

## The Rise of Antiochus the Great

Daniel 11:10-14

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God gave an essential qualification to test whether one who claimed to be a prophet of God was in fact a true prophet: what is prophesied must come to pass—not once in a while, but at all times (Deuteronomy 18:22). For if God is speaking through a man/woman, what they prophesy about the future must always come to pass (God has decreed the future). That’s not my test of a true prophet, but God’s test, and I submit it’s still His test. If a professed prophet cannot distinguish between God’s thoughts and his/her own thoughts, that person should not be listened to or followed—a true prophet knows when God is speaking and when God is not speaking (regardless of human frailties). In true prophets of God, human fallibility was overridden by divine infallibility.

I raise that most important test of a true prophet because as we consider the detailed prophecies here in Daniel 11-12 and as we see their precise fulfillment (one after another without exception), we hear the authoritative voice of the Lord confirming in history and revealing the authenticity and reliability of what God has spoken through the angel, Gabriel, to Daniel.

In fact, the hundreds of prophecies in Scripture that have been fulfilled/realized are God’s testimony that our faith in Scripture is not in vain or misplaced. Faith in God’s Word is more certain than the rising and setting of the sun each day. The many prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ (His birthplace, His miracles, His death by crucifixion, His resurrection, and the very time when this would happen) confirm for us that what was prophesied concerning historical events after Christ’s ascension into heaven (like the destruction of Jerusalem, the future conversion of Israel/Gentile nations, the millennium, and Christ’s Second Coming) will all come to pass as the Lord has said in His Word.

That is our certain hope and comfort in God’s promises to us every day—He is ever faithful to keep His Word (even in the trials, the heartaches, and the delays of life). We may fail Him, but He will never fail us, nor will He ever fail to keep His promises to us (beginning with the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life to all who trust Him).

As we continue in God’s history lesson for us today (in Daniel 11-12), which was prophesied hundreds of years before these events were realized, let us consider the following main points: (1) The Rise of Antiochus III—“the Great” (Daniel 11:10); (2) The Defeat of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:11-12); (3) The Return of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:13-14).

### I. The Rise of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:10).

A. After Gabriel, God’s angelic messenger, prophesied concerning the Persian and Grecian Empires and the four-fold division of the Grecian Empire after the death of Alexander the Great (Daniel 11:1-4), the prophecy turned to the two greatest of those four kingdoms—namely, the Syrian kingdom (the Seleucid dynasty), “the king of the north”; and the Egyptian kingdom (the Ptolemaic dynasty), “the king of the south”. I refer you to the previous sermon for a detailed exposition of Daniel 11:5-9, but we ended that section with the king of the south (**Ptolemy III** of Egypt) having invaded and conquered much of Syria to avenge the death of his sister, **Berenice** (246-241 B.C.). **Ptolemy III** then returned to Egypt with great spoil from his Syrian campaign.

B. After **Seleucus II** of Syria died (likely poisoned by his wife, **Laódice**), his two sons succeeded him to the throne of the Syrian kingdom (“But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces” Daniel 11:10). The eldest son, **Seleucus III**, only reigned for a short time (225-223 B.C.). He was assassinated by members of his own army, but he did raise up the military forces of Syria and began to regain Syrian territory.

C. The younger son of **Seleucus II, Antiochus III** (“the Great”) became king at 18 years of age and had a lengthy reign (223-187 B.C.). Notice how the prophecy in Daniel 11:10 shifts from the “sons” to one son in particular (“and one shall certainly come....”). Again, what precision of fulfillment! The exploits of **Antiochus III** are given in Daniel 11:10-19 (which comport precisely with secular historical accounts).

D. **Antiochus III** carried further the military campaign of his assassinated father and brother, “overflowing” and passing through and recapturing the former territories of Syria. He retook the original capital of Syria, Seleucia (“his fortress”). After that, he continued west and took Sidon, turned south and took the Holy Land (219 B.C.). After a brief interlude, he headed for Egypt (217 B.C.). He rode a wave of military victories. It appeared no one could stand in his way.

## II. The Defeat of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:11-12).

A. There is at this time a new king in Egypt, **Ptolemy IV** (221-204 B.C.), who succeeded his father, **Ptolemy III** (who died of natural causes). The anger of **Ptolemy IV** was greatly agitated at the success of **Antiochus III** (Daniel 11:11), and they met for battle at Ráphia—the **Battle of Gaza** in 217 B.C. (interestingly, this is the same city as the present Rapha—the southern most city in the Gaza Strip where the most recent battles between Israel and Hamas have occurred).

B. **Antiochus III** of Syria raised a great multitude at the Battle of Gaza, but was defeated by **Ptolemy IV** and was “given into his [Ptolemy’s] hand” (Daniel 11:11-12). **Polybius** (the Greek historian) records that about 10,000 Syrians were killed in battle. That brought an end to the advance of **Antiochus III** as he retreated back to Syria where he extended his kingdom, focusing in the east, all the way to India.

C. **Ptolemy IV** was indeed a very proud ruler (Daniel 11:12), and this victory only increased that pride as he returned to Egypt. In ancient sources, **Ptolemy IV** was criticized for being more interested in luxury and debauchery than in justly ruling the government entrusted to him. In fact, historically, the decline of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt is usually traced to his excessive lavishness, drunkenness, and laziness (“he shall not be strengthened by it” Daniel 11:12).

D. After the victory at Gaza (according to **3 Maccabees**), **Ptolemy IV** visited Jerusalem and proudly sought to enter into the Holy of Holies, but when the attempts of the priests failed, he was prevented from entering by a miraculous intervention in which he he was cast to the ground and temporarily stunned. This proud act did not earn him any favor with the Jews. When he returned to Egypt he sought revenge against the Jews (according to **3 Maccabees**), and caused Jews in Alexandria to be bound and dragged into the arena to be trampled by his elephants; but the beasts miraculously threw themselves upon the king’s troops instead. The Jews celebrated their deliverance by an annual feast-day in remembering how God had rescued them from destruction.

E. **Ptolemy IV** died in 204 B.C., leaving his young son, **Ptolemy V** (about 5 years old) to succeed him and to rule by appointed regents.

## III. The Return of Antiochus III (Daniel 11:13-14).

A. The previous defeat of **Antiochus III** of Syria (the king of the north) at the **Battle of Gaza** (217 B.C.) was not the last campaign he waged against the king of the south (Egypt); for we now read that “he shall return”, and return he did to battle Egypt (now under the reign of young **Ptolemy V** 204-180 B.C.). **Antiochus III** returned with a mightier military force than before and with the riches he had accumulated from his campaigns in the East. He returned “after certain years” (about 14 years later in 203 B.C.).

B. As Daniel 11:14 states, “there shall many stand up against the king of the south” (i.e. the king of Egypt, **Ptolemy V**). Not only did **Antiochus** increase greatly his military force, but also **Philip V** of Macedonia joined in alliance with **Antiochus** against territories held by Egypt. The battle of **Páanium** (200 B.C.), fought at Caesarea Philippi (north of Galilee), brought a decisive victory to **Antiochus III** (king of the north) against **Ptolemy V** (king of the south) from which the Egyptian kings thereafter never recovered.

C. In addition, there will also arise at that time “robbers” (or violent men) from among the Jews who will join with **Antiochus III** of Syria to battle the army of Ptolemy V. Many of the war-like Jews joined with **Antiochus III** to bring to pass what is revealed here in the vision. The Jewish historian, **Josephus** (*Antiquities of the Jews*, b. xii. ch. iii. Section 3), writes:

The Jews of their own accord went over to him [Antiochus III], and received him into the city [Jerusalem], and gave plentiful provision to his army, and to his elephants, and readily assisted him when he besieged the garrison which was in the citadel of Jerusalem.

1. The hope of these Jews in supporting Antiochus III in their aspirations to be independent from foreign rule failed. Antiochus III did not grant any such independence and in fact returned to Jerusalem (in 198 B.C.) to repay those who did not support him by slaughtering many Jews. The Jews in the Holy Land remained under the rule of the Syrian kingdom until the Maccabees delivered them from their wicked persecutor, **Antiochus IV** Epiphanes (to whom we shall soon come in Daniel 11:21).

2. Once again, we have seen the amazing fulfillment in great detail of these prophecies. Let us rejoice that the very God that has revealed in such historical precision all these rulers and events hundreds of years before their fulfillment, this same God is our God who knows with the same kind of precise, accurate, loving knowledge your history and mine. That is a comfort to those who trust Him, but is scary to those who reject Him.

D. Application—Though we may not be able to derive a righteous example from these heathen kings, we may yet be able take certain lessons and apply them to our own lives spiritually.

1. **Ptolemy IV** was lifted up with pride after his victory over **Antiochus III** (Daniel 11:12). After his victory, rather than being vigilant over his kingdom, he resorted to self-indulgence and feeding the lusts of his flesh, which led to the weakening of his kingdom. Let us learn that pride often tempts us to forget the Lord who brought us victory over sin and has blessed us with answered prayers (1 Corinthians 10:12). God had delivered Israel from the Egyptians by the 10 plagues and opening the Red Sea, but as they wilderness they began to complain against the Lord and as they had to wait for Moses to come down from Mt. Sinai, they became impatient and resorted to idolatry. We need to be in communion with our gracious Savior as much in times of blessing as in times of trial.

2. A significant portion of the Jews formed a military alliance with **Antiochus III**. This seemed temporarily to be to their advantage, but it led to the advances of power and control under **Antiochus IV** (Epiphanes), which led to the great persecution the Jews suffered not many years after this alliance. We must beware of unholy alliances with those who do not stand firmly upon the same truth that we profess in God’s Word. Such alliances are short-lived, for when the common enemy is overcome, then their power will be turned against all those who will not bow the knee to Baal or to Caesar. We shall not do evil that good may come. The answer to our present corruption and tyranny we see in our nation is not compromise with political leaders, but rather, the answer is a national regeneration and reformation through the gospel of Christ and submission under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His commandments. That is the only answer. That is what we must pray for and work for beginning with our own families and church—that is our little kingdom.

3. **Antiochus III** returned to win a great victory after his great defeat (Daniel 11:13). Clearly, he was not motivated by righteous and holy desires, but perhaps we can still see in this a spiritual truth: when we fall into sin or fail in faithfulness to the Lord in some way. Let us not listen to the enemy who would have us stay defeated and consumed with our failure. Let us rather look in faith and repentance to our gracious Savior who is plenteous in mercy and arise from defeat to go forth in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Let us learn from our defeats, rather than living in our defeats. We are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us. We are not victims, but victors through His death and resurrection.