

FROM ROME TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Thus far, the angel has taken us step by step in world history down to the time of the crucifixion of Christ, the Prince of the covenant. This came near the close of the “seventy weeks,” or 490 years of chapter 9.

Verses 23: “And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people.”

Verse 23 should begin a new paragraph in our Bibles, for the angel is now taking us on another journey, this time bringing us down to the final era of the work of God on earth and the everlasting triumph of His church. But he backtracks to the time when the Jewish nation made a covenant with the Romans (“after the league made with him”), and shows us that from the time that Rome assumed the protection of Judea, she began to develop from a small army, in a clever way.

Daniel 11:24: “He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers’ fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time.”

This “covenant” with the Jews was made in 161 B.C., before the days of Rome’s glory. From that time, Rome’s rise to undisputed world leadership was indeed a miracle. Whereas most kingdoms are established by war and conquest, various kings bequeathed their crowns to the Romans in peace and by choice. Distant nations learned of the wisdom and justice of the Romans, and invited their protection. Rome further did what no nation had ever previously done: divided the taxes and “spoil” among its conquered or subjugated peoples. It was an attempt at just and benevolent government for the good of all people. (It was later that Rome became cruel.)

The “strong hold” is doubtless the capital city of Rome, from which “he” will prosper in war and craft as long as heaven permits. The “time” is considered by some to be a year of prophetic time in symbol, that is, 360 years literally (see notes on chapter 7:25).

Daniel 11:25. “And he shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the

south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand: for they shall forecast devices against him.”

The angel is still going back to events following the league made with the Jews in 161 B.C. We come to the war between Rome and “the king of the south,” or Egypt. Mark Antony and Augustus Caesar were contending for the sole rulership of Rome. Antony had entrenched himself in Egypt, where he had yielded himself captive to the lustful appeal of Egypt’s queen Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra together assembled a fleet of warships. The kings of Thrace and Asia Minor joined them against Caesar Augustus and the Roman soldiers. Wealth, numbers, and power were on their side. But the inspired prophecy declared that “the king of the south shall not stand.” At the most important part of the sea battle off Actium on September 2, 31 B.C., Cleopatra suddenly became frightened and sailed away in her ship. Antony, foolishly infatuated with her, followed, and thus abandoned the victory to Augustus Caesar.

Daniel 26: “Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow; and many shall fall down slain.”

Those “who fed of the portion” of Antony’s “meat,” the land armies and generals who were fighting on his side, became disgusted with what he had done, went over to join the armies of Caesar. In the end, no one remained loyal to the foolish Antony—even Cleopatra betrayed him. He took his own life in despair.

Daniel 11:27: “And both these kings’ hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed.”

These two, Antony and Caesar, had professed to be loyal friends, but inwardly were enemies contending for the throne. In order to cement their friendship, Antony had married Caesar’s sister. But none of their attempts to unite prospered.

Daniel 11:28: “Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits, and return to his own land.”

We shall avoid confusion if we remember that the “king” mentioned in these verses does not necessarily refer to a single individual, but to a kingdom or a power prominent in history. Caesar returned to Rome with great glory and much booty from his conquest, his triumphal procession requiring three days to pass.

We learn that “his heart [that of Rome] shall be against the holy

covenant.” Written for the Jews, this describes how the Romans were against them, to whom they understood He had made a “holy covenant.” The Roman general Titus besieged the city of Jerusalem for five months. So terrible was the famine that some of the Jewish women ate their own children. This was in fulfillment of Moses’ warning that should the people of God refuse to hear the greatest of all prophets, Jesus Himself when He should come, they would be left without His guidance and protection. “Thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee” (Deuteronomy 28:49-58). So terrible is the result that comes upon a people who reject the only Savior of the world! In 70 A.D. Titus completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and their magnificent Temple.

Daniel 29, 30: At the time appointed he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter.”

But now we come to the time when Rome was weakened and corrupted. The move of the capital to Constantinople preceded the final break-up and conquest of the Roman Empire by the barbarians of Africa and Europe in 476 A.D. (The legs of iron of Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic image representing the pagan empire of Rome now give place to the divided kingdoms of Europe symbolized by the feet of iron and clay.)

Daniel 11:30: “For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.”

Foremost among the barbarian nations that wrecked the Roman Empire were the Vandals of northern Africa. Their capital was the city of Carthage on the coast of the Mediterranean. (In the Hebrew language, the name “Chittim” had reference to all the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean.) The Vandals fought against the Empire and pillaged Rome with their numerous ships which set sail from Carthage. Rome was “grieved.” The glory of the pagan Roman Empire was extinguished.

Now began another form of activity. The “little horn” power which we met in 7:21-25, comes on stage again. The Vandals who conquered Rome, together with two other tribes, the Heruli and the Ostrogoths, opposed the rising power of the papacy. These three kingdoms were brought to our notice in chapter 7 as three of the “ten kingdoms” of

the fourth beast, Rome. They were to be as horns plucked up by the roots by the “little horn,” the papacy.

Justinian, the Roman emperor, longed to conquer Carthage and the Vandals as punishment for their raids against Rome. But he feared to start, for Rome’s army was not as strong as formerly. The needed encouragement was supplied by the Roman Catholic bishop who admonished him to conquer the Vandals because they were considered “enemies of Christ.”

Thus the Roman emperor began to “give heed to those who forsake the holy covenant” (RSV). The bishops had indeed forsaken the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was for the purpose of conquering the Vandals and their friends that the emperor Justinian made his famous decree exalting the bishop of Rome to be the “head of the church” and the “corrector of heretics.” Thus was born the papacy in 538 A.D., in remarkable fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. The world began to enter its midnight—the noontide of the papacy.

Daniel 11:31: “And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily *sacrifice*, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.”

Have you ever watched events take place on a stage at night where a spotlight shines on the different players or actors who at that moment are the center of attention? Daniel 11 is the stage throughout the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14 and on into the “time of the end.” Verse by verse, the spotlight of inspired prophecy picks out for us the key power that is at that particular time the focus of God’s revelation. The key is its special relation to His work on earth.

Now we pass from pagan Rome to papal Rome. This verse takes us back to chapter 8:11, 12, where we read of “the little horn” taking up within itself “the daily” and “casting down truth to the ground.” This verse therefore explains 8:11-13. The capital of the empire of Rome has now been removed to Constantinople (present day Istanbul), and the bishop of Rome is left as the most important person in the West. We now see the papacy taking the spotlight of prophetic attention. It is absorbing something significant, taking it up within itself paganism—the “continual in transgression.”

The Hebrew word “arms” means military might employed to strengthen the papacy and make it supreme. “The sanctuary of strength” likewise means a dedicated place of *military* might. (In the Hebrew, the word is *miqdash*, a different word than *qodesh* in Daniel

8:14 which can mean only God's true sanctuary. (In Isaiah 16:12 and Ezekiel 28:18 we find that *miqdash* can mean Satan's, or a pagan, sanctuary.) Some scholars see this "sanctuary of strength" as the base or home of paganism, that is, the city of Rome that was the center of world paganism, sacked in 410 A.D. The Hebrew term here cannot fit any designation of God's sanctuary in heaven.

As we saw in Daniel 8, the word "sacrifice" is not part of the original text which says "the continual *in transgression*" (8:12). Therefore it refers to the continual scourge of paganism that was such a trial to God's people in exile in Babylon, and continuing on later to the time of the papacy which proved to become something even worse. The *chazon* vision in chapter 8 presented as two twin evils "the continual in transgression" and "the transgression of desolation," the latter as the worse.

In "the vision" (*chazon*) of Daniel 8:11-13, the prophet saw paganism being lifted up, or incorporated, or absorbed into "the little horn," the papacy. This was a unique development in world history. Several authorities comment more wisely than they possibly knew:

"The more Christianity [that is, Roman Catholicism] supplanted the heathen worship, the more did it absorb the elements of paganism."¹

"While Protestants have traditionally held to the idea of a syncretized church to help justify their existence, recent scholarship has demonstrated that the paganism of late antiquity did not die out after the fourth century, but rather attached itself to the church, reshaping it . . . [in] the church's assimilation of pagan forms and Europe's subsequent plunge into the night."²

"Paganism is a perpetual eclipse of Divine Grace. Many Christians live within the penumbra of this baleful eclipse."³

But here in chapter 11:31 we see a different Hebrew verb used. Paganism is not said to be absorbed in the little horn as in chapter 8, but "taken away" politically and militarily, so that no earthly power could stand against the papacy. The professed followers of Christ "forsook the holy covenant" (verse 30) by which God had promised to be their power or support, and turned to obtain it from the civil

¹ *The History of the World*, Word Locke & Co. (London), page 167; quoted by Ernest H. J. Steed in *Two Be One* (Logos International, 1978), p. 118.

² Arthur W. Hunt, III, *The Vanishing Word, The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), p. 57.

³ Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Galilean Gospel* (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1882), p. 96.

government, the “arms” of generals and captains of armies. This prepared the way for setting up “the abomination that maketh desolate,” something that proved worse than the “continual in transgression.”

The vision God gave to Daniel describes the religion of the papacy as paganism dressed in the garments of Christ. “He that heareth My word,” said Jesus, “and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life. He is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). This faith of Jesus is the opposite of the “abomination that maketh desolate.”

Daniel 11:32: “And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.”

Good things become “corrupt” when they spoil. The faith of Jesus was the most beautiful and powerful truth the world had seen. In Christ’s day (as in ours) even His enemies could “find no fault in Him.” Satan learned not to try to oppose Christ openly. He must “corrupt” Christianity from within. The papacy became his agency.

In what way did he “do wickedly”? There were steps in apostasy:

1. Early church “fathers” began to interpret the Bible according to pagan thought. Probably the first Christian teaching to be so corrupted was the doctrine of love which is *agape* in the New Testament Greek language. The Hellenistic idea of *eros* gradually infiltrated *agape* in the minds of the people. This paralleled the absorption of the doctrine of natural immortality into the church.

2. Next, in order to win more “converts,” the teachings of the Bible were altered to accommodate idol veneration introduced in violation of the second of the ten commandments. In order to excuse this sin, the second was dropped by the Roman church, and the tenth was divided into two.

3. The true Sabbath, the memorial of God’s creation, was gradually set aside, and the first day of the week, dedicated to the worship of the sun by the ancient pagans, was exalted in its place. Thus the seal of the authority of the God of heaven was set aside.

4. The Bible was kept from the common people. It was considered so difficult that only the priests and clergy could interpret it. Thus the voice of the Holy Spirit was silenced.

5. Due to the false teaching that the dead are still alive, the way was opened for the veneration of the virgin Mary and the “saints,” thus people were led to look away from Christ in whom alone we can have

forgiveness, to the merits of sinful man himself. (This has grown into contemporary efforts to make Mary the co-redemptrix.)

6. The pope and the priests assumed the right to forgive sins, which only Christ can do. People were led to trust in their own works for salvation instead of trusting only the righteousness and salvation given by the Son of God.

7. Religious liberty was taken away. Men were forced, under pain of imprisonment, torture, and death, to profess a faith they could not believe in their hearts. People were martyred during the Dark Ages simply because they dared to confess Christ as their only Savior, rather than yield homage to the mystery of iniquity.

But there were always some here and there who did “know their God.” The Lord Jesus has always had those in every country and in every generation who serve Him faithfully. Among those who stoutly resisted these false teachings were the Waldenses hiding in the Piedmont Alps. They helped to preserve for us the light of the knowledge of God. They were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation. They kept alive the faith in the ministry of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. They bled and died that we today might enjoy religious liberty, and that we might have all the glorious light of Christ’s truth. In our day now there are thousands who know Him truly, who will not sell their faith in Him for any price whatsoever. May we be among them!

Daniel 11:33: “And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.”

The “many days” were the 1260 years. Faithful servants of Christ such as the Waldenses, disguising themselves as merchants, traveled throughout Europe teaching the knowledge of the Bible and the ministry of Christ as our High Priest. This they did in a quiet way to those who would listen.

Daniel 11:34: “Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries.”

Men such as John Wycliffe of England, Huss and Jerome of Bohemia, and Luther of Germany, provided the “help” here mentioned. The people were taught to exercise faith in Christ alone as High Priest. He “ever liveth to make intercession” for those who believe (Hebrews 7:25). No power in heaven or hell could ever “take away” His heavenly ministry! Thousands were set free from the chains of darkness that had bound their souls.

Daniel 11:35: “And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.”

But the Reformation itself eventually became corrupted. The Reformers tired of the constant struggle, and sought the aid and support of *their* respective governments for the victory of truth, instead of depending on Christ alone. The perennial problem was the union of church and state! The gospel message was choked by selfishness and politics. The Protestant church once again became captive to the rulers of this world. “Many cleaved to them with flatteries,” said the angel.

The Reformation begun by Wycliffe and Luther is still going forward today. Surely we want to have fellowship with those who follow the light of Christ, those who “know their God . . . and do exploits”!

We are now brought to “the time of the end.” We learned in chapter 7 that the papacy was to rule for only 1260 years. In 1798 Berthier took the pope prisoner, his temporal power was weakened, and the Dark Ages came to an end. This was therefore the beginning of the “time of the end.” We’re living in it now!

Daniel 11:36: “And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. “

The king” here is obviously the power who will be the center of attention at this particular time of history, near the end of the 1260 years of papal supremacy. The long night is drawing to a close. Protestantism has set multitudes free from subservience to the papacy’s control. Now one of her most faithful “children” rises up in rebellion against the teachings of the papacy. These untruths provoked the most awful depravity among the people of one of Europe’s most enlightened nations—the kingdom of France.⁴

At this point in our study we will look at this prophecy as did the Protestant churches of the early 19th century. Among them thousands awoke as from a long sleep to realize that the books of

⁴ Some have differing understandings from here on. May the Holy Spirit bless and guide them in their study. What we see from here on in this chapter is what faithful Christians have believed for many years. When the Lord sees fit to grant a better understanding, we choose to be ready to listen. But any “new light” must be based on solid evidence.

Daniel and the Revelation were not “sealed,” but were “open” for study and understanding. The British and Foreign and American Bible Societies were formed shortly after the end of the 1260 years. In many denominations there was a phenomenal “Advent awakening” that thrilled multitudes of Christians. The “time of the end” had begun with the close of the 1260 years of papal supremacy. Night had given place to dawning.

They understood Jesus’ words, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matthew 24:34), to mean that Jesus planned to come in their lifetime.

These Christian believers came to understand Daniel virtually as we have presented it in this book. Like a jig-saw puzzle coming to fit together, they were overjoyed to see that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation complemented each other and constituted a precious “present truth” (in the expression of 2 Peter 3:1). Event after event of then current history validated their comprehension of Daniel.

Daniel 11:37. “Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.”

Now came some tumultuous happenings in the great nation of France (which had recently so generously helped the fledgling United States of America to gain her independence). For these many devout Christians, a giant upheaval in France seemed to be the precise fulfillment of this prophecy. Detail after detail fell into what seemed to be an inspired “place” in the prophetic picture.

All eyes of the Western world were turned on France. And in this conclusion of Daniel 11, the “spotlight” of prophetic attention is directed toward her as on center stage. In 1793 the leaders of France openly discarded the Christian religion (as they understood Roman Catholicism to be). For good measure they threw out the Bible also (in their ignorance of its teachings). In the name of the nation of France, they officially denied the existence of God, a declaration unique in that it was one of the decrees of the governing Assembly of France, and not the private opinions voiced by individuals. When “Thirteen Colonies” had officially “declared” their belief that “all men are created equal,” France officially declared the non-existence of this Creator! Thus “the king,” the government itself, publicly “did according to his will,” and magnified himself “above every god,” and spoke “marvelous things against the God of gods.”

The Roman bishop of Paris joined in these atheistic proceedings!

Publicly he declared that he had been deceived all his life in following the “Christian” religion, and stated openly that there is no God. Many who had all their lives professed to be Christian, followed his example.

“The king” did not “regard the God of his fathers.” All Christian worship was forbidden. The gold and silver in the churches was appropriated by the government. Church bells were broken and cast into cannons. The Bible was burned publicly. The Bible week of seven days was abolished and a “week” of ten days for a time substituted. Marriage was abolished as a sacred ordinance, declared to be binding only during the will or pleasure of the two parties. Thus the natural “desire of women” to be loved and cared for by a life-long husband was not “regarded.”

Daniel 11:38: “But in his estate shall he honor the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things.”

But soon this excess of revolution frightened the rulers of France. They realized that the people must worship *something*, or soon all law and order would become extinct. They devised a new “god” whom their fathers knew not. A popular dancer of questionable reputation was chosen as the representative of “Reason” and was publicly set before the people as their proper object of sacrifice and worship. This was the new “god” to take the place of the “God of their fathers.” This woman was taken to the cathedral of Notre Dame and installed as the nation’s “Goddess of Reason.” All over the land of France, similar ceremonies were held.

This “god” could be called the “god of forces,” for the purpose of the public worship of “Reason” was to secure the loyalty and support of the people for the armies of France soon to embark in an attempt to conquer the world.

Christianity, when it is pure, is a most powerful agency for the enlightenment, progress, freedom, and prosperity of a nation. Corrupt and apostate “Christianity” is paganism with a Christian robe. It leaves unsubdued the pride and self-worship of the natural human heart (the *gadal* of Daniel’s “continual in transgression”). It tends always to provoke excesses of hatred such as in the French Revolution of 1793-1799. “I will walk at liberty for I seek Thy precepts,” David said (Psalm 119:45). Jesus’ “yoke is easy,” and His “burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Daniel 11:39: “Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a

strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain.”

The leaders of revolution and atheism in France occupied the “most strong holds,” the authority of government, until 1799. One of the most noteworthy actions of the Revolution was the confiscation and redistribution of the wealth of some two-thirds of the land of France, which had been formerly held in large estates by the church of Rome and the former nobility and rulers of France. This land was then divided and sold at auction in small pieces to anyone who could buy. So, as the prophecy declared, “he . . . shall divide the land for gain.”

Out of the terror of the French Revolution arose one of the most prominent figures of the 19th century—Napoleon Bonaparte. In the early 19th century, multitudes of Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians saw in Daniel 11 this history delineated. If we had been living in their time, we would have seen it, too.

Could it be that what was “present truth” then is still present truth today? It was indeed the intention of Jesus Christ to have returned to earth to claim His people within the lifetime of those who first began to understand Daniel and Revelation in the opening of “the time of the end.” Their prophetic expositions were carefully studied; their conclusions were conscientious and reasonable. Truth is still truth. God’s word has not failed, but God’s people have failed to “follow on” to grasp the ever-developing “light” of justification by faith. Their failures have delayed the final victorious conclusion of “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.” The delay has not been due to faulty prophetic understandings, but to a failure to grasp the self-humbling revelations of “the everlasting gospel.” It must yet “lighten the earth with glory” when the fourth angel’s message of Revelation 18 is finally proclaimed clearly.