Daniel - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Book of Daniel: An Expository Outline, Daniel 11:2-15: The Antichrist

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Before receiving these fresh revelations, Daniel is assured that what he is about to hear is "the truth." For our knowledge of the history of God's earthly people during the times of the Gentiles we have the certainty of divine revelations in place of human speculations.

In the course of these revelations we have:

—First, the forecast of events that lead up to the time of the end (vv. 2-35),

—Secondly, the prophecy that takes us on to the time of the end foretelling the reign of Antichrist, as an apostate, in the midst of the apostate nation of the Jews (vv. 36-39),

—Thirdly, the northern enemy of the Jews, who, in the last days, overflow their land during the reign of Antichrist (vv. 40-45).

a. The prophetic history to the time of the end The angel presents before Daniel a brief outline of the activities of Gentile powers in connection with God's land. It becomes manifest that if God records events in the Gentile world, it is only so far as these events concern His people and "the glorious land" (v. 16).

Verse 2—At the time of these communications the first great world empire had fallen. The second or Persian Empire was taking the lead in the government of the world. Daniel is first told in few words how the Persian Empire would come to its end. After Persia's then present king, three more Persian kings were yet to arise, Persia's fourth king being far greater than his predecessors. From Ezra 4 we know that the first three kings were Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes and Darius (Ezra 4:5-7, 23-24). The fourth king was, we know from history, the famous Xerxes who led the Persians against the ruler of Greece.

Verse 3—Then the angel tells Daniel that a mighty king would arise who would rule over a great dominion, and do according to his will. Again history tells us that this was Alexander the Great who defeated Xerxes, crushed the Persian Empire and established the dominion of Greece—the third world Empire.

Verse 4—Then we learn, as already described in former visions, that Alexander's dominion would be divided into four distinct kingdoms which would not descend to his posterity but be ruled by strangers. All this we know was fulfilled when Alexander's dominion was divided among four of his generals.

Verses 5-6—One of these kingdoms would be located at the north of the land of Israel and another at the south. In the prophecy that follows, the rulers of these kingdoms are respectively referred to as the king of the south, or Egypt, and as the king of the north, or Syria. In the course of the prophecy these titles do not always refer to the same person, but are used as official titles to designate kings of the same line. The revelations that follow are mainly occupied with the activities of these two divisions of Alexander's empire, as they specially come into contact with God's earthly people and God's land.

Daniel is informed that the king of the south, one of the Ptolemies, a famous prince under Alexander, would be strong, but one would arise who would "be stronger than he" (JND). This was doubtless the first king of the north. Profane history gives in great detail the conflict between these two powers. God gives the outstanding facts, as in the course of these conflicts one or the other took possession of the land of Israel.

After years of conflict these two powers would seek to come together by agreement, strengthened by a marriage alliance. The daughter of the king of the south would be given to the king of the north. Nevertheless, this marriage would fail to end the conflict. The daughter of the king of the south, though coming to the king of the north, would carry no power. She, her husband and attendants would be "given up" to their enemies. History tells us they were all murdered.

Verse 7-9—The brother of the murdered queen, having come into his estate as king of the south, would attack the king of the north to avenge the murder of his sister. He would prevail over the king of the north, and, having taken many captives and a rich booty, would return to his own land.

Verses 10-12—In due time the sons of the king of the north would seek to avenge their defeat. They would assemble a great army and pass through the holy land to attack the king of the south. Moved with rage, the king of the south would come forth to meet this attack and seek to crush his opponents. Nevertheless, his overwhelming victory would not establish his own safety nor end these conflicts.

Verses 13-14—Again the king of the north would return to the attack with a yet greater army. Moreover, many others would join in this attack on the king of the south. Further, Daniel is told that insurrectionists among his own people— the Jews, here called the "violent" (JND)—would seek to exalt themselves by joining in this alliance against the king of the south.

Verses 15-16—In the course of this conflict the king of the north would take the fenced cities in the land of Israel, and the glorious land would come under his power. The forces of the king of the south would be unable to stop the conquest of the glorious land.

Verse 17—Having possessed himself of the land, the king of the north would prepare to enter the land of the king of the south with all the strength of his kingdom. Apparently, however, he would change his mind and give his daughter to the king of the south, hoping through her to attain his ends by corruption. She, however, would refuse to act for her father against her husband.

Verses 18-19—Trusting that by this marriage his ends on Egypt would be secured, the king of the north would attack the isles of Greece, and for a time be victorious, but a prince would arise in the west that would utterly defeat him, causing him to turn back to his own country a crushed and broken prince.

Verse 20—Consequent upon his defeat, the king of the north would have to pay tribute (as we know from history) to the Romans: therefore his successor would be known as "a raiser of taxes," or exactor. His exactions from the people of the land would lead to his assassination.

Verses 21-24—He would be succeeded by a vile person, known in history as Antiochus Epiphanes. He would not be the rightful heir, but by flattery would disarm opposition and obtain the kingdom peaceably. He would overflow God's land, crushing all resistance and setting aside the leader of God's people, here called the prince of the covenant. He would make a league with the people, and then work deceitfully to obtain the fattest places of the provinces by corruption and bribery. He would enforce idolatry upon the people, a thing which his fathers had not done.

Verses 25-28—Having possessed himself of the glorious land, he would attack the king of the south, by whom he would be met with a mighty army. Nevertheless, the king of the south would suffer defeat, as the king of the north would plan devices against him, corrupting his dependents. These two kings would meet and seek to deceive each other at the same table. The king of the north would return to his own land with great riches, having decided in his own heart not to keep any covenant made either with the king of the south or with the people of God.

Verses 29-35—Finally, the king of the north would again attack the king of the south. In this attack he would be opposed by a power from the west. The ships of Chittim come against him—a fleet of the Roman Empire. Thwarted in all his plans by this new enemy, he would be forced with indignation to return from the south. His indignation would apparently be vented upon the Jews. From the middle of verse 30 to the end of verse 35 we have in great detail the actions of this vile man in relation to the Jews and their land. It is to these events that these historical details have been leading, as setting forth the enmity of man to God and His people—an enmity that the Jew will have to meet in all its culminating horror in the last days.

In the day of this vile king, as in the latter days, apostates will be found among the Jews—those "that forsake the holy covenant." To these men he will "direct his attention" (JND), and "corrupt by flatteries." Succeeding for a time by his corruption, he will have power on his side, which he will use to pollute the sanctuary, take away the daily sacrifice, and set up an idol in the temple.

Nevertheless, in this terrible time, there will be among the Jews those "that do know their God." They will be strong and act for their God and instruct many in the ways and mind of God. In result, they will have to face persecution, violence, and imprisonment for many days. Nevertheless, in all their sorrows they will be helped. All will be allowed of God to try and prove them in view of the reward and glory that will come in the end, for the end, being appointed of God, will surely come.

The leading events foretold in this prophecy are given with such precision that it is easy to see, from profane history, their exact fulfillment, and even to give the names to the different actors, and the dates and places of their victories and defeats. Moreover, the final events in this prophecy, presented in verses 21 to 35, describing the activities of the vile Antiochus Epiphanes, are given in greater detail, as they not only present history in relation to God's people, which has already been fulfilled, but they very accurately typify the yet greater sorrows that the Jewish nation will pass through in the future day of the great tribulation.

b. The Antichrist (vv. 36-39)

To the end of verse 35 we have the prophecy of events which, though future in Daniel's day, have long since been fulfilled. From verse 36 the angel speaks of events, the fulfillment of which is yet future. This becomes clear from the angel's words which speak of these things continuing till the indignation be accomplished (v. 36); and again by the reference to the time of the end (v. 40). Already the angel has used this expression "the time of the end" to show that the persecutions the faithful remnant pass through have an end in view (v. 35); now, in verse 40, it is used to describe events that will immediately precede the time of the end. Further, it is important to notice that, in verse 36, the angel introduces into his prophecy an entirely new personage under the designation of "the king." From verse 40 we learn that both the king of the south and the king of the north will come against this fresh person. Evidently, then, the angel is no longer speaking of either the king of Egypt or Assyria, but of a king that reigns in the land.

The characteristics of this man, as given by the angel, so entirely correspond with the description of the man of sin, or Antichrist, as set forth in the New Testament (2 Thess. 2), that it can only be concluded that both passages refer to the same person. The difference is that, in Daniel the Antichrist is presented in connection with the Jewish apostacy, whereas in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians he is presented as the out-come of the apostacy of Christendom. It is the prophetic delineation of this terrible man that gives such deep importance to this final section of the prophecy.

First, we learn that he will do "according to his will." He will act in entire independence of God, recognizing no will but his own.

Secondly, he will exalt and magnify himself above every god. These two things marked the fall of man. Adam acted independently of God under the temptation of exalting himself to be as God. In the Antichrist, these two things will be seen in their final manifestation, the culmination of all the evil that has ruined Adam's race.

Thirdly, he will not only profess to be superior to every god, but he will speak blasphemous things against the God of gods.

Fourthly, in spite of the wickedness of this fearful man, he will be allowed to "prosper till the indignation be accomplished." The prophet Isaiah clearly shows that the expression "indignation" is used to refer to the time of God's dealing in governmental judgment with the nation of Israel (see Isa. 5 to 10 and Isa. 14).

Fifthly, we learn that this man will not "regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all." Evidently, then, he will be an apostate Jew, that rejects, not only Jehovah, but the Messiah, whose birth was the desire of Jewish women.

Sixthly, having magnified himself above all and set himself up as God, he will press upon man a new god, "the god of forces." Apparently, he sets up the rule of might over right.

Seventhly, under this new god of might, he will organize the whole land of Israel, dividing it up for gain and as a reward to those who carry out his will.

Such are the fearful characteristics of the coming Antichrist in connection with the Jew and the land. It is manifest he will be the exact contrast to all that is so blessedly seen in Christ, whoever did the will of God, never exalted Himself, and sought only the honor of the Father and the blessing of man.

Thus, in a few brief words, we have set before us the Antichrist, himself an apostate Jew reigning over an apostate nation. In this passage we learn nothing of his overwhelming judgment. This is given in the Revelation.

c. The King of the North (vv. 40-45)

Verses 40-43—In the Antichrist there is brought before us the great enemy of God and His people that, in the last days, will be found in the midst of the Jewish people. The closing verses of the chapter prophetically announce that, at the same time the Jewish nation will be opposed by an enemy without.

In "the time of the end," when the Jews are back in their land under the reign of Antichrist, they will be attacked by the king of the south and the king of the north. Evidently the king of the north will be their great and serious opponent, for we read he will come like a whirlwind and overflow and pass through the land. For a time he will pursue his victorious career, for "many countries shall be overthrown." Edom, Moab, and the children of Ammon will escape; but the land of Egypt will fall under his power.

We may gather from this Scripture that when the Jews are reinstated in their land, these ancient nations that formerly surrounded the land will re-appear, according to the bounds of their lands originally allotted to them by God. We know from Isaiah that the judgment of God upon these three nations will be exercised by Israel (Isa. 11:14); therefore it may be that the king of the north is not allowed to touch them. Nevertheless, he is permitted to overthrow the Egyptians and despoil them of their riches. The Libyans and Ethiopians will apparently do his bidding.

Verses 44-45—In the midst of his successes, he will receive news of approaching enemies from the east and the north which will compel him to turn upon these fresh foes "with great fury." On his homeward march he seeks to establish his palace in the glorious holy mountain.

In this passage no details are given of the circumstances that close his career. This only are we told that he shall come to his end, and there will be none to help him, an expression that would seem to indicate that God will deal directly with this foe apart from human agency (see Ezek. 39:1-7).

Connecting the different statements of verses 36 to 45, we see a vivid picture of the Jews at the time of the end, when they will be gathered back in their own land in unbelief, rejecting Christ as their Messiah. They will have rebuilt their temple and resumed their sacrifices. Having rejected their king, they will, according to the Lord's own words, receive another that "shall come in his own name" (John 5:43); thus they will accept Antichrist as their king. On the north of the land, Syria will be established under a powerful king. On the south, Egypt will prosper under its own king, having "treasures of gold and silver." Ethiopia and Libya will exist as distinct nations. On the east, Edom, Moab, and Ammon will be re-established. In these circumstances, the Jews, having accepted the rule of Antichrist, will become apostate and their land will fall a prey to their northern enemies.

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