Good morning! Please take your Bibles and turn with me to Daniel 11. We are delving further into the depths of Daniel and we are today looking at his fifth vision. It is a vision that concerns more of the history leading up to the time of Jesus. Sometimes we call this the “intertestamental period,” the period between the Old and New Testaments.

Most of what we read today is going to concern the time of the Greeks. That is, the kingdom which was begun by Alexander the Great and goes through his successors. Now, what we have here is a prophecy of the Six Syrian Wars. It’s going to talk about the king of the north and the king of the south and how they are always coming out against one another.

Just as an introduction, I have created some slides that I hope will give you some context. I found it good to do this in my study this week. So Ithought I’d share it with you.



This first slide is a picture of the land that Alexander the Great conquered. This is his whole realm. You see it reaches from Greece in the west all the way over into India. It even reaches down through the land of Israel and Judea into Egypt.

But of course, you remember that I’ve said how Alexander the Great wasn’t all that great. Despite his might of conquest, he died rather young. No sooner had he taken the land than he passed away. And his kingdom was broken into 4 regions, each being governed by one of his generals. That’s what this next slide depicts.



In this second slide you see the 4 different realms. There’s the purple, which is the original land of Greece. Then there is an area just above that in yellow, which is Macedonia. But it’s these next two that are important, at least for today. This large green area is what comes to be the Seleucid Empire. In our passage, the rulers of this kingdom are going to be referred to as “the king of the north.” Then there is this orangish/redish area in Egypt. This represents “the king of the south.” It’s another Greek empire known as the Ptolemy Empire.

Our passage is going to talk about how these two empires clash in the Six Syrian Wars.

Let me just give you real quick overview:

3-5 Alexander and his successors 334-282 BC

 (Gap of 20 years which is the first Syrian War)

6 2nd Syrian war 261-247 BC

7-9 3rd Syrian War 246-241 BC

10-12 4th Syrian War 240-203 BC

13-20 5th Syrian War 197-168 BC

21-32a 6th Syrian War 167-165 BC

32b-35 Maccabean Revolt

Now you’ll notice that there are more verses in this chapter and it flows over into the next chapter too. Chapter 12 continues the vision. But I stop at verse 35 because verse 36 begins a section dealing with the Romans. All in all, Daniel’s vision here goes all the way through the time of Christ and beyond. But I just want to focus our attention today on the portion dealing with the Greek realms.

And I want to approach it a little differently. Instead of reading everything all at once like we normally do, I want to read a section and talk a little about it. Being that it is so detailed and speaks in some degree of code, I think it will be better if we just tackle a little at a time.

So let’s begin with verses 1-4.

*"And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him.*

*2 "And now I will show you the truth. 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.*

*3 Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. 4 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.*

Now these verses cover the Persian period that Daniel was living in up until Alexander the Great. There would be 4 more Persian Kings and the 4th king would pick a fight with the kingdom of Greece. This fourth king is the Persian king Xerxes. And maybe you are familiar with the battle of Thermopolye (or maybe you saw the movie that came out years ago). This is referring to that time period. This is also the time of Esther and this Xerxes is the Xerxes of that book.

It’s not long after this time that Alexander comes on the scene. It’s about 50 years later. And this passage talks about him in verse 3. He is the mighty king who rules with great dominion and does as he wills. But of course, as we’ve said before, he dies and his kingdom is given to the 4 winds of heaven, which means his generals.

Now I want to pause here because I want you to take note of what God does in and through Alexander and his successors. I want you to understand that the Lord, through these men, put in place the very structures that he would use to bring about his ultimate dominion over the world. Alexander and the kings that come after him become some of the primary agents that the Lord uses to evangelize much of the world.

You see, Alexander loved Greek culture. That’s one of the main reasons he went on the rampage across the world. He loved Greek culture and he wanted to spread it across the globe. So everywhere he went he created Greek cities. And people started mixing with the Greeks and picking up the language.

Now, of course, this is all a story of pure selfish passion. Alexander and all of these kings that follow him have nothing but a thirst for more land, more power, more dominance.

But by the time the New Testament comes along, Greek is the international language. Pretty much everyone speaks Greek. You may speak your native language, but you’re going to speak Greek too.

And into that situation come Jesus and the Apostles. The Apostles start going out into the world and preaching, and there’s very little hindrance in terms of language barrier. People are able to listen and learn about Jesus because they all speak the same language.

As a matter of fact, our NT is written in Greek. The word of God was disseminated easily in those early centuries and it could begin to gain immense traction because God has already set up the very language structure.

Now, don’t you find that fascinating? Our God used these evil men. He used their lust for power. They thought they were erecting their own kingdoms, but they were actually becoming the instruments God would use to set up His kingdom. Little did they know that they, by their selfishness and lust for power, were actually helping to evangelize much of the globe. Their cruelty and self-glory became the very instrument our Lord would use to bring about His own glory.

That’s absolutely stellar. It is amazing to think that God was sovereign over the evils of this world and he was using that evil to eventually evangelize the world.

Now the rest of the chapter deals with these Six Syrian Wars that I outlined just a few moments ago. Here’s another thing I want you to see. What we have in this chapter is a clear presentation that our God exists. He is alive and well and there’s none that can compare with him.

What we have here is a precise presentation of history. This is not just a prophetic announcement of events to come, it is a meticulously accurate synopsis of actual history. I want you to understand the detail that we get here. This is not like a horoscope that is so vague it could apply to anyone. This is not just a general prediction of events that would occur. There is an exactness about this that should amaze you. This is undeniable evidence of God’s existence.

Look at verses 5-6. It says,

*5 "Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority.*

*6 After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those times.*

This is talking about how Ptolemy II (who was in Egypt, the king of the south). He made a treaty with Antiochus II (the king of the north). Ptolemy gave his daughter Berenice to Antiochus as a wife. In order to seal the treaty and show that there was a new relationship between them, you gave them a wife. But the problem was that Antiochus was already married. Part of the agreement was that he had to divorce his wife (Laodice). And so he did, and he took Berenice as his wife.

But Ptolemy II (the king of Egypt) died and was replaced by his son, Ptolemy III. He tried to get his sister to work over Antiochus so that Antiochus’ Empire in the north would come under his control. Guess what. Antiochus didn’t go for that. He ended up divorcing Berenice and taking back Laodice.

But you know the saying, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” Laodice wasn’t a happy woman after being jilted like that. You know what she did? She poisoned her husband. And after that she took out Berenice and the son she bore to Antiochus, and put to death the whole of Berenice’s royal entourage. With them all out of the way, Laodice ensured that her own son, Seleucus could have the throne.

All in all, Berenice (as it says right here) did not retain the strength of her arm. And every little bit of this prophecy was fulfilled with 100% accuracy. And that is only one of the many specific details that could be picked out of this prophecy.

And again, only God could do that. Only the Lord could set that out there and have it be lined up so perfectly. This is a testimony to His existence and sovereignty over the world. No one can write history like the Lord.

But how do you think Berenice’s brother felt about that? He was a little miffed. This is where verse 7 picks up with the 3rd Syrian War.

*7 And from a branch from her roots one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall deal with them and shall prevail. 8 He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold, and for some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north.*

This is great, isn’t it? This is the exact history. What I like is verses 10-12, which talk about the 4th Syrian War.

*10 "His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. 11 Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north. And he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand. 12 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.*

Verse 10 talks about Antiochus III (also known as Antiochus the Great). He was “one of the sons” attacked Ptolemy IV and took control of Judea (“overflow and pass through”). He issued an offensive attack that just dominated the land.

Then verse 11 talks about the counter offensive of Ptolemy IV. And this was one of the biggest clashes in all of the ancient times. In this war A3 had 55,000 soldiers, 6000 cavalry, and 102 elephants (it was a “great multitude”). Ptolemy IV (who was now ruling in Egypt) brought an even larger force. It consisted of 65,000 soldiers 5000 cavalry and 73 Elephants. Isn’t that crazy? You have almost 200 elephants clashing with one another, trampling down soldiers.

What’s interesting is that you had Asian Elephants with Antiochus’s army and African Elephants with Ptolemy’s army. This is the only time in history where you have Asian and African elephants battling each other.

Ptolemy won this war and in doing so he recaptured Judea. Which is what verse 12 is about.

Ptolemy “cast down tens of thousands” in that as he was going back home, he stopped in Jerusalem and began to severely persecuted the Jews. Many of them were executed. Many of the Jews who were in Alexandria were actually trampled by his elephants. As a matter of fact, Ptolemy IV made these elephants drunk and had them run rampant over these poor Jewish people.

Now, I want to say something about that. But first, I just want you to see how amazing this prophecy is. Daniel records here not just a vague outline of history. This is amazingly exact. You have some incredibly specific things that are said about world history and all of it comes about.

Do you know what the odds are of having every one of these prophecies come true? It’s virtually impossible. Yet you see how this lines up perfectly with what happened. This is undeniable proof that our God has complete control over everything in this world.

Now, the next thing I want you to see from this passage is this: **this passage shows the people of God that they need to be ready to suffer**. It gives them a heads up on the terrible things that are going to happen to them and really says, “You need to be a people who persevere.”

We just looked at 4 of the 6 Syrian Wars. We just saw how Ptolemy the IV persecuted the people of God.

Now look at verses 13-20. These verses talk about the 5th Syrian War.

*13 For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the first. And after some years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies. 14 "In those times many shall rise against the king of the south,* and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail. *15 Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siegeworks and take a well-fortified city. And the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand. 16 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.*

So here we have the king of the north, who is Antiochus the Great (III). He gathered an even greater army. He made a treaty with Macedonia and with them began to go down south on the attack. And one of the great battles took place just north of the Sea of Galilee. There was a fortified city there called Pan (later called Ceasarea Philipi). This was an Egyptian outpost of sorts. A3 set up siegeworks and overtook the city. Just as verse 15 says, “the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops.” Ptolemy IV was soundly defeated at that battle.

Now think about what’s been going on for the last 200 years. You’ve had these two empires marching right through your yard with massive armies. Back and forth, back and fourth. Many of those battles are taking place right in your own neighborhood. This one is by the Sea of Galilee. The one with the elephants was in Gaza, which was just to the south of Judea. This is all happening in your country.

Now you’ve seen pictures on the TV of lands that have been ravaged by war. You know what war does. Buildings are burned and broken down. The land is scourged as soldiers fight and attempt to survive. And you are caught right in the middle of it. Not to mention having to feed all these massive armies and their elephants. Can you imagine what 200 angry, hungry elephants will do to your land?

This is going to cause massive economic strain, let alone all the other emotional and physical damage it’s going to wreak.

But you also have these kings bringing terrible pain down upon the Jewish people. We just read about how the Jews were persecuted by Ptolemy III. We don’t really have time to talk about each instance where there is destruction and persecution in this chapter. It’s enough to say what we have. You get the idea. This was a wretched time for the people of God.

And as people go to synagogue and hear the book of Daniel, they would be reminded that their God was in control. He had foretold these things. And they should not lose heart. Though these would be dark days for them, there’s still hope. God is in the heavens and he rules. They could keep their eyes on the Lord and trust that He was working out His divine plan.

This tells us of terrible things, but it also is a reminder that God’s in control.

And this is something we should remember. We have something similar. Jesus says, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” That’s not as long or as detailed as Daneil’s message, but it’s the same in a nutshell. We’re going to have problems in this world. It’s going to be rough. But we also have reason to hope. We can persevere knowing that Jesus Christ is sovereign. He has already achieved the victory.

Let this be a lesson to us: Never give up. Never give up on God. The darkness may be dark, but it will never triumph. Which is exactly what we see in verse 17.

*17 He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage.*

*18 Afterward he shall turn his face to the coastlands and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him. 19 Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.*

Now this is still talking about Antiochus III again. After defeating Ptolemy V he established a treaty. And as we saw before, this treaty involves his daughter, Cleopatra I (not the famous one we know of who has a romance with Marc Antony, she would come later, VII). And A3 thought that by giving his daughter to P5, he could use her to have some dominance over him. That didn’t work though. She actually loved her husband and ended up snubbing her father (just as verse 17 says).

After that (v18) he turned to attack the other parts of the Mediterranean. But this is the time when the Romans are starting to become a powerhouse. Antiochus encounters the Roman General Scipio, who is famed for having beat Hannibal the Carthaginian. Needless to say A3 lost terrible against the up and coming Romans. A3 submit to dishonorable terms.

Now why do I point this out. Because I want to highlight how each of these guys ends up meeting his match in some way or other. The only one who isn’t defeated in all this is God.

Now remember, this was Antiochus the Great. We’ve also seen Alexander the Great. These are the men that the world calls Great. Because of the great feats and proud power that they flaunt, the world calls them “great.” But that’s not God’s evaluation of them. The Bible paints each of these men as being incredibly weak. I think that is intentional.

We are told of Alexander’s fall and Antiochus’ fall because God wants us to know that no man, no matter how great, is still just a man. He’s the only one who is truly Great. Our God is the only true sovereign. His plan and power continue to march on.

Wcich brings us to the sixth Syrian War, in verses 20-32.

*20 "Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle.*

Of course, War and defeat bring need for more money. War is expensive. And losing can be even more expensive. The Romans required a heavy tribute from A3. So the northern kingdom had to raise taxes. Seleucus IV came to rule in the north and he inherited all this debt. So he sought to raise more revenue by plundering the temple at Jerusalem (which is “the glory of the kingdom;” Note: in the kingdom vs for the kingdom).

This “exactor of tribute” later cut down by another Greek, Heliodurus, who was conspiring to take the throne. But Heliodurus doesn’t get the throne another man does. Antiochus IV does. And this guy is bad. Just as verse 21 says.

*21 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.*

*22 Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant.*

That’s likely referring to Onias III. He was the high priest. I think you probably can anticipate what happens at this point. As has been our custom, Antiochus IV, rises up to attack Egypt and as he does so he brings all kinds of havoc on the Jews. Onias is just one of the many multitudes of casualties of this persecution.

*23 And from the time that an alliance is made with him he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people. 24 Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers' fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time. 25 And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. 26 Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. 27 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. 28 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.*

This is recounting the attacks that A4 launched against Egypt. Antiochus devastated the forces of the south and gained control of most of it. I cannot understate how vicious A4 really was. But you’ll notice again in verse 27 that it mentions that, despite all his machinations and cheating, it’s “to no avail.” And then there are those iconic words “for the end is yet to be at the appointed time.”

This is predestination language. The appointed time is God’s time. To talk about the appointed time is a reminder that God has had all time perfectly planned out from the beginning of time. All the more reason to persevere, right?

This is part of the interesting thing about this text. There have been a number of times where it has said this or that king would “Do as he wills.” (end of v. 3; 16, 28). Here you have the free will of man be exerted. It is hell bent on doing all kinds of evil and making war. But throughout this passage you are reminded that God is sovereign over men and their free will. God has his appointed time. He is exercising His power and control. In all, the free acts of men are still subservient to the things that God has predestined.

Some interesting things happen in the following verses. Look with me at verse 29.

*29 "At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before. 30 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.*

*31 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. 32 He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.*

Kittim refers to the coasts and islands west of Judea in the Mediterranean. In this case, it is the Romans. The Romans start getting more and more involved in the events that are transpiring in the East. In this case, the Roman representative Gaius Popilius Laenas met with A4. Laenas handed A4 a decree of the Roman Senate which demanded he withdraw from Egypt. A4 requested time to consider it and weigh his options. In other words, he wanted to stall to see if he could wiggle his way out of this predicament. It is said that Laenas drew a circle around him and told him he had all the time he needed, but had to give an answer before leaving that circle. Otherwise, he’d get killed. So A4 had to submit.

That puts an end to the sixth Syrian War. But, of course, A4 wasn’t happy about that. And so, what does he do? He takes out his anger on the Jews. Verses 31f talk about how he comes to the temple and desecrates it. He stops the offering of sacrifices and he slaughters a pig on the alter in the holy place. He also tops it off by erecting an idol of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies.

There’s actually a span of 2-3 years where Antiochus plunders Jerusalem. The temple is looted and estimates of 135,000 pounds of silver were taken from the temple.

Not only that, but he destroys biblical documents stored there. Some of the books of the law were taken and broth from the unclean sacrifices that were being offered was poured all over them. Of course, this is happening concurrently while he is slaying Jewish people by the multitudes. It is said that 40,000 Jews were slaughtered and at least that many were taken as slaves.

The passage for today ends in verses 32-35, talking about the Maccabean Revolt.

*32 He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. 33 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. 34 When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, 35 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.*

The Maccabean Revolt was the work of some Jews who sought to fight off Antiochus. They were appalled at the sacrilegious activity that was being foisted upon them. So they banded together and began guerrilla attacks on A4’s forces. Amazingly, these guys ended up pushing A4 out. And what happens is that there ends up being about 100 years of Jewish independence.

Of course, the text points out how hard that was. It was a struggle. They stumble, they are refined, they’re purified: all these speak of the difficulty of the fight. This little band of Jews were able to accomplish some degree of victory, but it wasn’t easy for them. It came with a great deal of hardship.

This is where we are going to end today. The rest of the passage gets more into the period of the Roman conquest, nad I want to hold off on that. But before we end, I want to simply have you note some of the language that is used in this passage.

There are some wonderful phrases that are used in this passage: It talks about Israel as “the Glorious land” (16). Then it uses the phrase “glory of the kingdom” (20). Then it mentions “the prince of the covenant” (22).

Then it uses the word covenant several other times. It mentions those who take action against the “holy covenant” (30a). Then there are those who “forsake the covenant” (30b). Finally there are those who violate the covenant (32)

Now, for all of these terms, other words could have been used. He could have said the “land of Judea” instead of “glorious land” or “glory of the kingdom.” And he didn’t have to use the word covenant.

All this is pointing to the fact that there is a covenant. That land is glorious because it is where God’s covenant people live. It is the land God had promised his people in the covenant he made with them.

All these terms are sprinkled into this passage. And they are here to remind us that the Lord still has his eye on this covenant. God will be faithful to his covenant. God will not forsake or abandon the people with whom he has entered into covenant.

And that is the greatest consolation we have. He will not leave us nor abandon us. No matter what this world throws at us, we can remember that God is working out the details of His covenant. He will bring us into the land that he has promised us. He will deliver us from all our woes. That’s what he has promised.

And this is what it means to live by faith. We must keep our eyes on that promise. We must remember that our Lord will never break his covenant. He still is working out that covenant. He has brought about our redemption in Christ and one day that covenant promise will be fulfilled: All sin and wickedness shall be fully put away.

This all is are minder to us about what our Lord is doing. History is in God’s hands. And when difficulty comes our way, we may rest in the fact that our God is still bringing about his covenant promises.