

Lessons from Daniel 11–12

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Some people care only for themselves. They are not interested in the future of the human race, the future of the people of God, or even the future of their children or grandchildren. Others care deeply. Daniel belonged to the second category, and God revealed to him large portions of the plan of salvation and the destiny of the community of faith.

I. Overview of Daniel 11–12

1. The Broad Structure of the Vision in Daniel 10–12

Chapters 10–12 of the book of Daniel contain the following broad structure, which will later be broken down into smaller units:

- Prologue to the last vision of Daniel (Dan 10:1–11:1)
- The vision of the kingdoms (Dan 11:2–12:4)
- Epilogue to the last vision and of the entire book (Dan 12:5–13)

In our previous study the emphasis was on the introduction to the vision of the kingdoms (Dan 10). This time the focus will be on chapters 11 and 12, the vision proper, and the epilogue.

Daniel as a person appears five times in Daniel 10 and three times in Daniel 12. But other more important characters also appear in both chapters—the man in linen clothes and Michael. While in the beginning Michael is involved in a geographically limited situation (Dan 10), at the end He is involved in a drama of universal dimensions (Dan 12).

2. A Cosmic Scenario

The major visions in the preceding part of the book of Daniel all had some reference to the heavenly world. In Daniel 2 God's kingdom was completely established on earth with the falling of the stone from heaven, which became an all-encompassing mountain. In chapter 7 a heavenly judgment was portrayed before the saints received participation in God's kingdom at the end of time. In Daniel 8 the heavenly sanctuary was presented as it was attacked by the little horn. The last vision of Daniel differs insofar as a cosmic conflict appears right in the beginning (Dan 10) and climaxes in Daniel 12. This is important because we need to see the big picture apart from the details.

3. The Time Frame of the Vision

Which time elements appear in this vision?

- Daniel 11:2 clearly begins in Persian times and continues to the Greek empire.
- The vision informs us specifically about various time elements. It progresses from “the appointed time” (Dan 11:27, 29) to “the time of the end” (Dan 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9), “the time of trouble” (Dan 12:1), and to “the time” of deliverance (Dan 12:1) which is associated with resurrection (Dan 12:2–3) and in the epilogue is called “the end” (Dan 12:13).
- Specific time elements occur in the epilogue. These are long prophetic periods of three and a half times (Dan 12:7), 1,290 prophetic days (Dan 12:11), and 1,335 prophetic days (Dan 12:12).

Why is this time frame extremely important?

- It helps us understand the vision as it progresses from about 535 BC to the establishment of God's kingdom of glory at Christ's second coming.
- It also encourages us to focus specifically on the end of this period.

4. Literal Elements and Symbolic Elements

Daniel 11 begins with a reference to kings, kingdoms, and politics in literal language. Persia is not a bear or a ram as in previous visions but is described as a kingdom with kings. Initially, the kings of the north represent the Seleucids and the kings of the south the Ptolemaic rulers. But later the king of the north and the king of the south become symbolic entities, as do Edom, Moab, and Ammon. This is not unusual, since a mixture of literal and symbolic descriptions is also found in other parts of Scripture (e.g., the seven churches in Revelation). Since the Seleucids and the Ptolemies vanished in history, the appearance of the king of the south and the king of the north in the time of the end must be understood symbolically, at a time when a global widening of the vision develops and a narrow geographical frame is being abandoned.

5. The Religious Dimension

Unlike the image of many metals in Daniel 2, which refers to political entities only, Daniel 11 also contains a religious dimension. The characters appearing in this vision are not only kings, but obviously also religious leaders, the Messiah, and the God of gods (Dan 11:36).

Where does such a dimension surface?

- In the introduction to the vision (Dan 10) and especially the struggle behind the scenes.
- In the epilogue of the book. For instance, the “holy people” occurs (Dan 12:7) and Daniel is promised resurrection (Dan 12:13).
- In the vision proper:
 - Their gods—paganism (Dan 11:8)
 - The beautiful land—Palestine and the people of God (Dan 11:16, 41)
 - The prince of the covenant—Jesus (Dan 11:22)
 - The sanctuary and the daily—Jesus’ heavenly ministry (Dan 11:31)
 - Persecution of God’s people (Dan 11:32–35)
 - The king’s self-exaltation and blasphemy against God (Dan 11:36–37)
 - Reliance on the god of fortresses and a foreign god (Dan 11:38–39)
 - Holy mountain—attack against God and His people (Dan 11:45)
 - Rescue of those written in the book by Michael (Dan 12:1)
 - Resurrection from the dead (Dan 12:2–3)
 - Sealing of the book of Daniel and later understanding of its prophecies (Dan 12:4)

6. Connections to Other Visions in Daniel

Daniel 11 is the most difficult chapter in Daniel and has been interpreted differently. It is important to understand the big picture, even though we may not be able to explain all the details satisfactorily. However, parallels to clearer chapters help us interpret this chapter.

This table suggests that the same empires are found in chapter 11 that also occur in chapters 7 and 8, and also in Daniel 2, although the latter is not displayed here. In chapter 11 these empires are described with more details than in the other visions, but as soon as the next kingdom appears, the previous one is no longer considered. The italicized terms or phrases are either using the same vocabulary or the same concepts.

<i>Daniel 7</i>	<i>Daniel 8 and 9</i>	<i>Daniel 11–12</i>	<i>Period</i>
Bear (7:5)	<i>Medo-Persia</i> (ram, 8:3–4, 20)	Kings of <i>Persia</i> (11:2)	Persia
Leopard (7:6)	<i>Greece</i> (goat; 8:5–7, 21)	<i>Greece</i> (11:3)	Greece
• <i>Four wings and four heads</i> (7:6)	• <i>Large horn</i> (8:5, 21) • <i>Four horns</i> (8:8, 2)	• <i>Mighty king</i> (11:3) • <i>Four parts</i> (11:4)	
Terrible beast (7:7)	Little horn (first phase, 8:9)	Invader and other rulers (11:16–21)	Rome
	• <i>Beautiful land</i> (8:9)	• <i>Beautiful land</i> (11:16)	

	• <i>Messiah the Prince</i> (9:25)	• <i>Prince of covenant</i> (11:22)	
Little Horn (7:8)	Little horn (second phase, 8:9)	Ruler/King of north (11:29)	Papacy
<i>Changes of time and law</i> (7:25)	<i>The daily</i> (8:11)	<i>The daily</i> (11:31)	
<i>Persecution</i> (7:25)	<i>Abomination of desolation</i> (9:27)	<i>Abomination of desolation</i> (11:31)	
<i>Self-exaltation</i> (7:8, 25) <i>three and a half times</i> (7:25)	<i>Persecution</i> (8:10, 24)	<i>Persecution</i> (11:32–35)	
	<i>Self-exaltation</i> (8:10, 25)	<i>Self-exaltation</i> (11:36–39)	
	2,300 evenings & mornings (8:14)	<i>three and a half times</i> , 1,290 days, and 1,335 days (12:7, 11–12)	
	<i>Time of the end</i> (8:17)	<i>Time of the end</i> (11:40)	Time of End
The Son of Man (7:13)	Prince of princes (8:25)	Michael (12:1)	
God's Kingdom (7:14, 27)		Resurrection (12:2–3, 13)	The End

II. The Discussion of Daniel 11–12

1. The Persian Empire

11:2–3 When Daniel received the vision, the ruling monarch was Cyrus (Dan 10:1). The next three kings were Cambyses (530–522 BC), false Smerdis (522 BC), and Darius I (522–486 BC). The fourth king was Xerxes (486–465 BC). He is the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. Despite his huge navy and army, he lost the battles of Salamis (480 BC) and Plataea (479 BC) against the Greek. The end of the Persian Empire came through the Greek under Alexander the Great, who conquered Persia about 150 years later.

2. The Greek Empire

11:4–15 The mighty king represents Alexander the Great. He died prematurely in 323 BC at about thirty-two years of age. His kingdom split into four parts, the Hellenistic kingdoms (see the parallel in Daniel 8:8). Two of those four are described in detail as the king of the north and the king of the south (Dan 8:5–15). The Jews were placed between these two powers, had to suffer the consequences of war, and had to deal with changing submission to the respective authority. The two kingdoms were those of the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt.

3. The Roman Empire

11:16ff A shift to the Roman Empire seems to come with the “invader” in verse 16. The beautiful land (see Dan 8:9) should be understood as Palestine here and later in verse 41 in a symbolic way as the people of God. Verses 17–19 may point to Julius Caesar and his relationship with Cleopatra. He died in 44 BC and was followed by Caesar Augustus who took an empire-wide census and levied a tax on the peoples. It was under Augustus that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 1:1–7) because the census affected Joseph and Mary. Augustus died AD 14 after more than forty years of reign. The “despicable person” must have been emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37), Augustus’ son by adoption. He is also mentioned in Luke 3:1. Under him Jesus, the prince of the covenant (*nagid*; Dan 11:22, see also 9:25–26), was crucified.

4. The Papacy

11:31–39 *What are the major issues dealt with in this section?*

- An attack on the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Dan 11:31)
- Persecution of the true people of God (Dan 11:32–35)

- Self-exaltation and blasphemy against God (Dan 11:36–39)

The daily has already been found in Daniel 8:11. It describes Christ's priestly ministry in heaven, which is attacked by the little horn's substitute priestly ministry.

Persecution includes martyrdom but still has the effect of purifying God's people.

The abomination of desolation points to the desecration of the sanctuary through a false religious system, consisting of unbiblical doctrines and practices. The parallel in Daniel 7 contains the elements mentioned above but instead of speaking about the abomination of desolation mentions changes in time and law, obviously divine law (Dan 7:25).

5. The Time of the End

11:40–45 The time of the end is associated with the three and a half times in Daniel 12:4–10. The three and a half times already occurred in Daniel 7:25. It was the time of the dominance of the papacy, which came to a preliminary end in AD 1798 when the pope was taken prisoner and exiled. The time of the end would begin after AD 1798.

The events described here are still in the making and are explained in greater detail in Revelation.

What does Daniel 11:40–45 describe?

- A battle between the king of the north and the king of the south. The two stand symbolically for the religious power of end-time Babylon—Babylon invaded Israel from the north—and atheism and secularism as symbolized by Egypt, the king of the south (Dan 11:40). Symbolic Egypt, an atheistic power, will be utterly defeated by Babylon, a religious power (Dan 11:42–43). In Revelation Babylon is an equivalent of the satanic trinity (Rev 12–13). This victory of Babylon mimics God's victory over Pharaoh during the Exodus. However, Babylon is not a divine but an anti-Christian power, consisting of the papacy, fallen Protestantism, and spiritualism in various forms. Yet Babylon will now be unified.
- An attack on the beautiful land, persecution, and deception of God's people (Dan 11:41). Yet some people will be rescued (see Isa 16:1–5).
- The arrival of threatening news for the king of the north from the east and the north (Dan 11:44). This is where God and the Messiah are coming from (e.g., Rev 16:12). The news may announce the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:6–12; 18:1–2).
- The attempt to take over the beautiful Holy Mountain (Dan 11:45; see Ps 99:9), the dwelling place of God, is a direct fight against God. It will end with complete defeat of the king of the north (Dan 11:45).

6. The Intervention of Michael

12:1–4 In this extremely difficult time at the end of human history, the people of God experience the intervention of Michael (Dan 11:1), the great prince (*sar*, see Dan 8:11; 10:21). He stands up, which means that He assumes rulership. Jesus will rescue all those written in the book (Dan 11:1), obviously the book of life (Rev 21:27).

Resurrection is promised in verses 2–3.

What do we know about the resurrection from the dead in Scripture?

- Jesus was raised from the dead. He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18). All resurrections, whether past or future, depend on Him.
- The first resurrection is the general resurrection of all believers at Christ's second coming (John 5:29; 1 Cor 15; Rev 20:4, 5b–6).
- The resurrection of the enemies of Christ takes place one thousand years later (Rev 20:5a).
- In Daniel 12:2–3 a special resurrection is mentioned that will take place prior to and yet in conjunction with the Second Coming. It comprises a limited group of believers and Christ's opponents—namely those who have crucified Jesus and were His worst enemies. This special resurrection is also alluded to in Revelation 1:7.
- Resurrection is also implied in Daniel 12:1.

- The Old Testament does not talk much about the resurrection from the dead, in contrast to the New Testament. But the book of Daniel clearly maintains the hope of a future resurrection at the very end of human history.

The sealing of parts of the book of Daniel (Dan 12:4, 9) and its later understanding (Dan 12:10) was fulfilled in the nineteenth century when the prophecies, especially the time prophecies of Daniel, were comprehended.

7. Epilogue

12:5–13 Here the question “How long?” is raised again (Dan 8:13). This question refers to the vision of Daniel 11 and requests more information regarding the time spans involved. The man dressed in linen must be the same person who appeared in the introduction to the last vision (Dan 10:5–6). We have identified this person as Jesus (see also Rev 10:1–7). This request is granted. Three time periods are given:

- Three and a half times (see Dan 7:25; Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5), lasting from AD 538 to 1798¹
- 1,290 days, lasting from AD 508 to 1798. They began with the conversion of Clovis, king of the Franks to Roman Catholicism, through which the religious power was joined to the civil power. Ironically, the Franks helped the papacy to progress as a persecuting and deceiving power, and it was France that in AD 1798 gave the papacy a decisive blow.
- 1,335 days, lasting from AD 508 to 1843. This brings us to the preaching of the first angel’s message (Rev 14:7) and the Advent movement, as well as to the end of the prophecy of the 2,300 evenings and mornings. There is not only great distress related to the time of the end but also a great blessing for those who live in that time.

III. Application

Daniel 11 and 12 are rich in theology and encouraging messages:

- God knows the future. He knows all the details. He knows His people, and He knows us personally. He cares for us; we are precious to Him. Through Michael He rescues us from all tribulation and distress, from lion dens and fiery furnaces.
- The book of Daniel can be more completely understood only in the time of the end. Today, while we may not understand all details of Daniel 11, we do understand Daniel’s time prophecies and the book as a whole. That means we live in the time of the end and are waiting for Jesus’ second coming.
- Again we have encountered our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We met Him in the person of the man in linen clothes (Dan 10; 12). We met Him as Michael, the prince (*sar*) also in Daniel 10 and 12. We met Him as the prince (*nagid*) of the covenant, who was crucified under the Romans so that He could save us.

Amazingly, the book of Daniel is full of Jesus, although it is an Old Testament document. He is victorious over all powers of darkness. He appears in:

- Daniel 2 as stone
- Daniel 3 as Son of God
- Daniel 7 as Son of Man
- Daniel 8 as the prince of the host and the Prince of Princes
- Daniel 9 as Messiah Prince
- Daniel 10 as the man with linen clothes and Michael our prince
- Daniel 11 as prince of the covenant
- Daniel 12 as Michael and as the man with linen clothes

In gratitude we acknowledge Him as our Lord and praise Him. Contemplating Jesus, we cannot but love Him.

- We have the wonderful hope of resurrection. Our life here and now is only a prelude to life eternal. God has an everlasting kingdom (Dan 4:3). The Most High has everlasting dominion (Dan 4:34; 7:27); so has Jesus (Dan 7:14). And the saints will participate in it (Dan 7:27). Jesus has brought

everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24) and everlasting life (Dan 12:2–3). He has guaranteed resurrection. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid. Even if we die, the promise given to Daniel is also given to us—that we will rest until the resurrection. It is repeated in Revelation 14:13: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

¹ See Heinz Schaidinger, *Historical Confirmation of Prophetic Periods*, Biblical Research Institute Releases 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010).