

THE PREDICTIONS OF DANIEL

PART ONE: DANIEL 11:1–16

PAUL LAWRENCE

All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the NIV.

DOES GOD KNOW THE FUTURE?

Does God know the future? For many, the statement “[God] knows everything” (1 Jn 3:20) provides a certain answer that He does indeed know all that is going to happen. However, some are disturbed by such a seemingly simple answer—if God knows the future, does that mean that the choices that we make are illusory, not real?¹ There is one chapter in the Bible that, above all others, shows that indeed God does know the future, and it is this unique chapter that we shall examine in detail over two interconnected articles.

A UNIQUE CHAPTER

Daniel 11 is a chapter unlike any other in the Bible. In its first 35 verses, 21 men, 2 women, and 1 family are mentioned, but none by name. The overall passage purports to be a revelation given by a humanlike heavenly messenger to Daniel “in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia” (Dn 10:1) explaining what will happen to Daniel’s people in the future: “Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come” (10:14). The messenger tells Daniel that this future has already been “written in the Book of Truth” (10:21), which he is now going to reveal (“Now then, I tell you the truth” [11:2]).

Daniel 11:1–35 is a prophecy covering some 370 years of history, down to 164 BC; it thus fills in much of the gap between the Old and New Testaments. However, it makes so many detailed predictions that many refuse to accept it as a prophecy written before the events it describes. Those who make this objection are perhaps uncomfortable with the implication that if such a detailed predictive prophecy were actually given, it could only have originated from the God who knows the future; thus, the prophecy is frequently dismissed instead.²

WHY IS DANIEL 11 IN THE BIBLE?

Why were such detailed predictions, now preserved in Daniel chapter 11, given? If we suppose that the generations following Daniel had access to this remarkable chapter, then they would certainly have been able to link some details of the



prophecy with news of significant world and regional events that they became aware of.³ This knowledge, in turn, would give them an indication of when the climax of the predictions outlined in 11:21–35 was likely about to take place.

FOUR KINGS OF PERSIA

Daniel chapter 11 begins with Daniel being told of four future kings of Persia, the last of whom would be far richer than the others and would attack the kingdom of Greece (v. 2).⁴ “Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others” (2a). The Persian kings in question are Cambyses (530–522 BC), Gaumata (522 BC), Darius (522–486 BC), and Xerxes (486–465 BC).

THE FOURTH PERSIAN KING: XERXES (486–465 BC)

Daniel homes in on the fourth king: “When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone⁵ against the kingdom of Greece” (2b).

Xerxes,⁶ the husband of Queen Esther, launched a huge expedition to avenge his father Darius’s defeat at Marathon, near Athens, in 490 BC. In 483 BC, Xerxes had a canal dug through the narrow stretch of land to the north of Mount Athos in northern Greece, at the place where his father Darius’s fleet had been wrecked. In 480 BC, to transport the Persian army across the Dardanelles (the narrow strait separating Asia from Europe), Xerxes had two bridges made. Warships were lashed together to support the bridges—360 ships for the northern bridge and 314 for the southern one. The Greek historian



Herodotus records that it took seven days and seven nights of unbroken activity for the Persian troops to cross the bridges (*The Histories* 7.56).⁷

Herodotus also estimates the number in Xerxes's expedition (the army plus supporting personnel) as 5,383,220 (*The Histories* 7.186). Modern historians would seek to reduce this huge figure and label as hyperbole Herodotus's subsequent comment "I am not surprised that, with so many people and so many beasts, the rivers sometimes failed to provide enough water" (7.187).⁸ Yet seen in that light, Daniel's prediction that "he will stir up everyone" is suitably apt.

The vast army's progress was impeded by a force of three hundred Spartans holding the pass of Thermopylae in central Greece. Eventually, however, a traitor showed the Persians a secret path over the mountains, the Spartans were removed, and the army turned its attention to Athens. Most of the Athenians deserted their city and took refuge on the islands of Aegina and Salamis. A few took refuge behind a temporary wooden wall they had erected on the Acropolis, believing an oracle from Delphi that said their wall would stand intact. Persian soldiers attached lighted tow to arrows and burned the wall. But still the Athenians on the Acropolis resisted, rolling

huge boulders down on top of the advancing Persian army. Eventually, however, Persian soldiers climbed up the side of the Acropolis and burned all its temples to the ground. It seemed that Xerxes had fulfilled his ambition of capturing Athens and avenging his father's defeat at Marathon ten years earlier.

The Greek fleet, however, still remained. Many Athenians believed that the wooden wall referred to by the Delphic oracle was their fleet of some 310 ships. The Greeks lured the Persian fleet into a narrow stretch of water between the island of Salamis and the Greek mainland near Athens. Xerxes watched the ensuing battle while sitting on his throne on the Greek mainland across from the island of Salamis. In the narrow waters the action was very intense, but once again the Persians came off worse. The Persians are said to have lost 200 ships, the Greeks 40. The surviving Persian ships sailed away across the Aegean Sea to protect the bridges on the Dardanelles. Most of the soldiers in the vast Persian army made their way back with Xerxes to Asia. A force of the best troops, perhaps consisting of 75,000 men, was left behind under the command of a general named Mardonius. This force was defeated by the Greeks at Plataea in central Greece the following year (479 BC).⁹

ALEXANDER THE GREAT (336–323 BC)

Daniel goes on to record the following: "Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases" (11:3). The 20-year-old Alexander succeeded his father, Philip II, as king of Macedon in 336 BC. He is also the "goat" of Daniel's earlier vision recorded in chapter eight ("[S]uddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground" [v. 5]).

The prophecy in Daniel 11:1–35 covers some 370 years. Those who refuse to accept that these detailed predictions were written *before* the events occurred are perhaps uncomfortable with the resulting implication that the book of Daniel could only have originated from God.

THE PTOLEMIES AND SELEUCIDS

PTOLEMY I (323–285 BC) AND SELEUCUS I (311–280 BC)

In 334 BC, at the age of 22, Alexander crossed the Dardanelles with a highly trained, disciplined army numbering less than 40,000. Almost immediately afterward he faced a Persian force at the Granicus River (now Kocabaş). He routed the Persian army, and his audacious victory gave him and his men great confidence. He marched through what is now Turkey, liberating Greek cities from Persian rule. The following year, 333 BC, at Issus (Dörtyol, near Iskenderun), he cut to pieces the armies of the Persian king Darius III. As Daniel 8:7 records, “I saw it [i.e., the goat] attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power.”

In 332 BC Alexander took the Lebanese port city of Tyre after a seven-month siege. Passing by Jerusalem, he annexed Egypt without resistance and founded the major city at the mouth of the Nile that was to bear his name—Alexandria. On the first of October, 331 BC, Darius made his last stand at Gaugamela, near Arbela, in modern-day northern Iraq. The Persian king managed to escape but lost all his treasure, family, and army. Alexander then entered Babylon, and the Persian cities of Susa and Persepolis—the latter being burned to the ground. In July 330 BC, after undergoing a hot pursuit, Darius was murdered by one of his own men at Damghan in modern eastern Iran. Alexander then moved eastward through Parthia to Samarkand in what is now Uzbekistan. Then he crossed the Indus River in modern Pakistan and was hoping to reach the Ganges River when his homesick soldiers refused to go any further.

Alexander’s return was partly on land and partly by sea. The army suffered great hardship. In early June of 323 BC he entered Babylon. Here he fell ill, and after a short illness, perhaps malaria, he died at Babylon on June 13th, only 32 years old. This was precisely what Daniel had seen in his vision of the goat: “[A]t the height of its power the large horn was broken off” (8:8a).

Daniel 11:4 predicts that “his empire will be broken up and parcelled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.” Following Alexander’s death at Babylon, his realms were parcelled up among his generals, an event recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees in the Apocrypha:

The time came when Alexander fell ill, and, realising that he was dying, he summoned his generals, nobles who had been brought up with him from childhood, and divided his empire among them while he was yet alive. At his death he had reigned for twelve years. His generals took over the government, each in his own province, and, when Alexander died, they all assumed royal crowns, and for many years the succession passed to their descendants. They brought untold miseries on the world. (1:5–9)¹⁰

From verse five onward, Daniel 11 focuses on just two of the successor states of Alexander’s empire—the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt and the Seleucid kingdom of Syria; but with only one exception (Egypt in verse eight), these states are not mentioned by name. Rather, the terms “king of the South” and “king of the North” are used for Egypt and Syria, respectively. Initially the Jews living around Jerusalem fell under the rule of the kings of the South—the kings of Egypt, all of whom were called Ptolemy.

Daniel 11:5a begins by focusing on “the king of the South” who “will become strong.” This is Alexander’s general Ptolemy, who founded a dynasty in Egypt named after himself. But later in the verse the focus shifts: “[B]ut one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power” (5b). The reference here is to one of Ptolemy’s commanders, who assumed rule over Syria, which he made his own kingdom, ruling it as Seleucus I.

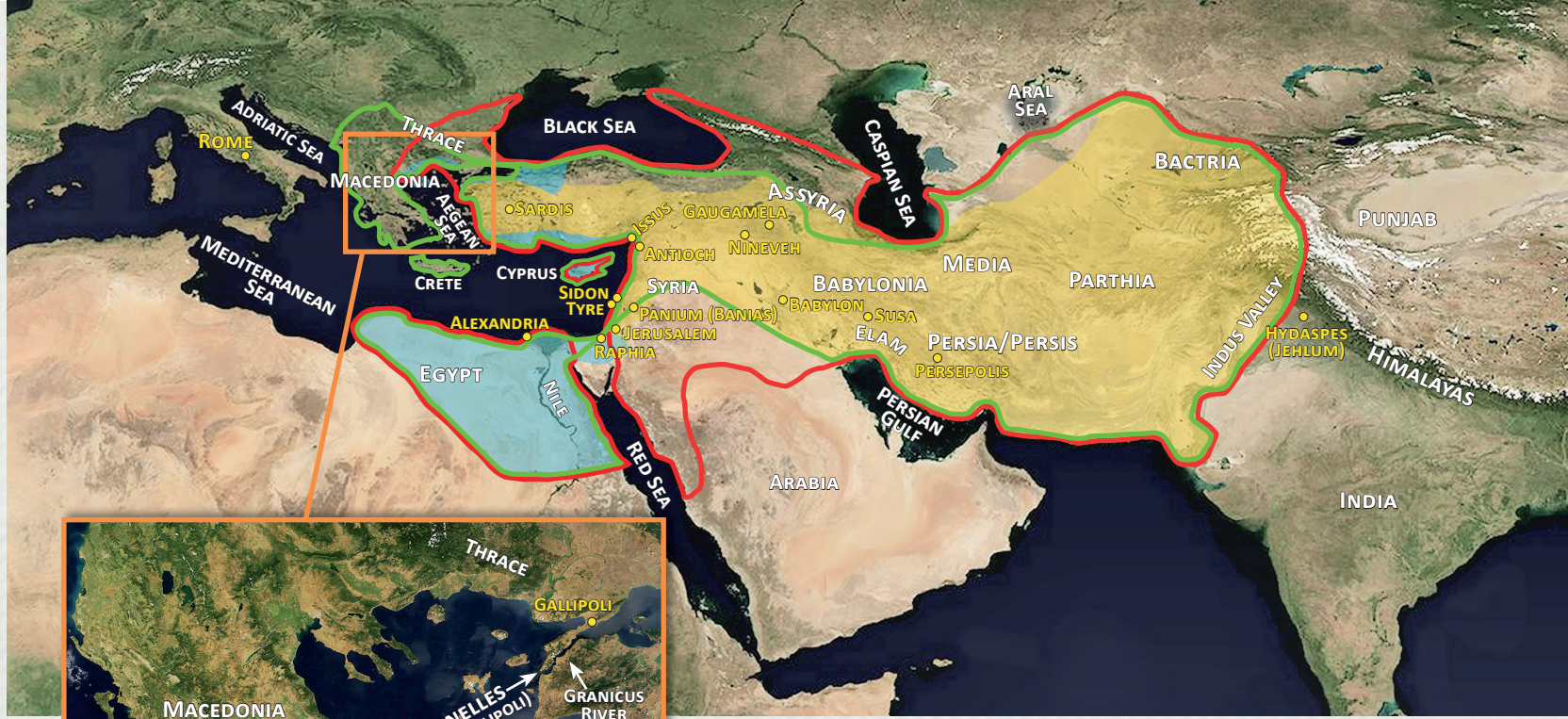
PTOLEMY II (285–246 BC) AND ANTIOCHUS II (280–261 BC)

“After some years” (6a) new kings came to the thrones of both Egypt and Syria. Daniel predicts that “they will become allies” (6b). The kings in question are Ptolemy II¹¹ of Egypt and Antiochus II of Syria. Then Daniel 11 predicts, “The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance” (6c). The daughter in question is Ptolemy II’s daughter, Berenice. However, the king of Syria, Antiochus II, was already married, so he had to divorce his wife Laodice to marry Berenice. Even so, the marriage alliance did not have its intended effect since Laodice exacted revenge by having Berenice murdered and Antiochus poisoned. As Daniel 11:6d predicted, “she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be betrayed, together with her royal escort and her father¹² [i.e., Ptolemy II] and the one who supported her.”

PTOLEMY III (246–221 BC) AND SELEUCUS II (246–226 BC)

Daniel 11 introduces another pair of kings: “One from her [Berenice’s] family line will arise to take her place” (7a).¹³ The new king of Egypt was Ptolemy III, who, according to Daniel, “will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress” (7b). Ptolemy III’s contemporary as king of Syria was Seleucus II, and the fortress mentioned was probably Antioch, the modern-day Turkish city of Antakya near the border with Syria.

Daniel predicted victory for Ptolemy III, who “will fight against them and be victorious” (7c); more specifically, Ptolemy III succeeded in putting Laodice, murderess of his sister, to death. Then “[h]e will also seize their gods, their



— The Persian, or Achaemenid, Empire at its peak, ca. 475 BC. Cyrus the Great is traditionally credited with founding the empire in 550 BC. “Achaemenid” refers to descendants of Achaemenis (or Achaemenes), a seventh-century BC ruler from an Elamite province. The alliance of Medes, Persians, and Assyrians conquered the kingdom of Babylonia and toppled the Chaldean dynasty, entering Babylon the very night Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall.

— The conquests of Alexander the Great before his death in 323 BC.

The Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms following the Wars of the Diadochi and the ongoing conflicts, the Syrian Wars, between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties. The “Diadochi” were six Macedonian generals considered to be the rival successors to the Hellenistic empire of Alexander the Great. The vast area eventually gained by the Seleucids was partitioned into numerous satrapies, or provinces, run by a satrap (governor).

BC	525	522	490	480
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Cambyses II, oldest son of Cyrus the Great, conquers Egypt during the reign of Psamtik III.

Cambyses II dies mysteriously in Syria.

The forces of Darius I meet fierce resistance at Marathon. The Athenians, whom the other Greek city-states refuse to join, defeat the Persians alone.

Xerxes takes up the campaign of his father after ten years of planning. This time the Greek city-states are allied in defense.

Twists on the Age-Old Coup D'état
Rumors swirled that Cambyses II had his half-brother Bardya (or Smerdis) secretly killed to solidify his own power. But then Cambyses II died suddenly. Some sources claim that with Cambyses II out of the way, an opportunistic Mede named Gaumata made a power play for the throne. A few months later Persian prince Darius I plotted a murderous coup against Gaumata, a so-called imposter. Gaumata may have been considered an imposter because he was not an Achaemenid. Or, he may have been somehow actually impersonating the dead Bardya. Some historians speculate that Darius I, in order to get away with killing the very-much-alive and rightful heir, concocted the story of Gaumata impersonating Bardya.

A *hemerodromos* was an elite Greek military courier who traveled on foot over any terrain in all types of weather to scout and deliver messages. As the story goes, runner Pheidippides covered 150 miles between Athens, Sparta, and Marathon in two days during the battle with Darius’s forces. He collapsed and died after running from Marathon to Athens to announce victory over the Persians. The Olympic marathon event honors this courier’s incredible feat.

The Persians advanced through the Dardanelles (known as the “Hellespont” in antiquity), marched overland, and met the Greeks in the famous Battle of Thermopylae at a narrow pass between mountains and ocean cliffs. In a final stand, King Leonidas and 300 Spartan warriors held Xerxes’s forces, allowing the remaining Greek troops to retreat. Today, the pass at Thermopylae (“hot gates”) does not resemble the battlefield of long ago. The area is now a large plain formed by over 2,000 years of continuous mineral deposits from thermal springs.

metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North [Seleucus II] alone” (8).

Seleucus’s attempt to reverse his fortunes was not to prove successful: “Then the king of the North [Seleucus II] will invade the realm of the king of the South [Ptolemy III] but will retreat to his own country” (9).

Daniel 11 records that “[h]is sons [i.e., the sons of Seleucus II—namely, Seleucus III and Antiochus III] will prepare for war and assemble a great army” (10a).

PTOLEMY IV (221–203 BC) AND ANTIOCHUS III (223–187 BC)

The focus then shifts to Antiochus III, who “will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress” (10b). The reference to “his fortress” is to the Egyptian fortress of Raphia on the modern-day border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Such a move would anger the new Egyptian king Ptolemy IV, who “will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North” (11a). This in turn provoked a response from Antiochus III, “who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated [by Ptolemy IV]” (11b). The reference here is to a battle at Raphia that took place on the 22nd of June, 217 BC, and in which Antiochus III was the loser.

It is a battle described in detail by Greek historian Polybius.¹⁴ Both sides were using elephants, but of different species, with Egypt employing African elephants, and Syria using Indian.

The way in which these animals fight is as follows: With their tusks firmly interlocked they shove with all their might, and then, when he has once made him turn and has him in the flank, he gores him with his tusks as a bull does with his horns. Most of Ptolemy [IV]’s elephants, however, declined the combat, as is the habit of African¹⁵ elephants; for unable to stand the smell and trumpeting of the Indian elephants, and terrified, I suppose, also by their great size and strength, they at once turn tail and take to flight before they get near them. This is what happened on the



Ptolemy I portrayed as an Egyptian pharaoh. The Greek Ptolemy rulers primarily stayed ensconced in the Hellenized city of Alexandria, a large, sophisticated seaport founded by Alexander the Great. Although Alexander was celebrated and deified by the Egyptians for driving out the Persians, his Ptolemaic successors did not assimilate into Egyptian culture. Instead, they mingled Greek gods and culture with Egyptian ways and used their own laws to preempt the Egyptian system when it suited. The elites and ruling class remained Greek, as native Egyptians found it difficult to advance as landowners or bureaucrats. However, the Ptolemies invested a great deal in Egypt and were responsible for building and refurbishing many Egyptian temples and tombs as well as for keeping the priestly system intact. Once the Ptolemies were fully in charge, waves of Greeks came to Egypt, as well as Jewish immigrants escaping persecution in Judea by the Seleucids.

previous occasion; and when Ptolemy’s elephants were thus thrown into confusion and driven back on their own lines, Ptolemy’s guard gave way under the pressure of the animals. (Polybius, *The Histories* 5.84.3–7)¹⁶

The losses were reckoned as follows:

His [Antiochus III’s] losses in killed alone had amounted to nearly 10,000 footmen and more than 300 horsemen, while more than 4,000 had been taken prisoners. Three of his elephants perished in the battle and two died of their wounds. Ptolemy [IV] had lost about 1,500 foot soldiers and 700 horsemen, killed; 16 of his elephants were killed and most of them captured. (Polybius, *The Histories* 5.86.5–6)¹⁷

Daniel goes on to record the response of the victorious Ptolemy IV: “When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride¹⁸ and will slaughter many thousands” (12a). Significantly, Polybius also notes that the response of the Egyptian army was one of pride: “The soldiers, highly proud¹⁹ of their victory at Raphia, were no longer disposed to obey orders” (*The Histories* 5.107.3).²⁰ But as Daniel notes, “yet he will not remain triumphant” (12b).

PTOLEMY V (203–181 BC) AND ANTIOCHUS III (223–187 BC)

As one would expect, Antiochus III wanted to avenge his defeat. Accordingly, Daniel records that “the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped” (13).

Daniel continues: “In those times many will rise against the king of the South” (14a). But this time the king of Egypt is different. We are now into the reign of Ptolemy V (203–181 BC).²¹ The last part of the verse—“Those who are violent among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success” (14b)—is obscure; the historical events predicted here are uncertain.²²

ANTIOCHUS III GAINS “THE BEAUTIFUL LAND” (198 BC)

Daniel goes on to outline how Antiochus III gained the upper hand: “Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city” (15a). The “fortified city” is believed to be Sidon on the coast of modern-day Lebanon. Egypt was unable to resist: “The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand” (15b).

It is easy to miss the historical significance of the next verse, which says, “The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will have the power to destroy it” (16).

The significance, however, should not be lost. In 198 BC, following defeat in battle at Baniyas near the Jordan’s headwaters, the Ptolemies of Egypt surrendered their realms in Asia to the Seleucids of Syria, and the Jews in “the Beautiful Land” had new rulers. This was a major news event that contemporary readers of Daniel 11 surely could not have missed. It was a sure sign that events detailed in the climax of the chapter (11:21–35) would not be long in coming. How Jewish fortunes were to change dramatically under this new regime is the subject of the next article.



Paul Lawrence studied Akkadian and Hebrew under Professor Alan Millard at the University of Liverpool, England. After completing a PhD, he went to Istanbul to work with the Bible Society on a translation of the Old Testament into modern Turkish that was published in 2001. He has since joined Wycliff Bible Translators and checks Bible translation in Eurasia.

