

quo vadis

What is going on behind the political and social upheavals in the Middle East

It seems that conflicts in the Middle East in different ages over the last three millennia, all involve the same territorial groupings over and over again, like there's some wrestling match for control going on, which is never settled.

Of course, wars are usually fought over resources – fertile agricultural land, water, control of access or trade routes – which don't change dramatically over time. Ukraine falls into this category. But this doesn't necessarily explain all conflicts. Israel is a case in point, particularly **Jerusalem!**

Jerusalem has no natural resources, no reliable water supply, doesn't sit on any major trade route and isn't strategically sited – it is surrounded by higher hills and is pretty indefensible from the north. Yet it is the most fought after city in the world. The 'city of peace' has apparently been besieged 49 times in history.

Why? Could it be anything to do with the fact that the God of Heaven has chosen it as His earthly dwelling place? (Psa. 132:13-14) Or that it's the place where all the great scenes in the story of Redemption have been played out? Or that it's where *Yeshua* is returning to? Unregenerate men are not aware of these things, but our enemy is! And he has always wanted what God has! (Isa. 14:13-14)

In Daniel 10, the prophet is told about the *prince of Persia* and the *prince of Greece* (v.20) withstanding and fighting the angelic messenger, and also about

'*Michael your prince*' (v.21). From Dan. 12:1 and Rev. 12:7, we know that *Michael* is also an angelic being, so it seems reasonable to conclude, from the context, that the other two princes are also angelic (demonic?) beings with some sort of interest in, or authority over, the territories mentioned.

Subsequent history seems to support that. Daniel ch. 11 records a prophecy which charts the history of the next 300 years or so from his time, with battles being fought between the nations/armies of those territories, regardless of who holds the political or military reins, and generally fighting across the land of Israel – caught between the hammer and the anvil. But it's also the land that *Satan* covets as it is God's land! All of which may explain what is really going on behind the political and military machinations over the centuries, and which seems to be coming to a head in the times in which we live!

Daniel was recording this prophecy as the *Babylonian empire* had just given way to the empire of the *Medes and Persians*, and it predicts:

- the rise of the *Greek* empire, vv. 2-3
- its division into 4 *areas*, v4
- the dominance of two of those divisions, vv. 5-20 and
- the rise of a powerful tyrant, identified by scholars with *Antiochus Epiphanes*, who ruled around the time of the Maccabean rebellion. vv.21-35.

The description of the powerful tyrant goes beyond Antiochus after v.35 and seems to merge into a description of '*the Man of Sin*' (commonly called 'the Antichrist') of the end times (see Dan. 7; Rev. 13), also prefigured as 'The Assyrian' in Isaiah 10 (the territory of Assyria was part of the Persian Empire and is where Antiochus was based – his capital was near Baghdad in Iraq).

There are also strong indications in Dan. 11 and Isaiah 10, as mentioned above, that the Man of Sin (the King of the North) will originate from Iraq and thus be a Muslim (see also *Philip Wren's* article

"*Islam's Christ*" Mar/Apl 2024 *Sword*).

So in Dan. 11:40 we see the King of the North (Iraq/Iran) attacking the King of the South (Egypt/Arabia) – something which the Saudis fear right now! (Egypt is currently building defence structures, such as anti-tank defences, in the demilitarised zone in the Sinai – what are they expecting?)

In v.41, the path for that attack follows the ancient route eastwards from Iraq/Iran and into Israel from the north. He may well occupy Jerusalem on the way, proclaiming there that he is God (Rev. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:4) "**It is the time of Jacob's trouble.**" (Jer. 30:7)

Interestingly, v. 41 goes on to say that the territory of Jordan is protected in some way from the King of the North's predations. This may be because a remnant of Israel is secluded there during the Great Tribulation – the 'place prepared by God' (Rev. 12:6, 14). *Micah* 2:12-13 indicates that this place is *Bozrah*, translated 'sheepfold' in some Bibles, near Petra in Jordan; *Messiah* comes from Bozrah on His approach to Jerusalem for the final showdown with the forces of evil (Isa. 63:1, possibly with the remnant following Mic. 2:13).

In vv.42-43, Egypt, Libya and Cush (Sudan) fall under the control of the King of the North (the same kingdoms that align with Gog in Ezek. 38/39, along with Russia and Turkey, both of which have long term interests in all those countries).

In v.44, '**news out the east and out of north trouble him**' (is this the approach of Messiah to Jerusalem from Bozrah?), which drives him with fury as he moves north into Israel. In v.45, he moves his forces to '**between the sea and the glorious holy mountain**'. The mountain here described can only be Jerusalem and the place between it and the sea is probably the valley of Megiddo. And the King of the North meets '**his end with none to help him**' at the hand of Israel's returning Messiah (Zech. 14:3-5; Rev. 19:19-20).

Daniel 11 maps the past – and the future!

What interests me is the map of the Middle East which is implied by these prophecies. Study of Daniel 11 and the nations and lands involved have led me to believe that the map of the power structures of the Middle East in the times before Messiah's return will be very similar to how Daniel saw it in his time and how it was to unfold during the course of this prophecy.

It has changed multiple times since Daniel's time. Empires, rulers, armies have all come and gone since then. The Romans, the Byzantines, the Arab dynasties and finally the Ottomans all dominated the area, or major parts of it. But with the dissolution of the *Ottoman Empire* 100 years ago, the stage was set for the re-emergence of those ancient power structures, and that is exactly what has happened.

To the immediate left is the map of the Persian Empire in Daniel's time.

The limits of Persian Empire are shown in purple, encompassing North Africa, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria (known collectively as The Levant), Iran, Iraq, and parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Saudi Arabian peninsula doesn't seem to have been conquered, probably because it was sparsely inhabited and they hadn't discovered oil (or the need for it!) at that time.

Then along came *Alexander the Great*, who conquered the Persians as prophesied in Dan. 11:2-3. This is shown on the map immediately left. The limits of the Greek empire are shown in green. Also included are Greece and Macedonia (off the map at the top left) and parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan (off the map at top right).

On his death (at the age of 33, supposedly of a broken heart because there were no more territories to conquer!), his empire was divided into four sections by the generals of his army (as prophesied in Dan 11:4 and corresponding roughly to the four personages we meet in Daniel's prophecy).



Above: The Persian Empire in Daniel's time (shown in purple).





The black lines on the map above, show roughly the divisions.

For the next c.250 years covered in Dan. 11:5-35, the *Seleucids* and the *Ptolemies* battled for dominance over Israel (the trade routes ran through it for one thing!), and it was consistently overrun by them as they attacked each other – the Ptolemies from the south and the Seleucids from the north – hence the descriptions 'King of the South' and 'King of the North' in Dan. 11: 5ff. Their battles and intrigues are predicted in the rest of the chapter, up to about v. 35 – so accurately that some have thought that they were written *after* the events described!

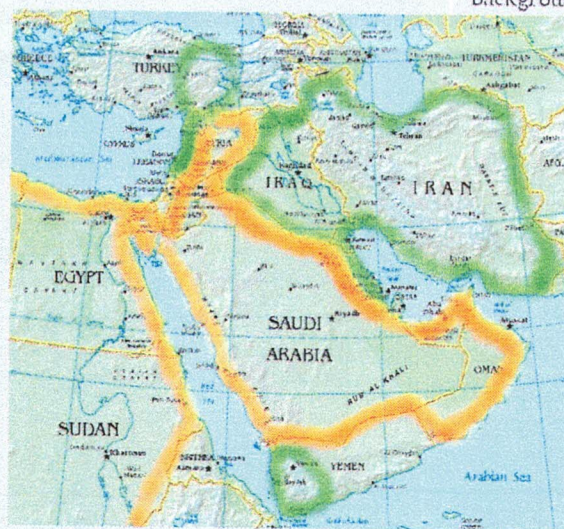
Dan. 11 vv. 36-39 mark the overlap between Antiochus' times and the end-times. The events we looked at above in vv. 40-45 have no parallel in history but do map on to other prophecies of the end times (e.g. Zech. 12-14; Joel 2-3; Rev. 19)

But in the meantime, *Macedon* (Greece) imposed its culture across all these territories. Later, *Thrace* (Turkey) would become the seat of *Constantine's* empire, and of the *Byzantines* (the Eastern Roman Empire after the fall of Rome,) and of the *Ottomans*. The Byzantines were expelled from the Levant by the Arab armies, which resulted in several Arab dynasties originating in the "King of the North's" territory ruling the Middle East, until they were overtaken by the *Ottomans*, who

combined all these territories into a single Caliphate.

Where is this heading?

If we consider the Middle East today, we can observe that the same geo-political power structures described in Daniel 11 have been developing since the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire after WWI. The countries we know today have only existed since then, but the tribal and religious factions go back much farther (and transcend the boundaries imposed by the West!). This can be seen when we look at the spread of the two main factions of Islam:



Map legend: *green* = countries where *Shia* Islam is dominant; *orange* = where *Sunni* Islam is dominant. (Source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/map-of-middle-east-religions> for more details).

1. The area of the *King of the North* is dominated by Shia Islam, which maps on to Iran's 'axis of resistance', 'resistance' to the existence of Israel and therefore violently opposed to Israel. Until December 2024, Iran had managed to build that axis all the way from Tehran to Lebanon (the territory of the King of the North in Daniel's prophecy). It remains to be seen if the fall of *Assad* (who belonged to a branch of Shia Islam) to Sunni-dominated forces will have permanently broken that axis. (It should be noted that the current leader of the Syrian forces has said that he wants to liberate not only Jerusalem, which goes without saying, but Mecca also, which is in Saudi Arabia, a Sunni controlled state so ostensibly on the same side as he is!)

2. The countries of the *King of the South* are dominated by Sunni Islam. Most of those countries have made peaceful overtures to Israel (e.g. *The Abraham Accords*) – no doubt a cause of irritation to the Iranians and their 'axis'. There are also deep religious tensions between those two factions (as pointed out by *Philip Wren* in 'The Empire that died', Jul/Aug Sword 2024). Although Egypt currently has a peace treaty with Israel, hovering in the background is the *Muslim Brotherhood*, who are deeply opposed to the government of *General Sisi* (and are behind *Hamas* amongst other 'resistance' groups).

3. Israel, of course, also emerged as a state in 1948, which was a necessary stage for the fulfilment of Bible prophecies relating to the End Times. (Students of prophecy foresaw that this was essential 200 years ago without knowing how it could happen, but we have been privileged to see it in our own lifetimes!)

And just as in Daniel 11, Israel is the object of oppression by the nations surrounding her.

What's the point?

For the first time since the *Romans* took control of the Middle East in the first century before Christ, the geo-political scenario in our world is very similar to that of Daniel's time and seems to be moving towards the conflicts and events described at the end of Ch.11 and beginning of Ch.12, which immediately precede Yeshua's return in glory to defeat His (and Israel's) enemies and establish His kingdom.

Thus history suggests that the 'Prince of Greece' (Greece/Thrace), the 'Prince of Persia' (Iran), the 'King of the North' (Iraq) and the 'King of the South' (Egypt/Sudan) could be spiritual principalities working through human agents (see Eph. 6:12). If so, it then becomes clear that the whole Middle East situation is not about the territorial ambitions of the 'Palestinians', nor even Islam's claim over the land of Israel and its holy sites, but a much greater struggle between the forces of evil against God's plans and the Second Coming of Yeshua.

While it is interesting to try and relate prophecies to current events, it is ultimately fraught with danger, as the many false predictions and associations over the years has shown. However, we should expect things to become clearer as the time approaches (Dan. 12:10). What I hope that this article has shown is, that despite the geo-political and religious changes that have gone on in the Middle East, there are unseen forces moving events towards **the goal that the Lord has planned** and revealed in His Word.

Amos 3:7 tells us that "**the Lord does nothing without revealing it to His servants the prophets**". The Lord Jesus also said "**See that you are not alarmed ... See, I have told you ahead of time**" (Matt. 24:6, 25) "**So that when it happens you will believe that I AM.**" (John 13:19)

Why does He reveal it? So that we can pray in His will! Lots of events are happening and will continue to happen, and may leave us confused. But if we understand the spiritual powers behind the events, and what the end scenario

is going to be as we head towards the last days before Yeshua's Return, we can intelligently look at the news and pray into situations. The situations which now cause so much heartache and anguished prayer are only skirmishes in a war which has been going on for millennia!

What the 'West' doesn't understand

As 'Podcast Dave' notes in Steve Maltz' article "**Who will save us**" (pp.6-7 of this magazine), the Western mindset operates on "**Fake realities**" and does not understand what is driving events in the Middle East, holding a fictional liberal view that everyone values western democracy and prosperity, and given the right conditions, wants to live in peace and harmony with everybody else. (Most of the Western media is also deeply infected with this thinking.)

This has been shown to be a fallacy in recent decades. As someone recently observed: "**The illegal invasion of Iraq was based upon just such a miscomprehension. If only we could oust Saddam Hussein from power, the grateful Iraqis would as one rise up, give their thanks, and in a scrupulously observed general election give their votes to the Iraqi equivalent of Menzies Campbell. That did not happen, did it? And a good many Iraqis - those who aren't actually dead - rather miss the brutal stability imposed by Saddam. A few years after that catastrophe, Tony Blair urged the Palestinians to go to the polls and back a nice sensible movement which might negotiate with the Israelis. What did the Palestinians do? They elected Hamas, which wishes to see Israel stricken from the map. Following this came the Arab Spring and a whole bunch of Islamist organisations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, somewhat surprised at [finding themselves] suddenly championed by armchair warriors in north London.**"¹

Events can move very fast in the Middle East and by the time this article is published the situation in Syria may well have changed.

The euphoria which the downfall of Assad is currently receiving might have faded as the character of the rebel groups and their in-fighting reduces Syria to chaos (like Libya after the downfall of *Gaddafi*), or Iran may have caught its breath and reasserted its influence.

Following the news can leave us feeling very seasick! But, just as keeping your eyes fixed on the horizon can help overcome seasickness, so keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord, and on His glorious and victorious return (the 'eschatological' horizon!) is the remedy for disturbances of soul. Whatever the future holds, it is reassuring to know that **God is already there** - we just have to follow on! He has revealed as much as we need to know, and much is becoming clearer as we move closer and closer to the Lord's Return. Dan. 11 & 12 show us that it is "those who know their God shall stand strong and prevail" (11:32) and "the wise will understand" at the time of the end (12:9-10).

"Let us know, and let us press on to know the Lord!" (Hos. 6:3)

¹ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/can-you-tell-a-good-guy-from-a-bad-guy-in-the-middle-east/>

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