

SESSION TWENTY-THREE

DANIEL'S "KING OF THE NORTH"*A Study of Daniel 11:36-45*

NOTE: The following article was originally published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. As much as possible, I have attempted to leave the article unchanged, though of course the page numbering is different from the original. [Yet minor corrections have been made to the final paragraph]. The reader should be aware, however, that in my more recent commentary on the book of Daniel in the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series, I changed my position to that of *slightly favoring the two-king theory*. The discussion in this *JETS* article is still quite valuable. The reference for the first publication is:

J. Paul Tanner, "Daniel's 'King of the North': Do We Owe Russia An Apology?" *JETS* 35:3 (Sept 1992): 315-28.

Interest in Biblical eschatology took a quantum leap in America after World War II, especially with the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s. As "the end" appeared more imminent than ever, a plethora of books on prophecy appeared. Volumes such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* popularized eschatology for the evangelical Church, feeding an insatiable market spawned by the emerging "Jesus revolution." Every political development was carefully scrutinized for its possible prophetic implications, not the least of which were the cold-war hostilities between the United States and Russia.

While Bible students scratched their heads in search of Biblical details regarding America's end-time role, a consensus prevailed that Russia was the major eschatological villain. A couple of factors contributed to this, the foremost of which was probably the anticommunistic attitude that had engulfed America following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The nuclear arms race that rapidly escalated after World War II only heightened the intensity of mistrust for Russia. A second factor was the pro-Israel stance of many evangelicals. Russia had a long history of persecution of Jews, and the efforts of Russia to form alliances with and arm Israel's hostile neighbors only seemed to confirm suspicions that it would not be too long before the Red Army would descend upon the mountains of Israel.

If the second coming of Christ was indeed near and if Israel was to be attacked by a mighty army in the tribulation period, Russia appeared as the most likely candidate for such hostilities. In retrospect, however, the attention given to Russia seems disproportionate to the actual Biblical support for her role. The NT makes no explicit mention of Russia. Those who promote the idea of Russia's end-time role usually appeal to two passages from the OT—namely, Ezekiel 38–39 and Daniel 11:40–45.¹ In each of these a military force from the north is seen to attack Israel in a context of the latter days.

¹ J. D. Pentecost mentions a few more passages in which a great northern confederacy may be described: Joel 2:1–27; Isa 10:12; 30:31–33; 31:8–9 (*Things to Come* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958] 326). These passages,

The purpose of this paper is to argue that the reference to a northern invasion against Israel in Dan 11:40–45 does not find its fulfillment in an invasion by Russia. The greater concern, however, is not to correct what may only be a minor prophetic detail but to point out the inconsistency of hermeneutics that this interpretation rests on. If I am correct in my thesis, then the case for a Russian invasion rests solely on Ezekiel 38–39.

I. DAN 11:36–45: A SURVEY OF INTERPRETATIONS

The interpretation of Dan 11:36–45 is admittedly a difficult task and has been the subject of much discussion throughout the ages. For the first thirty-five verses of the chapter there is general agreement that the details pertain to various historical events that transpired between the time of the Persian empire and the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC), especially with regard to the conflict between the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt and the Seleucid kings of Syria. Beginning with v. 36, however, the task of interpretation becomes much more challenging. In general, critical scholars shun any eschatological import to this final section, seeking rather to interpret the verses historically in light of Antiochus Epiphanes.² At times their remarks have been quite disparaging of those who would see eschatology in these verses. Di Lella, for instance, writes: “The Antichrist interpretation of these verses is exegetically witless and religiously worthless.”³ Porteous is just as adamant in his refusal to consider the eschatological implications of these verses:

It should be said at this point that vv. 36–39 so clearly are applicable to what is known of the career of Antiochus Epiphanes that we may confidently reject the view that these verses are a prophecy of Antichrist. Such a view is based on *a priori* reasoning and does not arise out of sober exposition of the text. Indeed it is theologically valueless.⁴

Despite such unaccommodating sentiment, the prevailing view among conservative scholars has been to see a shift at Dan 11:36 from discussion about Antiochus to the latter-day antichrist.⁵ This view is held

however, are more obscure than the Ezekiel and Daniel passages, and any eschatological connections are quite unclear.

² Those taking the historical view include J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927) 460; A. A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 301; R. Hamner, *The Book of Daniel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976) 114; N. Porteous, *Daniel* (OL; 2d rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1979) 169; R. A. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 141; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas: Word, 1989). Some scholars see these verses pertaining to Antiochus while also pointing forward to a future antichrist (see D. Ford, *Daniel* [Nashville: Southern, 1978]; J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel* [Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978] 199).

³ Di Lella, *Daniel* 303. Anderson is just as contentious when he writes: “Though this has been a tenacious interpretation over the centuries, it now has minimal appeal beyond the circle of some sects” (*Signs and Wonders* 141).

⁴ Porteous, *Daniel* 169.

⁵ One variation of the eschatological interpretation is to take “the king” in Dan 11:36 as the false prophet rather than the world ruler (the “little horn” of Daniel 7 or “beast” of Rev 13:1–8). This view is held by C. L. Feinberg (*Daniel: The Man and His Visions* [Chappaqua: Christian Herald, 1981] 173, 176) and by J. N. Darby (*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* [Winschoten: H. L. Heijkoop, 1970] 2.457). Feinberg interprets “the king” (Dan 11:36) as the false prophet of Rev 13:11 ff. but calls him the antichrist.

not just by premillennial scholars but by amillennial scholars as well.⁶ It was also the view of early Church leaders such as Chrysostom, Hippolytus, Theodotion and Jerome.⁷ Without going into a formal defense of the position, a few observations are worthy of note: (1) While the transition at v. 36 may be very subtle, we should observe that the primary subject of the verse is not referred to as the "king of the North" but rather as simply "the king." Normally in chap. 11 a qualifier such as "south" or "north" is included (except in vv. 2–3, 27). (2) In vv. 21–35 Antiochus IV served in the role of the "king of the North," as did the other Seleucid kings before him. In v. 40, however, "the king" is apparently in contention with both the "king of the North" and the "king of the South." (3) Verse 35 still anticipates the "end time," whereas v. 40 reflects that the "end time" has finally come. (4) Dan 12:1–4 is actually a continuation of 11:36–45 and forms one unit with it. The opening verse of chap. 12 connects the two temporally with the expression "Now at that time." But the mention of the time of greatest distress in 12:1 (a reference to the "great tribulation") and the mention of the resurrection in 12:2 gives the whole unit an eschatological setting (certainly beyond the time of Antiochus). (5) A sudden leap forward in time from Dan 11:35 to 11:36 is consistent with other leaps in time throughout the chapter (e.g. 11:2–3). (6) The death of the "king" recorded in 11:45 takes place in Israel, but this does not correspond to the death of Antiochus, who died outside Israel. (7) The comment in 11:36 that the king "will exalt himself above every god" is not precisely true in regard to Antiochus. As Archer has pointed out, Antiochus exalted Zeus on the reverse side of his coinage.⁸

While there is a consensus among conservative scholars that "the king" of Dan 11:36–39 refers to the antichrist, there is a wide divergence of opinion as to the interpretation of 11:40–45, which reads:

And at the end time the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen, and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through. He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many *countries* will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon. Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians *will follow* at his heels. But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him, and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many. And he will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.⁹

The two primary interpretive problems are these: (1) the identification of the "king of the South" and the "king of the North," and (2) the determination of who is fighting against whom in v. 40. The latter issue

⁶ Among amillennial scholars who have adopted the antichrist view are C. F. Keil (*Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 9 in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 (1865)] 461); E. J. Young (*The Prophecy of Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949] 249); and H. C. Leupold (*Exposition of Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969 (1949)] 511).

⁷ Montgomery, *Commentary* 469. Cf. J. Braverman, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel: A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Hebrew Bible* (CBQMS 7; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1978) 124.

⁸ G. L. Archer, "Daniel," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 7.144.

⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all Scripture quotations are taken from the NASB.

will be dealt with in the next section. As for the identification of the two kings mentioned in v. 40, conservative scholars follow one of two general approaches. They either spiritualize them to mean something other than literal kings, or they interpret them eschatologically as military/political leaders of the tribulation period prior to the second coming of Christ.¹⁰ The spiritualizing interpretation is not satisfactory because throughout the chapter (which conservative scholars agree was given prophetically to Daniel) the kings of the north and south have consistently represented literal individuals. It seems rather hermeneutically inconsistent to suddenly spiritualize at v. 40 when this was not done at any earlier point in the chapter. Those applying a more literal hermeneutic usually interpret the "king of the South" as Egypt (or a coalition involving Egypt) whereas the "king of the North" is either taken to be Russia (or a coalition involving Russia) or the antichrist himself.

II. THE TWO-KING THEORY VERSUS THE THREE-KING THEORY

Due to the pronominal suffixes in the Hebrew text of Dan 11:40, there is some uncertainty as to the number of subjects involved in the conflict depicted there. The more popular tendency among conservative scholars has been to see three subjects, with the pronoun "he/him" taken to refer to "the king" (the antichrist) of v. 36. In this case the subjects are the "king of the South," the "king of the North" and the antichrist. The conflict then becomes one of the "king of the South" and the "king of the North" attacking the antichrist. Grammatically, however, it is possible (and some would advocate) that there are only two subjects, the "king of the South" and the "king of the North" (the latter equated with the antichrist of v. 36). By supplying the intended subject in brackets, these two views can be depicted this way:

Three-king theory of Dan 11:40

And at the end time the king of the South will collide with him [the antichrist], and the king of the North will storm against him [the antichrist]...and he [the antichrist] will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through.

Two-king theory of Dan 11:40

And at the end time the king of the South will collide with him [the king of the North = antichrist], and the king of the North [the antichrist] will storm against him [the king of the South]...and he [the king of the North = antichrist] will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through.

Those who advocate the three-king theory include M. R. De Haan, R. D. Culver, J. F. Walvoord, D. Campbell, J. D. Pentecost, L. Wood, H. Lindsey, Richard De Haan, J. N. Darby and J. MacArthur.¹¹

¹⁰ Those following a spiritualizing hermeneutic hold slightly different interpretations. Ford, for example, understands the two kings to represent two powers opposed to the true Church (*Daniel* 275). Young interprets the "king of the North" as the antichrist of v. 36 and spiritualizes the "king of the South" to be representative of the powers that will resist the antichrist (*Daniel* 252). Leupold, on the other hand, interprets both kings as forces coming against the antichrist, and the invasion of the "Beautiful Land" (11:41) symbolizes an invasion against "the church of God" (*Daniel* 520–521).

¹¹ M. R. De Haan, *Daniel the Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947) 300; R. D. Culver, "Daniel," *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1962) 798; J. F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 277; D. Campbell, *Daniel: God's Man in a Secular Society* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1988) 169; J. D. Pentecost, "Daniel," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck; Wheaton: Victor, 1985) 1372; L. Wood, *A*

Those who advocate the two-king theory include G. Archer, D. Ford, G. H. Lang, C. F. Keil and E. J. Young.¹² C. Feinberg holds the rather novel interpretation that there are only two kings in Dan 11:40 but that the "king of the North" is not the antichrist—that is, the antichrist (the false prophet, for Feinberg) is depicted in vv. 36–39 and two other distinct kings (in conflict with one another) in vv. 40–45.¹³

The two-king theory would certainly preclude an identification of Russia in the Daniel passage, since the antichrist (equated with the "king of the North" according to the two-king theory) is definitely not connected with Russia. For Daniel the antichrist motif is linked with the fourth beast, the Roman empire (Dan 7:23–24; 9:26). Those who interpret the "king of the North" as Russia usually hold to the three-king theory, although this is not a necessary conclusion of the three-king theory and, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, is a most unlikely conclusion. Adequate discussion and evaluation of this issue regarding the antecedents of the pronouns in Dan 11:40 is clearly lacking in most commentaries. Archer, an advocate of the two-king theory, recognizes the problem but only gives cursory remarks: "It seems much simpler and more convincing, however, to take the 'king of the North' in this verse to be none other than the latter-day little horn, the Antichrist."¹⁴ Unfortunately there is no rationale offered for this conclusion, and one is left wondering why it is "more convincing" or what being "much simpler" has to do with the matter.

Keil, one of the few who makes a serious attempt to defend the two-king theory, offers three reasons. The first reason is based on the antecedent of the pronouns. Dan 11:40 states: "And at the end time the king of the South will collide with him (*'mw*), and the king of the North will storm against him (*'lyw*)." Keil argues that the suffix on *'lyw* has its nearest antecedent in the "king of the South" just before it.¹⁵ In Hebrew, however, the proper antecedent of a pronoun cannot simply be determined by near proximity. Contextual awareness is also a determining factor. This can easily be demonstrated by an example from Daniel 11 itself. The NIV translates Dan 11:28 as follows: "The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant." But in the MT the words "the king of the North" are not present. The subject of the sentence is simply understood from the initial verb "and he will return," which is followed in the second clause by the noun phrase "and his heart." Technically, however, the near antecedent of both the verb and the noun is the "king of the South" in vv. 25–26. Since this is obviously not the proper antecedent for v. 28, the NIV took the liberty to add the words "the king of the North." To argue on the basis of "near antecedent" as Keil does for Dan 11:40 is not conclusive proof.

A second argument for the two-king theory advanced by Keil is the direction from which the attack seems to arise. Keil notes that "according to vers. 40–43, he advances from the north against the Holy Land and

Commentary on Daniel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 308–309; H. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 153–154; Richard De Haan, *The Middle East in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, April 1974) 23; J. N. Darby, *Synopsis 2.457*; J. MacArthur, *The Future of Israel: Study Notes, Daniel 9:30–12:13* (ed. M. Hall; Singapore: Word of Grace, 1985) 78.

¹² Archer, "Daniel" 147; Ford, *Daniel* 275; G. H. Lang, *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel* (4th ed.; London: Paternoster, 1950) 174; Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel* 468–470; Young, *Daniel* 251.

¹³ Feinberg, *Daniel* 177.

¹⁴ Archer, "Daniel" 147.

¹⁵ Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel* 470.

against Egypt.”¹⁶ Keil’s point is that the attack appears to be one that emanates from the north toward Egypt in the south, thereby suggesting that the conflict is limited to these two kings. But this argument is by no means conclusive. Verse 40 is quite vague about the direction of advance. The text merely says that “he will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through.” The fact that Israel is mentioned in v. 41 and Egypt in v. 42 is not enough evidence to establish a broad direction of attack.

Keil’s third argument rests on the observation that no attack is specifically mentioned against the “king of the North” in contrast to the emphasis put upon the attack against Egypt in vv. 42–43.¹⁷ True, Egypt as the primary country of the “king of the South” is explicitly mentioned, whereas no specific country connected with the “king of the North” is mentioned. But there could be other explanations for this. If the “king of the North” attacks the antichrist and is defeated outside the realm of the north, then there was no real need to mention an invasion into the “king of the North’s” territory. This would be particularly true if the “king of the North” is defeated in Israel (which v. 41 would certainly allow for). Another possibility is that the antichrist deals the “king of the North” an initial defeat, the “king of the North” retreats, the antichrist advances on Egypt to defeat the “king of the South,” and he then returns again to fight with the “king of the North” (his armies now regrouped) in Israel. The mention of the “rumors from . . . the North” in v. 44 could support such a view. In any case, Keil’s argument does not offer conclusive proof.

Aside from these counterarguments against Keil, there is a more compelling reason to dismiss the two-king theory in favor of the view that three major players are depicted in Dan 11:40. If one takes the position that the conflict in 11:40 is between the “king of the North” and the “king of the South,” then there are only two alternatives left as to the role of the antichrist. One can assume that the “king of the North” is the antichrist (the common approach taken by those advocating the two-king theory), or one can assume that the “king of the North” is distinct from the antichrist. Both of these alternatives, however, are weak and unconvincing.

If the “king of the North” is interpreted as the antichrist (i.e. “the king” of 11:36), then one has to explain the connection of the antichrist to the north. Throughout the chapter the “king of the North” has consistently been identified with a ruler from the Seleucid empire. Although Antiochus (a type of the antichrist) did appear in the preceding section (vv. 21–35) in the role of a “king of the North,” the antichrist himself simply cannot be cast in this same role. The antichrist (at least as Daniel has presented him) is not connected with the realm of “the North” (the Seleucid empire) but with some aspect of the Roman empire (cf. Dan 7:23–24; 9:26–27).¹⁸

The other option, then (for advocates of the two-king theory), is to assume that the “king of the North” is not the antichrist (“the king” of 11:36) and that the conflict in 11:40 is simply between two other kings. This too leads to a problem, because the subject of the latter clause in 11:40 (“and he will enter countries”) continues throughout the remainder of the chapter. In other words “the king” in Dan 11:36 is not the subject of the action in vv. 40–45. That is a very unsatisfactory conclusion, however, because the whole chapter has been moving toward a grand finale, especially one that climaxes in Israel’s

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Archer himself admits that the antichrist is not connected with any Syrian dynasty (“Daniel” 147). Lang, however, an advocate of the two-king theory, claims that Assyria is the “king of the North” and the antichrist (*Daniel* 174).

eschatological future. In fact the earlier portions of the book have been preparing the reader for the great opponent of God's people who wages war against the saints, despises God's covenant with Israel, and must be judged and destroyed prior to the Son of Man's receiving a kingdom (esp. chap. 7). He appears as the "little horn" in chap. 7, is portrayed by type in chap. 8, is referred to as an unfaithful covenant-maker with Israel in 9:26–27, and is once again depicted by his type in history in the person of Antiochus in 11:21–35. It comes as no surprise that in the climax of the book the author would bring back on stage "the king" who does as he pleases and who speaks monstrous things against the God of gods (11:36). But to advocate that this great enemy of God is briefly described in 11:36–39, only to be suddenly dropped from the story, is to miss the main point. He is surely the one dominating the action sequence in 11:40–45, for the author is not content to let him pass so briefly without describing for us the very end to which this one comes. Verses 40–45 must have the antichrist in view.

The best interpretation, therefore, is to adopt the three-king theory that in Dan 11:40 we have three major players: the antichrist and the two kings with whom he is in conflict.¹⁹ The question now must turn to the identity of the "king of the North." If this figure is not the antichrist, could it be equated with Russia (and possibly her allies)? [Update Note: In my 2021 commentary on Daniel, I have reversed my position and *slightly* favor the two-king theory. But this is still very debatable, and the three-king theory is certainly a possibility].

III. THE QUESTION OF RUSSIA²⁰

The interpretation of the "king of the North" as Russia (and possibly her allies) has been a very popular one with premillennial expositors, especially those in the dispensational camp. In 1947 M. R. DeHaan linked the Daniel 11:40–45 passage with Ezekiel 38–39 to describe the northern confederacy that would oppose the antichrist. The confederacy would consist of Russia and other eastern European nations:

Now among Bible students it is almost generally agreed that Gog refers to the land of Russia, we have the description very graphically given in chapter 39, and associated with Russia will be the Germanic peoples. We shall see Poland and Czechoslovakia and the northern part of Germany and Yugoslavia and those nations that today are already being formed into the Russian bloc.²¹

More recently John MacArthur has stated: "'The king of the north' clearly refers to the Soviet Union, which also wants control of the Middle East."²² Donald Campbell views this invasion as a repercussion of

¹⁹ One possible weakness of this view is the slight inconsistency with the earlier portion of the chapter. The three-king theory seems to suggest that the "king of the North" and the "king of the South" side together in their hostility against the antichrist, whereas the earlier part of the chapter depicted the two kings in conflict with one another (exceptions occur with vv. 6, 17, 27, where attempts were made for peaceful agreements). The resolution may be found in viewing the action from the perspective of Israel. In the earlier part of Daniel 11 it was the activities of the two kings and their continual struggle for control of the land of Israel that brought pressure upon God's people. In the days of the antichrist it will be the activities of the two kings that once again put pressure upon Israel and that cause Israel to be caught up in a great military conflict that threatens her existence.

²⁰ For the purposes of this paper I will use "Russia" in the very broad sense. At the time of writing, the Soviet Union has dissolved and an attempt is being made to unite the former states into a Commonwealth of Independent States, although many of them are attempting to remain outside of such a union.

²¹ M. R. De Haan, *Daniel* 301.

²² MacArthur, *Future* 78.

the covenant established by the antichrist with Israel: "An alliance formed by the king of the south (probably Egypt and allies) and the king of the north (probably Russia) will challenge that protective treaty by a simultaneous invasion of the land of Israel."²³

If the "king of the North" is indeed a leader who unites with the "king of the South" to attack the antichrist, what rationale might be offered for an identification of Russia as the "king of the North"? Basically there are two arguments: (1) the fact that Russia is geographically situated to the north of Israel and (2) the influence of Ezekiel 38–39, which prophesies a huge invasion from the north. These arguments, however, must be carefully evaluated.

1. "North" as a geographical referent.

A word study of *šāpôn* ("north") reveals some insightful information when the term is used in reference to countries or individuals beyond the borders of Israel. Aside from the use of the term in Dan 11:40; Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2, most of the other occurrences refer to countries or individuals of the Middle East, some of which are actually east of Israel (all of the references are from the prophets, most often from Jeremiah). In Daniel 11 the term is used six times to refer to the Seleucid empire lying to the immediate north of Israel (Dan 11:6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15). The term is used in Zeph 2:13 in regard to Assyria (and Nineveh): "And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria." Cyrus the Persian is regarded as being from the north in Isa 41:25: "I have aroused one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun he will call on my name." The Medes and Persians under Cyrus who defeat Babylon are described as being from the north in at least four passages (Jer 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48). The predominant usage is in regard to Babylon as the troubler or invader of Judah during the days of the neo-Babylonian empire.²⁴ In these verses Babylon is consistently viewed as a menace from "the north." The book of Jeremiah (with its setting in the time of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon) opens with a warning in Jer 1:15: " 'For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,' declares the LORD; 'and they will come, and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem.' " Similarly the Lord declares in 25:9: " 'I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land.' " A few other verses are unclear but most likely have a connection to the Middle East.²⁵

The conclusion is that the use of the term "north" in reference to countries outside of Israel is a frequent expression of the prophets for Israel's neighbors of the Middle East, either Babylon, Assyria, Medo-Persia or the Seleucid empire. The reason why eastern countries such as Babylon would be designated as being "from the north" is to be found in the explanation that an attack upon Israel by these foes always came from the north, whereby the major highways across the Fertile Crescent (along the Euphrates) would take one to the upper regions of Galilee in the northern part of the country. There is not one reference (unless one wants to argue on the basis of Ezekiel 38–39)

²³ Campbell, *Daniel* 172.

²⁴ Jer 1:13, 14, 15; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 16:15; 23:8; 25:9; 46:20, 24; 47:2; Ezek 26:7; Zech 2:6.

²⁵ There is a vague reference in Dan 11:44 about "rumors from the north." Jeremiah 25:26 is unclear, although there seems to be a connection to the Arab lands to the east. Jeremiah 31:8; Zech 6:6, 8 may refer to Babylon. Ezekiel 32:30 is in a context of nations around Israel as far as Assyria and Elam.

where a country from "the north" ever means an enemy as far north as present-day Russia. For the prophets, "north" would always refer to a Middle Eastern neighbor of Israel.

2. The influence of Ezekiel 38–39 on the interpretation of Dan 11:40.

A number of expositors have been influenced in their interpretation of Dan 11:40 by the northern invasion depicted in Ezekiel 38–39.²⁶ Since the Ezekiel passage has consistently been interpreted in regard to Russia (and her allies?), and since the Ezekiel passage does indeed depict a major prophetic military conflict, some have naturally connected it with Dan 11:40.

Not all who interpret the Ezekiel passage as pertaining to Russia, however, would link it with Daniel 11:40. Walvoord, for instance, places the invasion of Ezekiel in the first half of Daniel's seventieth "week" in contrast to Dan 11:40, which he would see in connection with Armageddon during the last half of this period—that is, the final three-and-a-half years leading up to the second coming of Christ.²⁷ His reason is that the attack comes at a time when Israel is "living securely" (Ezek 38:8, 11), which Walvoord would understand to mean as a time other than the last half of the seventieth week. Since Israel is under a covenant (peace treaty?) with the antichrist during the first half of the week, this would be a time when she was "living securely." Nevertheless, although he distinguishes the invasion of Ezekiel 38–39 from Dan 11:40, Walvoord does see a connection:

Hence it may be concluded that the battle described here, beginning with verse 40, is a later development, possibly several years later than the battle described in Ezekiel. If a Russian force is involved in the phrase, "the king of the north," it would indicate that, in the period between the two battles, Russia is able to reassemble an army and once again participate in a military way in this great war.²⁸

Other premillennial expositors, however, equate the invasion of Ezekiel 38–39 with Dan 11:40. Leon Wood, commenting on the Ezekiel invasion, states that "this battle must be clearly related to, if not identical with, the conflict described in this verse (11:40)."²⁹ He offers several reasons: (1) Assuming that both events are near the midpoint of the tribulation it is unlikely that two major battles would transpire in the same general area in so short a time; (2) since the antichrist had a covenant with Israel, it is most likely that he would get involved if such a large nation as Russia invaded Palestine; (3) both passages place a stress on invasion from the north; and (4) the Ezekiel passage depicts an alliance with Persia, Ethiopia and Libya, which could represent the same Arab bloc of nations as possibly led by the "king of the South" in Dan 11:40–45. Of these reasons, however, only the last deserves a response.³⁰ While it is true that some countries mentioned in the

²⁶ M. R. De Haan, *Daniel* 301; J. M. Boice, *Daniel: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 124; Walvoord, *Daniel* 277; *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Dallas Seminary, 1990) 274; Campbell, *Daniel* 172; Pentecost, *Things to Come* 332, 355; Wood, *Daniel* 309–310; Lindsey, *Planet* 154; MacArthur, *Future* 78.

²⁷ Walvoord, *Daniel* 277. Cf. J. F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967) 103–120.

²⁸ Walvoord, *Daniel* 278.

²⁹ Wood, *Daniel* 309.

³⁰ The first reason is an assumption in which it is by no means clear that the invasion of Dan 11:40 occurs

Ezekiel passage could be part of a southern bloc, the omission of any reference to Egypt casts a great doubt on this argument.

Still other premillennial expositors are more cautious on the relationship of Ezekiel 38–39 to Daniel 11:40. Pentecost, for example, although linking the two passages in his earlier work *Things to Come*, is noncommittal in his commentary on Daniel as to the relationship between them (in fact he does not even mention Russia in his discussion of Dan 11:40–45).³¹

A thorough evaluation of the Ezekiel passage is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few observations can be made to sound a word of caution. Those who often equate the Ezekiel passage with Russia point out that Gog and its allies do not simply come from “the north” but from the “remote parts of the north” (Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2). In fact the NASB reads “the remotest part of the north” in Ezek 39:2. In the MT, however, the three phrases are essentially the same: *yrkty špōn*.³² Hence there is no reason to translate Ezek 39:2 differently than the previous two references. The noun *yrkh* has the basic idea of “extreme portion,” “extremity.” But other occurrences of the word when used geographically reveal that the term does not have to mean the farthest point away. The expression *myrkty-’rš* (“from the remote parts of the earth”) occurs four times in Jeremiah. In Jer 6:22 we read: “Behold, a people is coming from the north land, and a great nation will be aroused from the remote parts of the earth.” There is general agreement that this refers to Babylon in this context. Jeremiah 50:41 reads: “Behold, a people is coming from the north, and a great nation and many kings will be aroused from the remote parts of the earth.” The context is dealing with God’s judgment upon Babylon and the enemies that he will bring upon Babylon. Although the invaders are not clearly specified, there is mention of the “kings of the Medes” in the general context (51:11; cf. 51:27, 28). In two other verses (25:32; 31:8) God is depicted as stirring up nations from the remote parts of the earth, but the reference is quite vague. Outside of Ezekiel 38–39 *yrkh* is used in a geographical sense of nations from the Middle East, thereby demonstrating that the expression need not be taken to mean the farthest point possible.

The more common tendency is to argue a case for Russia based on such names in Ezekiel as Gog, Magog, Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer and Beth Togarmah.³³ While this may be possible on the basis of the migration of peoples who came from these locations, the attempt to demonstrate a connection between these names and modern places (such as Moscow) is fraught with problems. Alexander, for instance, states:

There is no evidence from the ancient Near East that a country named Rosh ever existed. Some would understand *rō’s* as modern Russia. Proponents of this view usually appeal to etymology based on similar sounds between the two words. Such etymological procedures are not linguistically sound, nor is etymology alone a sound hermeneutical basis on which to interpret a word. The word “Russia” is a late eleventh-century A.D. term. Therefore, the data does not seem to support an interpretation of *rō’s* as a proper name of a geographical region

near the middle of the tribulation. The second reason proves nothing, since Wood is assuming what he is trying to establish. The third reason is weak in light of the word study on the term “north” previously discussed.

³¹ Pentecost, *Things to Come* 355; “Daniel” 1371–1372.

³² See Ps 48:3; Isa 14:13 for the same or a similar expression.

³³ See for example Walvoord, *Nations* 107–108.

or country. . . . The biblical and extrabiblical data, though sparse, would imply that Meshech and Tubal refer to geographical areas or countries in eastern modern Turkey, southwest of Russia and northwest of Iran. This, however, gives no basis for identifying these place names with any modern country. Some would see in Meshech and Tubal references to the modern Russian cities of Moscow and Tobolsk. However, there is no etymological, grammatical, historical, or literary data in support of such a position.³⁴

Another note of caution regarding the Ezekiel passage concerns the uncertainty of the timing of this invasion. There is debate even among dispensational premillennialists as to the proper time when this will be fulfilled.³⁵ Is there a fulfillment of Ezekiel 38–39 in Rev 20:7–10, as Alexander has suggested?³⁶ Even for those who see the fulfillment in the tribulation prior to Christ's return, the question must be asked if this invasion comes in the first half of Daniel's seventieth week.

Thus any argument for Russia as the "king of the North" in Dan 11:40 based on the passage in Ezekiel 38–39 rests on weak ground. This is not to say that the Ezekiel passage can have no reference to Russia. In light of the uncertainties, however, the Daniel passage should be interpreted in its own context.

IV. DAN 11:40: THE HERMENEUTICAL FACTOR

Although correlation of related Biblical passages is a legitimate hermeneutical principle in its own right, I have argued in the preceding section that the Ezekiel passage should not be given much weight in the interpretation of Dan 11:40. How then should the "king of the North" be interpreted there? Perhaps it means just what it has throughout chap. 11: a power that emerges out of what once was the Seleucid empire. It seems rather hermeneutically inconsistent that those who interpret the "king of the South" as Egypt and her allies (since this is the meaning it had throughout Daniel 11) are so apt to invest the phrase "king of the North" with a whole new meaning. Pentecost concludes: "Since 'the king of the South' in 11:5–35 referred to a king of Egypt, there seems to be no reason to relate *this* king of the South (v. 40) to some other nation."³⁷ One would think that the same line of reasoning would be applied to the "king of the North," but this is not the case. Archer, at least, recognizes the dilemma:

On the analogy of the struggle between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria, we might expect to see in the final Near Eastern struggle a contest between a bloc of nations allied with Egypt, including Libya and Nubia (or Sudan) referred to in v. 43, and a Syrian coalition, comprising a league of Middle Eastern nations.³⁸

Since Archer opts to interpret the "king of the North" as the antichrist, however, he does not make this application. Yet this is the precise point that the dispensationalist interpretation faces: To be

³⁴ R. Alexander, "Ezekiel," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 6.930. Cf. E. Yamauchi, "Russian Attacks?," *BA* 46 (Spring 1983) 96–97; *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982).

³⁵ For a brief introductory discussion see C. H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," *Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT* (ed. Walvoord and Zuck) 1300.

³⁶ Alexander, "Ezekiel" 937–940. He does not limit the fulfillment, however, to Rev 20:7–10.

³⁷ Pentecost, "Daniel" 1371 (*italics his*). Cf. Walvoord, *Daniel* 277.

³⁸ Archer, "Daniel" 147.

hermeneutically consistent, the “king of the North” ought to be interpreted in light of the meaning the phrase has had throughout the chapter.³⁹

V. THE “KING OF THE NORTH” INTERPRETED IN LIGHT OF THE SELEUCIDS

The hermeneutical issue raised above should make one wonder why Daniel’s “king of the North” has so often been interpreted in light of Russia or the antichrist (revived Roman empire). Wood, after interpreting the “king of the South” as Egypt (as head of the Arab world), quickly dismisses the notion that the “king of the North” is related to the former Seleucid empire: “The designation ‘king of the North’ is not so easily adapted, for the present Syrian government hardly qualifies as a world contender of the stature of the Seleucids.”⁴⁰

What is being overlooked here is that the Seleucid empire was something much more than present-day Syria: “Originally it included a vast area extending from European Thrace east to the borders of India; when it was finally conquered by the Romans in the 1st century BC, the authority of the Seleucid kings was confined to Syria and Cilicia.”⁴¹ At times the empire included in addition to Syria the ancient realms of Babylonia, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Bactria, Arachosia, Sogdiana, and much of ancient Anatolia.⁴² Translated into terms of today’s national boundaries this would include Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, parts of Pakistan, and some of the central Asian republics (the lower parts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

Interpreted in light of the domain of the ancient Seleucid empire, the “king of the North” is no small player for the Armageddon scenario. I would like to submit that the “king of the North” is a confederation of northern nations closely connected with the Middle East that will attack the antichrist and his forces in this military conflict centered in the Middle East.⁴³ If the “king of the South” is Egypt and possibly other neighboring countries of North Africa, then Dan 11:40 may be a prophecy of a combined assault by countries closely connected with the Middle East against the forces of the antichrist with Israel caught in the middle as in the days of the Ptolemies and Seleucids. **[Update Note: In my 2021 commentary on Daniel, I have reversed my position and *slightly* favor the two-king theory. But this is still very debatable, and the three-king theory is certainly a possibility].**

³⁹ Although very few premillennial commentators have taken this position, a brief comment by Richard De Haan indicates substantial agreement with my interpretation: “‘The king of the south’ in the Bible always refers to Egypt, and ‘the king of the north’ is Syria. They probably will be in a confederacy with the other Arab nations. These will unite in their opposition to the Antichrist” (*Middle East* 23).

⁴⁰ Wood, *Daniel* 308.

⁴¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed.) 16.501.

⁴² For a helpful map see B. J. Beitzel, *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 152–153.

⁴³ Of some interest to this discussion are the recent attempts to create an Islamic common market out of several countries that once formed the Seleucid empire. In February 1992 the Economic Co-operation Organization (made up of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan) added several former Soviet republics to its ranks: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Commenting on the possible significance of this new formation United States Senator Larry Pressler said, “There’s a danger there will be a group of seven to nine Islamic fundamentalist countries, contingent to or near India, by the late 90s. . . . If several of these former Soviet states, and Pakistan, have nuclear weapons and if they ever got a federation together, it would be a major force in the world” (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, January 13, 1992).