. 8:22: "As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power."

"And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail" (11:12).
—Ptolemy IV's victory over Antiochus III will cause his heart to "be exalted." The pattern of proud kings continues. So does the brevity of their triumph.
—Ptolemy celebrates his greatness rather than vanquishing the foe, allowing the latter to recover. A generation later, this negligence will prove disastrous.

"And the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail" (11:14).
—"violent among your own people":

- This could mean that their violence fulfills God's prophetic vision, much like the wickedness of rulers throughout this passage. I don't think that's the meaning. The language seems to suggest that these men deliberately attempt to fulfill the vision. The Hebrew phrase translated "in order to fulfill" naturally expresses purpose, and the description of these men "lifting themselves up" suggests self-assertive ambition. They appear to believe they can accomplish God's purposes through political violence. But their efforts fail.
- Pagan rulers are not the only problem. Even among God's covenant people, violent insurrection will arise!

—"shall lift themselves up to fulfill the vision":

- This contrasts with "the wise" of 11:32-35 who reject violence, royal flattery, and political compromise. Instead, they stand firm, instruct others, and persevere.
- I feel concern about some who label themselves "Christian nationalists" today. On one hand, I see no verses condemning the idea of a Christian theocracy; on the other hand, a concerning number of Christian nationalists are disgustingly racist, sexist, arrogant, cruel, crazy, and utterly un-Christlike. They think they are acting "to fulfill the vision"—God's supposed vision—of government. But I can't imagine the word "Christian" beside the vision they propose. Their political approach is a dark parallel to what the angel describes in verse 14. Rather than being a pure expression of government, it is faith compromised by politics and rage.
- The term "Christian nationalist" is widely debated. For some, it means "making disciples of all nations" through a Christian prince who rules with an iron fist. For others, it means nothing more than influencing politics with Christian values. The label is vague enough to make everyone angry. For our purposes, the *Daniel 11 zealots* warn us, by their example, not to "help God" with political violence.
- God doesn't need our help 😉

"But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him. And he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand" (11:16).
—Because Ptolemy IV did not press his advantage, Antiochus III would have time to recoup, marshalling a greater force years later. Ptolemy V (successor to Ptolemy IV) is defeated.
—"do as he wills": Earlier, Alexander the Great would "do as he wills" (11:3). Now the Seleucid king of the north—Antiochus III—will do as he wills.
—The "glorious land" (or Beautiful Land) would pass from Ptolemaic to Seleucid control. Israel is caught in the middle of warring empires like a child of domestic violence.

—"with destruction in his hand": This phrase reinforces Israel's vulnerability. Antiochus III was not cruel to Judea, but the wars he waged undoubtedly affected them. Within a short time, Antiochus' successor would crush and desecrate the Jewish nation.

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2. THE RISE AND FALL OF ISRAEL'S WORST NIGHTMARE (11:21–31)

11:21-22: After Seleucus IV dies, his younger brother, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, will seize the throne, even though he is not the rightful heir. Through political maneuvering and the support of powerful allies, including Eumenes of Pergamum, he will establish himself as king in 175 BC. His reign will be characterized by deception, flattery, and the ruthless removal of opposition. Even the covenant prince [probably Onias III, the legitimate high priest of Jerusalem] will be swept aside.

11:23-24: Antiochus will consolidate power through cunning alliances, gaining influence with a relatively small group of supporters. He will accomplish what earlier kings had not, distributing wealth and plunder to secure loyalty and plotting against powerful rivals. His influence will extend into Judea, where competing Jewish factions will seek political advantage through allegiance to Syria. Onias III will be displaced from the high priesthood in favor of his brother Jason, who supports the Hellenization of Jerusalem. [The events corresponding to vv. 23–24 remain uncertain.]

11:25-27: Antiochus will turn his attention southward, leading a major military campaign against Egypt. Around 170 BC, he will defeat the forces of Ptolemy VI Philometor near Pelusium. Egypt's military strength will be undermined by the failures and intrigues of Ptolemy's own advisers. Antiochus and Ptolemy will negotiate peace, but both kings will speak deceitfully, pursuing their own ambitions while pretending friendship. Their schemes will not achieve their ultimate objectives, because history is moving toward an appointed end.

11:28: Antiochus will return northward with substantial wealth, but his hostility toward the Jewish people and their covenant will intensify. He will plunder Jerusalem's temple and interfere with its worship before returning to Syria.

11:29-30: In 168 BC, Antiochus will launch another campaign against Egypt. This time, however, Rome will intervene. The Roman envoy Gaius Popillius Laenas will deliver an ultimatum ordering Antiochus to withdraw. According to the historical account, the envoy will draw a circle in the sand around Antiochus and demand an answer before he steps outside it. Humiliated and unable to challenge Rome, Antiochus will retreat. His frustrated ambitions will turn into fury against the Jews, especially those who remain faithful to their covenant. He will find willing collaborators among those who have abandoned their ancestral religion.

11:31: Antiochus's forces will desecrate Jerusalem's temple. They will stop the regular sacrifices and establish pagan worship in the sanctuary, including an idolatrous object associated with Zeus. This sacrilege will become known as the abomination that causes desolation. The temple, once dedicated to the worship of Yahweh, will become a center of pagan defilement.

Select Exegetical Observations

"In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries" (11:21).

—"contemptible person":

- "vile person" (NKJV); "despicable person" (NASB, NLT); "despised person" (CSB).
- Considering the deceitful and blood-thirsty ambition detailed in verses 1-20, this one stands out even above those! Remarkable. It would almost be like someone saying, "Hitler, Stalin, and Mao did some really sick things, but they don't hold a candle to the guy I'm about to describe."
- Antiochus IV clearly fulfilled the predictions of 11:21-35. However, beginning in verse 36, the description seems to go beyond just him. In my judgment, the rest of the passage details a ruler "in the likeness of Antiochus"—the final Antichrist.
- I'm not suggesting that verses 36-45 stop talking about Antiochus IV altogether. I'm just saying they speak beyond just him. More on that next week.

—"royal majesty has not been given":

- Antiochus IV did not come into power through royal succession but through palace intrigue. Here is the sequence of events:
    - Seleucus IV, the brother of Antiochus IV, reigned—until Heliodorus assassinated him in 175 BC.
    - Antiochus IV secured powerful allies to unseat Heliodorus by force.

    - Antiochus IV claimed that he was only serving as a guardian for the rightful heir—his nephew. People believed him. Then he sent the hitman.
    - In short, Antiochus IV secured the throne through force, manipulation, and murder—not legitimate succession.
- Since Antiochus IV is a prototype of the final Antichrist (11:36-45), it would not surprise me if the latter gained power illegitimately.

—"without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries":

- "without warning": This phrase appears again in verse 24, highlighting Antiochus's deceptive methods. In verse 21, he exploits political instability to seize the throne through flattery; in verse 24, he unexpectedly enters prosperous regions, distributing wealth to secure loyalty while secretly plotting further conquests. The recurring idea is deception. The appearance of peace conceals his ambitions.
- "by flatteries": We have noted how Antiochus IV buys loyalty. In verse 23 we read he will "act deceitfully" (11:23). This man will say whatever it takes to gain power.

"And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed" (11:27).

—"the two kings": Antiochus IV of the north; Ptolemy VI of the south.

—"hearts bent… evil… lies at the same table": Israel is caught in a wrestling match between two despicable tyrants. It's like a UFC match in a room of fine china. Israel is the room.

—"but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed":

- Each king seeks his own advantage, lying to the face of the king sitting across from him. But neither can bend history to his will. Their schemes are subject to God. Once again, kings do as they will, but only God does as he wills (Dan. 4:35).
- The NASB reads, "it will not succeed, because the end is still to come at the appointed time." In other words, the conflict between these two kings will not be decided by them. Their lies and manipulation will not remove opposition. Their conflict will reach its end point on God's timetable, not their own.
- Theme of "appointed" time in Daniel 11:
    - "They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, **for the end is yet to be at the time appointed**" (11:27).
    - "**At the time appointed** he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before" (11:29).
    - "and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for **it still awaits the appointed time**" (11:35).
- In verse 27, the schemes of two kings will fail because God had not yet "appointed" the end of their conflict.
- In verse 29, the conflict will escalate, as Antiochus IV wages war on Ptolemy IV "at the appointed time." As we read in Ecclesiastes 3, "there is a time for war and a time for peace " (3:8)—an appointed time "under heaven" (3:1).
- In verse 35, "appointed time," refers to the end of the suffering of "the wise." In the short-term, this refers to persecution under Antiochus IV. However, it also telescopes toward the "appointed time" at the end of the age, where resurrection of the "wise" is in view (12:2-3).
- In like manner, "the end" speaks most directly to the end of conflict between these two kings, but it telescopes further toward the end of the age, when God's people will no longer be entangled in wars between greater powers.

"And he shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. And he shall work his will and return to his own land" (11:28).

—"great wealth":

- In 11:2, great wealth stoked pride in the Persian king, who then attacked Greece, which ultimately led to Persia's downfall. It happens to a Greek king here in 11:28.
- Pattern: great wealth→great pride→needless aggression→aggression backfires.

—Wealth becomes an instrument of power, and power emboldens a king to do as he pleases—even "against the holy covenant."

"For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant" (11:30).

—Verse 28 established Antiochus as a wealthy aggressor, even against Israel. Verse 29 reveals another southward turn; it also shows God obstructing his military success.

—This brings us to verse 30. Where "ships of Kittim" stymie his aggression against Egypt. The Greek translation of the OT calls them, "ships of Rome." Kittim belonged to Cyprus, but the term could be used to describe western Mediterranean peoples, particularly Romans.
—Now the pattern gets especially interesting. Just as Xerxes grew wealthy, proud, and needlessly aggressive against Greece, and just as Greece ultimately crushed Persia, citing this very aggression as rationale—we see it again. Antiochus IV grew wealthy, proud, and needlessly aggressive, but Rome intervened. And Rome became the next superpower.
—Given that verse 29 refers to "the appointed time" for Antiochus' invasion of Egypt, the passage portrays the tyrant's ambition as ordained by God. I would argue that this is God judging a tyrant, causing him to choke on his own ambition.
—We have observed this throughout history. Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Hussein, and countless other tyrants have overextended themselves, sending armies to certain death, hastening the demise of their own empires. Evil crushes others; it cannibalizes itself.
—"shall be afraid and withdraw": According to the historical account, Rome sent Gaius Popillius Laenas to intervene—to prevent his aggression against Egypt. He delivered Antiochus an ultimatum by drawing a circle in the sand around him. Before Antiochus stepped outside the circle, he would be required to decide whether to continue his invasion or retreat. He retreats. Like a madman, he turns his fury toward people who had nothing to do with Rome or Egypt: the Jews.
—Antiochus had long desired to spread Greek culture (a process called, "Hellenization"), but the Jews stood in his way. Scripture required them to repudiate the Greek pantheon and its associated customs. For this reason, Antiochus would "pay attention to those who forsake the covenant." Apostates would receive special treatment.

"Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate" (11:31).
—Daniel 8:11-14 already described this once. Here's what I recorded there:

- Cross-references identify the "abomination that makes desolate" (or similar) as a pagan installation of false worship on God's altar.
    - Ancient historian Josephus describes Antiochus' desolation: "*He forbade them to offer those daily sacrifices which they used to offer to God, according to the law. ... And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God, and to adore those whom he took to be gods; ... And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also"* (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.4).
    - 1 Maccabees 1:54 refers to these exact events using Daniel's language: "they **erected a desolating sacrilege** on the altar of burnt offering."
- In the New Testament, Jesus uses the same language about an abomination that makes desolate:
    - Matt. 24:15-16: "So when you see **the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."
    - Mark 13:14: "But when you see **the abomination of desolation** standing where he ought not to be (**let the reader [of Daniel] understand**), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."
    - Luke 21:20-21: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that **its desolation** has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."
    - First Maccabees reveals how ancient Jews viewed Antiochus—as the fulfillment of Daniel's vision about an abomination of desolation. By Jesus' time, this had already happened. But this doesn't stop him from recalling that past sacrilege—and pointing his followers toward an Abomination 2.0, which would occur in their own generation: "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20). As we have consistently observed, Antiochus fulfilled the prophecy, but he did not exhaust it. The Gospel's aside ("let the reader understand") alerts readers familiar with Daniel that the old pattern is appearing again.
    - Christians in the first century heeded Jesus' warning and fled Jerusalem before the war. Josephus records a holocaust of 1.1 million Jews (*Jewish War*, 6.9.3). He also reports that, after the sanctuary burned, Roman soldiers brought their standards into the temple area, placed them opposite the eastern gate, and sacrificed to them (*Jewish War* 6.6.1).

- Therefore, it seems that the fulfillment under Antiochus in 167-164 BC was fulfilled in even greater fashion in 70 AD, with the total destruction of the temple, along with over a million fatalities.
- Christians debate whether there will be a greater fulfillment still. Paul points toward a man of lawlessness who will exalt himself above God in the temple just before Christ returns (2 Thess. 2:1-8; see Dan. 11:36). Regardless of whether one interprets "the temple" of Paul's epistle as a literal Jewish temple or as a symbol of the church, the apostle seems to envision an ultimate fulfillment beyond Antiochus—Abomination 3.0.

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3. THE RISE OF THE WISE (11:32–35)

"He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time" (11:32-35).

—"He shall seduce with flattery":

- Translations: "he shall corrupt with flattery" (NKJV); "with flattery he will corrupt" (NIV, CSB); "by smooth words he will turn [some Jews] to godlessness" (NASB).
- The one who obtained his kingdom through "flatteries" (11:21) now seduces God's people "with flattery" (11:32). Be careful of smooth words. Politicians tell you what you want to hear, but if they ever want you to violate Scripture, stand firm.

—"but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action":

- His smooth words deceive certain Israelites, but those who know the LORD won't fall for them. Not all Jews were truly saved. As Paul tells the Romans, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom. 9:6). Many had been born into the covenant community, but Judaism was just their culture.
- Is Christianity just your culture? Or is Christ your life? Do you know your God, or do you merely know about him? Only those who know their God will be saved—from a compromised life; from a condemned eternity.
- "stand firm and take action": Not only do those who know God resist the seduction of wicked politicians; they also take action. But how? See the next verses.

—"the wise among the people": This is the same category as "the people who know their God." Throughout Daniel, wisdom is a defining characteristic of Daniel himself. But here, God envisions an entire class of people who possess Daniel-like wisdom. Here's what that wisdom looks like:

- Dan. 1:4: Daniel and his friends are selected for their aptitude in wisdom. The Hebrew word translated "skillful" comes from the same root used to describe "the wise" in 11:33.
- Dan. 1:17: God gives Daniel and his friends wisdom and understanding. True wisdom is ultimately a gift from God.
- Dan. 1:20: Their wisdom proves ten times greater than that of Babylon's magicians and enchanters. God's people possess a wisdom superior to that of the world.
- Dan. 2:20-23: Daniel praises God as the source of wisdom, who reveals mysteries and governs the rise and fall of kings. The wise understand history from God's perspective.
- Dan. 2:27-30: Daniel acknowledges that his insight comes not from his own abilities but from the God who reveals mysteries. The wise depend upon divine revelation.
- Dan. 5:11-12: Even pagan rulers recognize Daniel's wisdom, understanding, and ability to solve problems. Godly wisdom is recognizable even to unbelievers.
- Dan. 6:3-5: Daniel's exceptional spirit is accompanied by such integrity that his enemies cannot find grounds for accusation. Wisdom is expressed in character as well as understanding.
- Dan. 9:22-23: God sends Gabriel to give Daniel insight and understanding in response to his prayers. The wise seek understanding through prayer.
- Dan. 10:12: Daniel receives heavenly revelation because he has set his heart to understand and humbled himself before God. Wisdom belongs to the humble.
- Dan. 11:32-33: The wise know their God, stand firm against persecution, and instruct many. Their wisdom produces courage and is shared with others.
- Dan. 11:35: The wise suffer, but God uses their suffering to refine and purify them. Wisdom does not exempt God's people from tribulation.

- Dan. 12:3: The wise shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who turn many to righteousness shine like stars forever. Their wisdom bears fruit in others and culminates in everlasting glory.
- Dan. 12:10: The wicked fail to understand, but the wise understand. Spiritual discernment ultimately distinguishes God's people from the wicked.

—"the wise among the people shall make many understand":

- "He who wins souls is wise" (Pr. 11:30).
- Daniel was an evangelist. Because of him, the entire kingdoms of Babylon and Persia heard the good news of the kingdom of God. In the same way, "the wise among the people" will teach others about God and his kingdom.
- This verse originally applied to the days of Antiochus, but their significance continues. In his own day, Jesus warned that "I send you prophets and **wise men** and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town" (Matt. 23:34). God never stopped sending prophets, wise men, and scribes. Each word describes a unique nuance, but they all belong to the category of God's messengers in hostile environments.

—" though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder."

- "though": Despite their bold instruction amid hostile enemies…
- "for some days they shall stumble": This refers not to moral stumbling but rather physical persecution. They stumble "by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder"—resembling the persecutions inflicted against Daniel and his friends.
- In short, God will raise up wise instructors to proclaim his truth boldly amid hostile enemies, but "for some days" those enemies will prevail over them physically.

—"When they stumble, they shall receive a little help."

- Some argue that the "little help" comes from the Maccabean revolt, where the Jews fight back against Antiochus IV and ultimately prevail.
- The passive construction ("they shall receive…") allows for that interpretation, but I don't think it makes the most sense in light of the context. Consider:
    - *Daniel's model is nonmilitary*. He resists pagan authority through prayer, wisdom, and courageous faithfulness (Dan. 1; 3; 6). Likewise, the wise in Dan. 11:33 instruct many, even as they suffer persecution. We don't see them taking up arms.
        - *Note*: I am not a pacifist. There is "a time for war" (Ecc. 3:8). Militaries serve a purpose. I also believe the Maccabean revolt was justified. They were recapturing their own stolen land. That said, I don't think the argument of Daniel is, "When beastly governments persecute the saints, gun them down." The argument of Daniel focuses more on the need for repentance before God (to stay his hand of judgment) and faithful perseverance.
    - *Daniel repeatedly receives help from heaven*. God grants him favor (1:9), reveals mysteries (2:19), delivers him from lions (6:22), and sends angels to strengthen him (10:10-19). The same can be said of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, surviving the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).
    - *There's a lexical connection*. The Hebrew verb for "help" in Dan. 11:34 is the same verb used in Dan. 10:13, when Michael comes to help the heavenly messenger. And it appears again in 11:45, where the wicked king comes to his end with no one to help him. The contrast seems deliberate: heaven refuses to help the tyrant; heaven rushes to help the saint.
    - *Daniel distinguishes the wise from violent political activists*. In 11:14, violent men among Daniel's people attempt to fulfill the vision but fail. This raises questions about identifying the faithful wise straightforwardly with the Maccabean resistance. (Again, see my note above about pacifism vs. war.)
- I believe this text is to encourage "the wise" to continue standing firm, taking action, and instructing many. Even if God's people must suffer persecution "for some days," God will provide "a little help" as he did for Daniel and his friends.

—"And many shall join themselves to them with flattery":

- Earlier, we observed how Antiochus seduced unfaithful Jews with flattery (11:32). Now, unfaithful Jews join themselves to "the wise" through flattery (11:34).
- These are people who attach themselves to the community of the godly, but only for personal gain, and without sincerity.
- Those flattered by deception in turn deceive others through flattery.
- It appears that wisdom does not automatically discern flattery. The apostle John indicates this when he reflects on the defection of former teammates: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19). Sincerity is not always easy to judge.

- Flattery is a horrible sin, and it doesn't get enough airtime. Here are some verses from Proverbs about flattery. They use the same root word for "flattery" in Dan. 11.
    - Prov. 2:16: Wisdom delivers from "the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words (חֲלַקָּה)."
    - Prov. 7:21: "With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk (בְּחֵלֶק) she compels him."
    - Prov. 26:24-25, 28: "Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart… A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering (חָלָק) mouth works ruin."
    - Prov. 28:23: "Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters (מַמְחִיא) with his tongue."
    - Prov. 29:5: "A man who flatters (מַחֲלִיק) his neighbor spreads a net for his feet."
- The wise instruct others in truth—often hard truth—while the wicked flatter. Hard words today lead to peace tomorrow. Flattery promises peace while hiding a knife.
- A flattering tongue is associated with deception (Pr. 26:28).
- It is also associated with an adulteress (or, for that matter, an adulterer. Remember, Proverbs was written from a father to a son). Do you struggle to speak hard truth? Do you soften the sword of truth until its edges are dull—even comfortable?

—"and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white":

- "stumble" must mean what it did in 11:33—to be persecuted.
- God allows persecution for an allotted time (see 7:25) because it purifies his people.
- Coming on the heels of a verse about false believers and flattery, this verse about purifying fires of persecution provides a contrast. Flattery conceals who people are, but persecution reveals who they are. It also refines the wise.
- Where do you think these false believers went after the persecution hit? I can only imagine they disappeared. For them, allegiance only lasts until it costs something.
- Daniel 11 juxtaposes the insincerity of false faith and the costliness of true faith.

—"until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time":

- "until the time of the end" can be translated "until the time of conclusion"—in this case, the conclusion of the saints' persecution under Antiochus. I believe that is the nearest referent.
- At the same time, I believe the expression anticipates the broader eschatological horizon of 11:40-12:3, which culminates in final resurrection.

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