

Contextual Hermeneutics (Principles of Interpretation)

by Tim Roosenberg

There has been a discussion whether human powers that appear in the prophecy of Daniel 11 are literal/geopolitical, religious/ideological, or both geopolitical and religious/ideological. The internal context of Daniel gives us the answer. There is a change in the powers that appear in the prophecy. In Daniel 11:2-21, the powers referred to are literal/geopolitical.

In verse 22, however, the Prince of the Covenant, Christ, is introduced. He is a religious leader. In the following verses of the prophecy the king of the North is given the additional aspect of being religious while continuing as a geopolitical power. As a geopolitical power, the king of the North directs armies into combat in which large numbers die. This is literal and geopolitical. However, the king of the North also attacks the covenant of God and God's people, making it a religious power as well.

This transition from literal/geopolitical to both geopolitical and religious takes place not just in Daniel 11, but also in Daniel 2, 7, and 8 at the same point in the flow of prophetic history. When the papacy takes power in the waning Roman Empire, a union of church and state results. So we have a geopolitical and religious combination.

In Daniel 7, the divided Roman Empire is represented by the 10 horns. The horns were geopolitical, but the little horn is religious. Once again, both geopolitical and religious powers are indicated since the little horn is among them and uproots three. Again we have a church and state union, or a geopolitical and religious combination.

In Daniel 8, the little horn starts out as Rome and changes to papal Rome. Both literally attack Israel from the northwest, pushing in a southeastern direction. Then it exalts itself into the place of the Prince of the Host (religious) and has an army support it (geopolitical).

In Daniel 11, after the time of Christ the king of the North leads real armies into warfare (geopolitical) and it also attacks the covenant of God and the people of God (religious).

So the contextual evidence indicates that the king of the North in Daniel 11 will be both geopolitical and religious. As the enemy of the king of the North that counters its geopolitical and religious aims, the king of the South would also be both geopolitical and religious.

Another contextual issue is whether the powers represented by the king of the North or South can be changed during verses 23-45—or should they be the same beginning to end? In Daniel 7, 8, and 11, when you leave the focus of Imperial Rome, the kingly power switches to the papacy

represented by the little horn. This power lasts from Rome to the coming of Christ's kingdom.

The parallel between these chapters indicates that the king of the North in Daniel 11:23-45 should be the same power (papacy) all the way through, and its antagonist to the south should be Islam all the way through—which, like the papacy is a geopolitical and religious power.

Daniel 11:29 also ties the conflict and players of verses 25-28 (the former) with verses 29-39 (the appointed time or “returns”) and 40-45 (the latter or “time of the end”). This indicates that if the papacy is the king of the North at any point in Daniel 11:23-45, it should be the king of the North all the way through the whole section. In the same way, Islam should be the king of the South all the way through the whole section.

The parallel between Daniel 11:5-19 and verses 23-45 is striking. When the Greek empire divided, the same two powers (the Seleucids and the Ptolemies) were the kings of the North and South throughout their entire conflict, with Jerusalem caught in the middle.

The same thing happens in the divided Roman Empire. When this empire divides, the same two powers (papal-led Christianity and Islam) are the kings of the North and South throughout their entire conflict, with Jerusalem again caught in the middle.

The internal context of Daniel 11 indicates that the kings of the North and South should be both geopolitical and religious and that they start in the time of Rome and extend all the way to the end of the conflict of the North and South in verse 45. Only Rome and Islam match these criteria!