

THE WARS OF THE PTOLEMIES AND THE SELEUCIDAE

CHAPTER 11

In taking up the first part of this chapter, I want to impress upon you again the words of the apostle Paul, several times already alluded to in these lectures, that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." For in seeking to expand this particular portion, I shall be obliged to occupy you, almost entirely, with a running historical outline of events, covering a period of something like 200 years, in connection with the wars that desolated the land of Palestine after the death of Alexander the Great. This may seem to some very dry and unspiritual; but the subject, if it is to be made at all lucid and plain, seems to me to demand the kind of treatment I purpose giving it. And I feel sure, if carefully noted, it will give many to see, as never before, the absolute unerring precision of God's holy word.

We have here set forth for our learning a record that was first made in heaven; and it must be that God intended us to study it, and to understand it, or He would not have included it in the volume of Scripture. And for this we must take some pains; for it is a portion of the Word which we cannot clearly understand unless we take the trouble to investigate a little, and see how it has been fulfilled. Now if there are those who decry the study of historical and other subjects in connection with the word of God, I would remind such again of the pregnant sentence that "All history is His story." And surely the man of God can lose nothing but gain much, by observing how remarkably history confirms prophecy, and thus sets its seal upon the divine inspiration of the Bible. The Holy Spirit never condemns our acquiring the knowledge of this world. That which is set aside as untrustworthy, fruitful only of strife, speculation, and vain wrangling, is the "wisdom" of this world. That is, we are warned against human philosophy, against the reasoning of the human mind Uninstructed by, and unopened to, divine illumination; but we are not warned against the acquisition of true knowledge, if we couple with it the fear of God and the love of the Spirit.

God does not put a premium upon ignorance. Some Christians are most short-sighted, narrow-minded and bigoted; intolerant of the opinions of others; or, in fact, of anything outside their own range of vision. Undoubtedly the best cure for this very unchrist-like spirit, is to be more in the company of the blessed Lord Himself; but to this may well be added a helpful, broadening knowledge of facts and events, especially in connection with Scripture.

The angel who had appeared to Daniel tells him that in the first year of Darius the Mede, after Babylon's overthrow, he had stood to strengthen him. In the second verse, he begins, as it were, to unroll the scroll of the Scripture of truth. "Behold," he says, "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" (ver. 2). We saw in chapter ten that this vision was given to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus. The three kings who were to follow were; first, his son Cambyses, who was succeeded, not by his own son Smerdis but by a wretched impostor generally called Pseudo-Smerdis. He looked very much like the son of Cambyses, and by trickery, had himself proclaimed emperor, and reigned in the name of Smerdis. Darius Hystaspes succeeded him, and he, in his turn was succeeded by Xerxes the Great. This Xerxes was not the last king of Persia, nor is it so stated here; though at first sight it might seem to be

implied. But he was the fourth, and as prophesied, " far richer than they all." He stirred up Asia against the realm Of Grecia, and with an immense army of over two million and a half (if we can trust the computation of the historians of those days), crossed the Hellespont and invaded Greece. But the very size of his army defeated his own purpose, and his hosts were driven back into Asia. The Grecians never forgave this insult to their race, and nursed the desire for vengeance until the days of Alexander the Great, who is the " mighty king " referred to in verse three.

There is quite an interval between verses four and five, which is passed over in silence in order to connect the invasion of Alexander with the effort of Xerxes to conquer Greece. After Alexander had established his authority over all Greece, he determined to pass over into Asia with the special object of wiping out the disgrace referred to. He met the forces of Darius Codomanus, utterly defeated them, and laid hold of all the Persian dominion, but passed away himself, very shortly afterwards, in a drunken revel. He died in the very prime of his life, a wretched victim of ill living. Thus was fulfilled the word, " And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken." The verse goes on to tell us that it " 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 besides those." Now all this was fulfilled to the letter. Alexander had two sons, Hercules and Alexander, but both were slain, one before, and the other after his death. His kingdom was then divided, as God had said it should be. After the battle of Ipsus, which took place in B. C. 301, his dominions were parceled out, as we have already seen in chapters seven and eight, among four of his generals. From this point on, our chapter occupies us only with the dominions and the doings of two of them and their successors, namely; Ptolemy Lagus, ruler of Egypt; and Seleucas, Satrap of Syria. Thus, the great world-empire that Alexander had established at such a tremendous cost was broken into warring fragments, none of which ever again attained the splendor or power of his kingdom.

From verse five to thirty-five we have the wars of the Seleucidse and the Ptolemies for about two centuries. These rulers are called respectively the King of the North and the King of the South, the directions having to do of course with the land of Palestine, which in God's eye is the center of the earth. " When the Most-High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance " (Deut. 32: 8, 9).

The reason that the other two kingdoms do not here appear upon the page of prophecy is thus made clear. The angel told Daniel he was going to show him what should befall his people; and those two kingdoms had no place in connection with Israel or their land.

It will almost be necessary to take up what we are now to have before us verse by verse; and I pray God that as we do so, it may impress every heart with the absolute perfection of the Holy Scriptures, and their correctness down to the smallest detail. The King of the South mentioned in verse five was Ptolemy Lagus. The expression " one of his princes " may either refer to the fact that Ptolemy was one of Alexander's princes, or, as others judge more likely, that Seleucas Nicator was in the beginning, subject to Ptolemy, who was strong above him, and had the greatest dominion of the four into which the empire had been divided. But upon the death of Lagus, when Ptolemy Soter succeeded him, conditions were reversed. The dominion of Seleucas

was enlarged by the annexation of Babylon, Media, and the surrounding nations. He threw off his allegiance to Egypt, and ruled independently. Naturally, this brought about a state of warfare and enmity between the two kingdoms; but, as we read in verse six, "in the end of years they shalt join themselves together." This was in the reign of Nicator's grandson, Antiochus Theos. In his days a treaty of peace was arranged with Ptolemy Philadelpia, which was confirmed by the king's daughter of the South, Berenice, being given in marriage to Antiochus, who divorced his own wife Laodice for this purpose. But God had declared that she "shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times." All this was fulfilled as predicted. Laodice managed to stir up her friends against the king; and as a result, Berenice and all her attendants were put to death. Antiochus then reinstated his divorced queen, who shortly afterwards poisoned him and had her son Seleucas Callinicus crowned in his stead.

"Out of a branch of the roots" of Berenice, that is from her family, one was to stand up in his place for office and come with an army into the fortress of the King of the North, and prevail against him (ver. 7). This refers to her brother, Ptolemy Euergetes, who, with a mighty army, forced his way across the land of Palestine, spreading desolation everywhere, actuated by the desire to avenge the murder of his sister, and to wipe out the dishonor inflicted on Egypt. He was everywhere successful, utterly defeating Callinicus and reaping an immense spoil. But tidings of a sedition in Egypt caused him to hasten back, carrying with him an immense number of captives with "their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold." He did not return to Syria, and Callinicus himself died shortly afterwards by a fall from his horse. Ptolemy reigned four years longer, thus continuing "more years than the King of the North."

In the tenth verse the sons of Callinicus are contemplated. These are known in history as Seleucus Ceraunus and Antiochus the Great. They assembled a great force to inflict retribution upon the Egyptians. But Ceraunus died in less than two years, leaving his brother sole ruler. He was one of the most notable kings of those days, and lost no time in pressing an Egyptian invasion. He led an army of seventy-five thousand against the hereditary foes of his house. But he proved no match for the indolent and despised King of the South, Ptolemy Philopator, who could barely be dragged away from his pleasures and follies to lead an army against the invaders. At the battle of Raphia, he defeated Antiochus with great slaughter, reconquered all that had been wrested from him, put Antiochus under tribute, and returned to Egypt crowned with military glory. But like another Alexander, he then gave himself up to out-and-out wickedness and licentiousness, and upon a revolt soon after occurring in Syria, concluded an ignoble peace with Antiochus, because too depraved and indolent to follow up his victories. Upon his death, Egypt sank lower than it had been for years. All this we have briefly sketched in verses eleven and twelve.

Upon the succession of his son Ptolemy Epiphanes, a mere child, to the throne, Antiochus the Great formed an alliance with Philip the Third of Macedon, and sought also to rally the Jews to his standard. The faithful among them refused to serve in his army, but the apostates, called in verse fourteen, "the robbers of thy people," readily entered into covenant with him and proved a very great help on a number of occasions. With his united armies he besieged the Egyptian garrison left in Jerusalem, and put it to the sword. He defeated Scopias the Egyptian general at Paneas, who fled to Sidon, a fenced city, but was there destroyed. The Egyptian armies, sent for

the deliverance of Paneas, were likewise routed, and Antiochus found himself everywhere supreme. Upon his return from the Egyptian wars, he entered into " the glorious land," that is Palestine, where, because of the help rendered by his Jewish troops, he bestowed upon the people many evidences of his favor. The last clause of verse sixteen should read, " which by his hand shall be perfected." It refers undoubtedly to the fact that in his time Palestine became a more peaceful and fruitful country than it had been for half a century.

Verse seventeen was fulfilled in his effort to undermine the remaining influence and power of Ptolemy Epiphanes by giving him his daughter Cleopatra to wife, having previously charged her that she should, after her marriage, in everything act for her father's interests. But it was written, " she shall not stand on his side, neither be for him." Cleopatra proved a faithful wife to Epiphanes, supporting him against her father, who was naturally much disappointed that his well-laid plans had completely miscarried.

He determined now to extend the glory of his dominions by conquering Greece. The isles of the Aegean Sea were first subjugated to his sway; and he then crossed over with his armies into Greece. But now a most unlooked-for event took place. The Iron Kingdom, destined to be the fourth and last upon earth, ere the establishment of the kingdom of the Son of Man, was at this time just beginning to make its presence felt. The Grecians had entered into an alliance, offensive and defensive, with the Romans; and so, they at once notified their powerful allies of the danger to which they were exposed. The senate commissioned Lucius Scipio Asiaticus to go to their relief with an army of tried warriors. He met Antiochus in battle and utterly defeated him, and on the most ignominious terms sent him back to his home. Scipio is undoubtedly the prince, or as some render it, captain, referred to in verse eighteen. Thus Antiochus, humbled and in deep distress, turned his face toward the fort of his own land: " but, according to the writing of the Scripture of truth, he was to stumble and fall and not be found. This he did, for in his need and desperation, attempting with a band of soldiers to plunder the temple of Jupiter at Elymais, he and his warriors were slain by the infuriated populace, incensed at what they considered an act of sacrilege of the gravest nature.

In verse twenty we read, " Then shall stand up in his estate one that causeth an exactor to pass over (margin), in the glory of the kingdom, but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle." This was the son of Antiochus, Seleucus Philopator, who in desperate need of money owing to the wretched condition in which his father had left the kingdom, sent Heliodorus to plunder the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem. Upon his return with the booty, he treacherously assassinated his master after he had reigned twelve years, a " few days " as compared with the long reign of Antiochus which extended to nearly forty years.

From the twenty-first verse to the end of the thirty-fifth, we have before us the fearful monster who has well been called the " Antichrist of the Old Testament," because of his unfailing enmity to the people and worship of Jehovah. He is the same as the one of whom we have already studied in the eighth chapter, the infamous and blasphemous " Little Horn" that sprang out of one of the four horns upon the head of the Grecian goat. His name is execrated to this day by all Jews in every land. He was called by his fawning courtiers Antiochus Epiphanes, that is, the splendid or magnificent; but some wag of his day changed one letter of his name and called him Antiochus Epimanes, that is, the mad man; because of his wild pranks and almost insane follies and brutalities. He was stirred with such hatred against the Jews and

their religion, that there was no atrocity too great for this wretched king to perpetrate. He is well described as a vile person, who came in peaceably, and obtained the kingdom by flatteries. At the beginning, he made a league both with the Jews and with Ptolemy Philometer, but proved false to each, as God had declared he would (vers. 22 to 24). "The prince of the covenant" in Israel was, I judge, a title given here to the high priest. It is a notorious fact that Epiphanes degraded the office to the last degree, selling the high priesthood to the vilest man to be found among the apostate part of the people.

In accordance with verse twenty-five, he "stirred up his power and his courage against the King of the South with a great army;" and the King of the South, Philometer, came against him to battle "with a very great and mighty army," but he was unable to stand because of devices forecasted against him, namely, through the treachery of his own sons and household servants who betrayed him to Antiochus, thus fulfilling verse twenty-six; "Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow, and many shall fall down slain." Professing great magnanimity, Antiochus proposed a truce, and the two kings met "at one table." There they made promises which they never intended to keep, thus "speaking lies" (ver. 27).

Angered by the exultation of the Jews who had heard that he had been slain in Egypt, Antiochus marched his armies against Jerusalem, which he caused to pass through all the horrors of a siege and sack, sparing neither age, sex, nor condition. In their desperation the Jews appealed to the Romans, who had before interfered on behalf of the Grecians, and requested their assistance in what was to them a life and death struggle for their religion and their liberty. Marching against the Maccabees, Antiochus was met by Popilius Loenus and the other Roman envoys at the head of an army. Popilius demanded that Antiochus at once cease his interference with the Jews, and bind himself to accept the decree of the Roman senate, keep the peace, and acknowledge Rome's authority. Epiphanes asked for time to consider the terms proposed for his acceptance. But Popilius with his sword or staff at once drew a circle around Antiochus and demanded that he decide before he stepped out of the ring. Having no alternative, he submitted, evidently with no intention of keeping the pledges he made. The "ships of Chittim," of verse 30, refer doubtless to the Roman galleys sent in response to the pitiful plea of the Jews.

After the Romans had gone, Antiochus forswore his allegiance and turned once more upon the devoted sons of Israel, "having indignation against the holy covenant," Certain traitorous Jews, here described as "them that forsake the holy covenant," formed a league with him and betrayed their own compatriots to the tyrant who hated them. He set up a statue of Jupiter Olympus, whom he identified with himself, in the temple at Jerusalem; sacrificed a sow upon the altar, and put a stop to the oblations to Jehovah, declaring that he alone should be an object of worship. The faithful of Judah, horrified beyond measure at his unspeakable sacrilege, took up arms against him, led by the heroic family of the Maccabees, and were slaughtered by thousands.

This was the placing of "the abomination that maketh desolate," predicted in verse 31, in connection with the pollution of the sanctuary and the taking away of the daily sacrifice.

The next chapter speaks of another abomination of desolation, which our Lord Jesus Christ, in Matthew, chapter 24, declared was still future, when He- was upon earth. Of that abomination we shall read in the last chapter. The 2300 days of chapter 8 commenced with this act of desecration by Antiochus. At the end of that period, the sanctuary was cleansed, and sacrifices to Jehovah re-instituted.

Verses 32 to 35 describe the conditions prevailing among the Jews in that awful time of suffering, never to be paralleled until the great tribulation of the last days. In fact, they picture the whole history of the people of Judah from the time when they were joined to the Roman empire right on to the time of the end, or the 70th week of which we have already spoken.

Between verses 35 and 36 there is an interval of many centuries. The history of the Kings of the North and South is now closed, and another dreadful character, of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was merely a forerunner, or type, is at once introduced; the willful king, the great personal Antichrist of the last days. Of him our next lecture will treat.

And now, in concluding this historical outline of the wars of the Kings of the North and the South, I would press upon each one, that prophecy is indeed but history prewritten, and in this instance, even in the minutest details, history is seen to be prophecy fulfilled. Terrible indeed is the presumption of any, who with such a record in their hands refuse to heed its solemn lessons, and deliberately reject the testimony of the inspired word of God. It seems to me that even the natural mind, if at all unbiased and willing to learn, must be impressed by this remarkable correspondence between history and prophecy, leading any truly honest soul to exclaim, "God spake all these words!"

And remember that He who spake these words is the God who has inspired all Scripture, and who will hold all men responsible to accept the testimony He gives them, upon pain of everlasting banishment from His holy presence if they persist in rebelling against His authority and refusing His word. That Word is given you now to warn you of your danger and point the way to salvation. That Word will be opened on the day of judgment; and if you appear there unsaved, you must be judged according to what is there written. And just as in the ages to come, when the redeemed look back over their path way here on earth, they shall exclaim, like Israel in the land of Canaan, " There, hath not failed one word of all His good promise;" so will each lost soul cry out in bitter anguish, " Not one word has failed of all that God declared in regard to the doom of the impenitent and the Christ rejecter! "

Oh, how important, then, that you have to do with the God who gave you the Bible, now, on the ground of the atoning work of His blessed Son, that you should know Him as your own personal Saviour. Would that you might be aroused by these addresses, you who have no hope and are without God in the world, to see the danger in which you stand, and your need of turning to Him, who once in infinite grace gave Himself for our sins on Calvary's cross of shame.

The Maccabees, in the days of Antiochus, were called the hammers of God, and God has asked, " Is not My word like a fire and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? " Preaching the gospel is just like hammering away at hard hearts. Alas, that there is so little response! I have heard of a gentleman, a traveling man, who used to go to a town where there were many great factories and foundries. In that town scores of immense steel hammers were pounding away continuously. The noise was deafening, and this gentleman of whom I speak, found it impossible to sleep in that town, for there was no cessation of the noise day or night. But the people of the town were so thoroughly used to it that they could sleep on through it all. But one night something went wrong with the power plant, and all the hammers stopped. At once all the town woke up. What wakened them? It was the unusual quiet and stillness succeeding the years of deafening sound. Beloved

friends, the day has now drawn very near when God's hammers shall all cease their pounding. Soon gospel days will have ended, preaching the message of love and grace which you have refused so long will have ceased; and then, ah then! there will indeed be a great awakening, an awakening when it is too late to be saved; when the great men and the chief captains and the mighty men, and every bondman and every free man will hide themselves in the dens and in caves of the mountains and will cry to the rocks, " Fall on us," and to the hills, " Cove? us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? "

But no hiding place will avail in that day, for God will then be dealing no longer in grace, but in stern intrinsic justice with those who have not received the love of the truth that they might be saved. Their heart-rending cry will be, " The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and I am not saved."

O dear unsaved one. weigh these things well, and trifle no longer, with the question of the eternal destiny of your precious soul still unsettled. If you continue to do despite to the Spirit of grace, " what wilt thou say when He shalt punish thee?"