

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## God Unfolds History before it is History

*Also I in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I, stood to confirm and to strengthen him. And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.* (Daniel 11:1-4)

Daniel had been fasting for 3 weeks when an angelic messenger arrived to address his concerns. What was the concern? It was for the future of Judah, his people. They have been in captivity for almost 70 years. During his captivity, Daniel had aged from his teenage years to being now over 80 years old. As would be quite natural, his thoughts drifted from his history in Babylon and the captivity of Judah to what the future may hold. God had heard Daniel's words, just the same as he hears ours today! The Heavenly Father then dispatched the angel to remind Daniel of the visions that had been given to him on several other occasions.

It wasn't a vision of great spiritual truth, or of heaven, or even of God – instead it was a vision, a prophecy, of world events. Why would God reveal future worldly events to Daniel? Of course, we can only speculate about the answer to such a question, for who can know the mind of God? His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways higher than our ways. They are past finding out. But we do know that Daniel's thoughts were toward the future of his people, that Daniel has been faithful to God even during almost 70 years of captivity, and that God honors His people who seek Him. Thus, when Daniel's thoughts turned to the future, even as his own days on earth were coming to a close, God chose to reveal 2 general events: (1) the continual conflict which shall center on the Jews and the promised land, and (2) the eventual victory of all of God's chosen people in spite of that conflict.

The specific events and fulfillment of the vision/prophecy given to Daniel can be either boring or exciting, depending on a person's reason for studying it. If one is just reading without a real desire to understand, then the boredom factor will set in. But if one desires to understand that God knows the end from the beginning, that nothing will surprise Him, and that He can and will be victorious in His own timing,

then the study can be quite invigorating, uplifting, and encouraging!

The vision/prophecy of Chapter 11 begins with the Medo-Persian Empire. By this time the Babylonian empire has come and gone. The golden head of Babylon has been decapitated and the silver breast/arms of the Media/Persia empire are reigning. Soon they will give way to the brass belly/thighs of the Grecian empire, and then eventually to the iron/clay legs & feet of Rome. What is astounding really is that both the Medo-Persian Empire and the Grecian empire are dispensed with so quickly. By verse 5, the stage is set for the break-up and division of the Grecian empire established by none other than Alexander the Great into 4 separate kingdoms.

According to the angelic messenger, there are going to be 4 kings of Persia, of which the 4<sup>th</sup> will be far more wealthy and aggressive than the other three. These 4 kings are known to us both from an historical perspective as well as in scripture. They are as follows:

The 1<sup>st</sup> one was Cambyses, known in scripture to be Ahasuerus (which actually is a title rather than a name). He is mentioned in Ezra 4:6. At that time, the Jews, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, had been rebuilding the temple in the city of Jerusalem. In the beginning of his reign (i.e. around 529 BC), their enemies wrote "an accusation" against them to King Ahasuerus Cambyses. Evidently nothing came of this false accusation.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> was Gomates, known in scripture as Artaxerxes. His reign began around 522 BC, but lasted less than a year. He is mentioned in Ezra 4:7-23, when the enemies of Judah ceased on the opportunity to befriend this usurper and again wrote a letter of accusation. This time, however, the letter had its intended effect. The letter accused the Jews of rebellion and plotting to declare their independence. In response, Artaxerxes commanded that the rebuilding of the temple and of Jerusalem cease, a condition

which continued for about 2 years when Darius allowed it to begin again.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> king referred to in the vision/prophecy given to Daniel was Darius I. His reign began around 521 BC and lasted for 35 years. He was also known as Hystaspes, and he is the Darius referred to in Ezra 4:24. Darius I allowed the rebuilding of the temple and of Jerusalem to continue after it was stopped under Artaxerxes. Refer to Ezra chapters 5 & 6 for this history.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and most prevalent king of Persia about which Daniel was told was Xerxes, the son of Darius I. Like Cambyses, he was also known as King Ahasuerus, and he is the king we read about in the book of Esther. He was on the throne for 21 years, from BC 468-465, and treated the Jews favorably (see Ezra chapter 7). However, during his reign he “stir[red] up all against the realm of Grecia” which he then unsuccessfully attempted to invade. (It was a little while after this attempt that the events of Esther occurred.) His actions against the Greeks led to them being “stirred up” which set the stage for a warrior to arise out of Greece years later.

That warrior is known as Alexander the Great, and he ruled in Greece from BC 336-323. He was the “mighty king” referred to in Daniel 11:3, and he did “rule with great dominion” and did “according to his will”, at least for awhile. As we know, the world may think highly of someone, and that person may also think highly of themselves, but God has a way of humbling the prideful. Such was the case with Alexander “the Great.” He ruled only 13 years, and within 15 years of his death his entire family was extinct. In the vision given to Daniel, Alexander is given only a brief mention, and we are quickly told that when he “shall stand up” (i.e. become arrogant/prideful), then “his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided” in 4 directions and shall not be given to his posterity. We will tell you about those 4 in our next writing.

This is a lot of historical information, but it is the fulfillment of the vision given to Daniel. The story may be somewhat interesting (or maybe not!), but what can we glean from it? I would encourage us to at least remember the following points:

1. God is sovereign, even in the “kingdoms” of men (see Proverbs 21:1). Don’t overly despair of any worldly government.
2. God not only knows the past and present, but also the future, including yours! Trust him to guide you.
3. Even though like Daniel we may not be in the situation we would want, God hears us and cares for us and talks with us.

Elder Mike Rodgers, San Antonio, Texas

I appreciate Elder Rodgers’ research and clear presentation of the historical background of this section of Daniel’s writings. The miracle of God’s omniscience, His all-knowing attribute, is not compromised by time, past, present, or future. God knows the future as fully as He knows the past. This fact stands out when we realize that Daniel wrote his prophecy around or before five hundred B. C. Yet the various civil powers that rose and fell in this prophecy precisely as God revealed them to Daniel unfolded over the next five hundred years. God gave Daniel such incredible details of these world empires centuries before they came to exist, particularly in the case of Greece and Rome.

How does God’s omniscience impact you and me? It reminds us that we cannot keep anything about us secret from God. Remember those deep secret thoughts you had this week? God knew every one of them, even before you had them. He didn’t cause you to have them. He didn’t make you think those sinful things, but He knew all about them. This truth should serve as a powerful incentive for all of us to “clean up” our minds and keep our focus on godly things—to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, not conformed to this world. (Romans 12:1-2) In a powerful psalm David makes this point.

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. (Psalm 139:1-12)

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Worship service each Sunday                    10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder                                 Pastor