

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

### PART ELEVEN – GIVING A HISTORY LESSON TO A BELIEVING LEADER

The year 539 BC was an important one in Jewish history. The last Babylonian king, Belshazzar, was overthrown by the alliance of Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Mede. The new rulers treated the Jews very differently from their predecessors. There was a growing realization among the Jews that their 70 years of captivity were almost over. In just 3 years Cyrus would issue the decree which allowed those who wanted to return home to Jerusalem. Daniel's ministry had now lasted 67 turbulent but fruitful years in which he had remained faithful through changing regimes. One might suppose that he would be looking forward to a well earned retirement. Far from it! Through the trickery of jealous rivals Daniel had to face one more near death experience in his meeting with the lions.(chapter 6)

He had been given even before the end of Belshazzar's time a broad view of the four empires which were to follow one another right down to the coming of Christ and beyond.(chapter 7) He had then been allowed a closer view of two of those empires, Persia and Greece. When the Greek empire broke into four under Alexander the Great's four generals, two of them would impact the life of Judah.(chapter 8) Daniel had been reminded of the imminent end of Jewish captivity if only the Jews would acknowledge their sin which had caused it, and by faith accept a new life which would lead on to the coming of the Messiah.(chapter 9) In chapter 10 Daniel had been shown the spiritual warfare between the forces of heaven and hell which is the unseen background to our earthly struggles.

Now Daniel was given one final task, to be 'an encouragement and a protection for',(11:1) Darius, the king who had nearly killed him. His last mission was the spiritual care of his former enemy. How was he to do it? In the way God always does. By teaching him the purpose of God for him and his people in generations to come. He began with the prediction that the fourth king after him would challenge the power of Greece. This was fulfilled by Ahasuerus, otherwise known as Xerxes who would make Esther, a Jewish woman, his queen.(Esther 2:17) He and his successors fought against Greece for over 100 years until a brilliant young Greek king, Alexander, began a lightning campaign which defeated Persia and extended his rule right across to Pakistan.(11:2,3)

Only eight years later, in 323 BC, Alexander the Great would die. After 22 turbulent years his empire would be divided between his four generals. As already described in chapters 7 and 8 Judah would be caught between the Seleucid empire in the north based in Syria and that of the Ptolomies in Egypt to the south. At first Judah would be ruled from Egypt relatively peacefully until 204 BC. In this time Alexandria, named after Alexander, would become a great centre of learning in which the Jews would play a prominent part for centuries to come. In this period the Old Testament would be translated into Greek. This would be known as the Septuagint and would lead to the spread and awareness of the scriptures throughout the Greek world. The Jews themselves would be greatly influenced by the Greek culture leading to the description, Hellenist, in the New Testament.(Acts 6:1)

Daniel was shown accurately the frequently changing relationship between the Ptolomies and the Seleucids. Sometimes they would be united by marriage between their royal families. At other time they would be at war.(11:4-19) Eventually it was the Seleucids who dominated the area leading to much harsher treatment of the Jews. This culminated in the blasphemous actions of Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the temple with sacrifices to heathen gods as already described in chapter 8. Eventually the Jews would rise in revolt and become independent under the Maccabees from 163-63 BC.(11:20-35) In 63 BC Jewish self-rule would come to an end with the Roman invasion under Pompey. Once more the temple would be violated by offensive sacrifices, this time to Roman gods. Julius Caesar, the first Roman emperor would take over not only Judah, which would in future be known as Judea, but would conquer the former oppressors from Syria and Egypt. Roman rule would last for many centuries but during that time a new king, Jesus, would be born. Thankfully though political turmoil would continue the world would never be the same again!(11:36-45)

#### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Why did God give Darius the privilege of knowing all this? How does an awareness of the future change our attitudes to present problems and future opportunities?
2. How did such a glimpse of the future change his attitude towards God and change his behaviour particularly towards God's people? Why does God give us the privilege of knowing something of the events which will climax in Christ's return?
3. Why was Darius not given any dates for these events? Why are we not told when Jesus will return? How are we to occupy ourselves in the meantime?