Now I will tell you what shall surely happen. Three more kings will reign in Persia, and then a fourth who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up all his resources against the realm of Greece.

At the time Daniel received the revelation, Cyrus was the reigning king of Persia, as is indicated in Dan. 10:1, “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, something was revealed to Daniel.” After Cyrus, three minor kings would reign over Persia. Following these three kings would come Xerxes (485-465 B.C.), the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther. Xerxes was far richer than all the previous kings. When he had become strong through his riches, he stirred up all his resources against Greece. He spent four years organizing the largest and best equipped army the world had ever seen, amassing some 2½ million men to fight against Greece. But Xerxes’ campaign against the Greeks came to nothing: it ended in ruin with the defeat of the Persian navy in the Bay of Salamis. With the defeat of Xerxes the Persian Empire faded away.

Then a mighty king shall appear, who will rule with power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his kingdom will be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven. But it will not be given to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his kingdom will be uprooted and given to others.

The next two verses focus on the rise of the Greek empire. The mighty Greek king is a reference to Alexander the Great. Having conquered as far east as India, Alexander died at the age of 33 in 323 B.C. By 301 B.C. his vast empire had been divided up among his generals into four kingdoms: Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt.

The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than him and gain dominion—his dominion shall be a great dominion.

One of Alexander’s generals, Ptolemy, established himself as ruler over Egypt (305-285 B.C.). Another of his generals, Seleucus, having to flee from Babylon, found refuge with Ptolemy in Egypt. Eventually Seleucus departed from Egypt and established an even more powerful dynasty in Syria.

After some years [the king of the South and the king of the North] will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will be married to the king of the North to make an alliance. But she will not retain her power; neither will he stand, nor his power. In those days she will be given up, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who married her.
Approximately sixty years later, an alliance was formed between Egypt and Syria. Ptolemy Philadelphus (264-261 B.C.) of Egypt forced Antiochus Theos of Syria to divorce his own wife, Laodiceia, and marry Philadelphus’ daughter, Berenice. When Philadelphus died two years later, Antiochus abandoned his Egyptian bride and took back his own wife, Laodicea. But in an act of revenge, Laodiceia had her husband, Antiochus, murdered, along with Berenice and the couple’s son.

7 But one from her family line shall arise to take her place. He will come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the North. He will fight against them and be victorious.

Soon there arose an Egyptian king, Ptolemy III (246-222 B.C.), who took vengeance on Syria. He advanced into Syria and brought to ruin all that the Syrians had built up.

8 He will also seize their gods—their metal images, as well as their valuable articles of silver and gold, and carry them off to Egypt. Then for some years he will refrain [from attacking] the king of the North.

Ptolemy III went so far as to carry away captive the Syrian idols and plunder their temples, indicating a complete conquest of the nation.

9 Then [the king of the North] will invade the realm of the king of the South, but he will retreat back to his own land.

Though the Syrian power was prostrated, its enmity against Egypt and its ability to strike back were not completely broken. Seleucus Callinicus (246-226 B.C.) conducted an expedition against the Egyptians, but without much success.

10 His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army that will sweep on like an irresistible flood; and they shall again wage war, even to his fortress.

In the course of time the Syrians regained strength and launched a massive campaign against Egypt. Though Seleucus Callinicus failed in his efforts against Egypt, his two sons carried on the campaign. When the elder son, Seleucus III (227-224 B.C.), met with an untimely death, his younger brother, Antiochus III (also known as Antiochus the Great) (224-187 B.C.), carried on the campaign. He drove the Egyptians out of Syria and advanced towards Egypt itself; he recaptured Sidon and Tyre, swept through Palestine, and attacked the Egyptian garrison at Gaza.

11 Then the king of the South will be enraged and will come out and fight against him—that is, against the king of the North. [The king of the North] will raise up a great army, but that army will be defeated by [the king of the South].

Up to this point the Egyptian king, Ptolemy Philopator (222-205 B.C.), had stood by idly; he was pre-occupied with the pursuit of his own vices and pleasures, while
Antiochus was driving the Egyptians out of Syria. But now he is finally moved to anger and engages Antiochus in battle. Philopator gathered a force consisting of 73,000 men and 73 elephants. Antiochus countered with a force of 72,000 men, 6,000 horses, and 102 elephants. At first, Antiochus gained the advantage; but assuming the victory was his before he had it in hand, he sought to plunder the Egyptian army before it was totally defeated. Consequently, the Egyptians were able to turn certain defeat into unexpected victory.

12When the great army has been disposed of, the heart of [the king of the South] will be exalted; he will cause tens of thousands to fall, but he will not triumph.

Though Philopator had won the victory he was not able to make the most of it, since he was so addicted to luxurious living. He returned to the pursuit of his own pleasures and did nothing to re-establish Egyptian security and sovereignty.

13Then the king of the North will return, having assembled an army even larger than his former one. After several years he will attack with a huge army fully equipped.

The defeat suffered at the hands of Philopator and the Egyptians did not dishearten Antiochus. He proceeded to raise an even greater army than before and launched another offensive against Egypt.

14In those times many will stand against the king of the South. Also, the violent men among your people will rebel in an effort to fulfill the vision, but they will fall.

Internal problems within the Egyptian empire made it possible for Antiochus to have no small measure of success. With the death of Philopator in 205 B.C., various uprisings occurred within the Egyptian empire that weakened its power considerably. These internal rebellions within Egypt itself sparked similar uprisings in Palestine: a Jewish revolt led by Tobias threw off Egyptian dominion and sought to establish an independent Jewish nation in Palestine. This revolt would eventually bring the Jews under the control of Syria, rather than establishing an independent nation.

15So the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will not be able to stand their ground; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand.

There had been a disruption in the victorious advance of Antiochus, as he had been called away to deal with difficulties in Pergamum. During his absence, the Egyptian general, Scopas, recaptured some of the territory Antiochus had gained back for Syria. But now, upon his return, Antiochus recouped his loses and drove the Egyptians back to Sidon, the “fortified city” referred to in verse 15.
16He who comes against [the king of the South] will do as he pleases, and no one will be able to stand against him. And he will stand in the Glorious Land, and it shall be entirely in his hand.

Antiochus has now gained complete control of the situation and no one can stand against him as he proceeds south into Palestine. The Jews, having rebelled against Egypt, look favorably to Antiochus for protection, and Antiochus poses as their friend. He released Jerusalem from all taxes for a period of three years, he contributed a large sum of money to the temple, and he made the priests exempt from all future taxation. Thus Israel yielded itself to Syrian rule—and embraced the Syrian/Greek secular culture.

17He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom, offering [the king of the South] equitable terms that he intends to carry out. He will also give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow [the kingdom]; but she will not take a stand for him or work on his behalf.

Antiochus contemplated the expedition of a great army to completely conquer Egypt, and upon their surrender set up an equitable policy of rule over the nation. But the plan never materialized; however, he did give his daughter, Cleopatra, in marriage to the Egyptian king, Ptolemy Epiphanes. His intention was to control Egypt through his daughter; but Cleopatra gave her allegiance to her Egyptian husband rather than to her father, consequently Antiochus’ scheme failed.

18After this he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them. But a commander will make him desist from his boasting without repaying him by boasting against him.

Antiochus now turned his attention away from Egypt to the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea. His desire was to secure his control over Asia Minor and the islands off the coast of Asia Minor so that the Romans could not conquer this region and advance into Syria. By 196 B.C. Antiochus had advanced as far west as Thrace, but in 190 B.C. the Roman general, Lucius Scipio defeated him in a battle near Magnesia. As the text indicates, Lucius showed no small measure of graciousness to the defeated Syrian ruler. But by 190 B.C. Antiochus had been driven back into Syria.

19Then he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own land; but he will stumble and fall, and be heard of no longer.

Following his defeat at the hands of the Romans, Antiochus returned home in humiliation and faded away.

20In his place one shall arise who will send out a tax collector who will pass through the Glorious Kingdom. But within a few days he will be destroyed, though not in anger or in battle.
Following the reign of Antiochus the Great, Seleucus Philopator (187-176 B.C.) came to the throne of Syria. Due to Antiochus’ defeat at the hands of the Romans, the new Syrian king was forced to pay an enormous tribute to Rome annually; this consequently led to a heavy taxation by the Syrians imposed upon their subject nations, including the Jews. The Syrian king sent a special tax collector to Jerusalem to confiscate the rich treasures of the temple; this is the meaning of the phrase, “a tax collector ... will pass through the Glorious Kingdom” (“the Glorious Kingdom” being a reference to Israel.)

21In his place there will arise a contemptible person, one on whom the honor of the kingdom has not been bestowed. He will come by stealth and obtain the kingdom by means of intrigue.

When Seleucus Philopator died, his brother, Antiochus Epiphanes (176-164 B.C.), managed to secure the throne. He posed as the guardian of the legitimate successor to the throne, Seleucus’ infant son; but the boy was murdered and Antiochus assumed the throne himself.

22Overflowing armies will be swept away before him and will be broken; and also the prince of the covenant.

When Antiochus Epiphanes first gained the throne, his position was not secure; it was a time when armies are pictured as surging through the country like a flood. But the forces of opposition were eventually disposed of by Antiochus and his position was secured. During this time of upheaval even “the prince of the covenant” (a reference to the pious high priest, Onias) was murdered.

23After an alliance has been made with him, he will practice deceit; he will advance and gain power with only a small number of supporters by means of stealth.

Upon securing the throne and solidifying his kingdom, Antiochus began to form leagues with other nations. Through such leagues, and by further intrigues, Antiochus began to ascend as a major force in the Middle East.

24He will enter the fertile areas of the provinces and will do something neither his fathers nor forefathers had done: he will distribute plunder, booty and spoils among [his allies]. He will [successfully] devise his schemes against strongholds, but only for a time.

Antiochus further enhanced his position by plundering the most fertile territories of his subject nations and then distributing the spoils to others in order to gain their support (this was a departure from his forefathers who would squander the spoils upon themselves in luxurious living). With his newly won support, Antiochus managed to secure a key fortress, Pelinium, on the border of Egypt, but only “for a time.”
He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a vast army. So the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war. But he will not stand, for they will devise schemes against him.

Now Antiochus summoned up his strength and courage to invade Egypt. The Egyptians countered Antiochus with an even greater army of their own. But by means of intrigue, more than military might, Antiochus was able to defeat the Egyptians.

Indeed, those who eat of the king’s choice food will break him, and his army will be swept away, and many shall be slain.

It was treachery within the royal court of Egypt that caused the defeat of the Egyptian king and his army before Antiochus.

The hearts of both these kings will be set on doing mischief; they will speak lies to each other at the same table. But [their devices] will not succeed, for their end shall yet come at the appointed time.

Both Antiochus and the Egyptians were involved in treachery: both sides presenting insincere treaties and conditions of peace. However, all their intrigue was for naught, as neither side would gain the ultimate victory.

Then [the king of the North] will return to his own land, with great wealth. But his heart will be set against the holy covenant; so he will take action and then return to his own land.

After a temporary success in Egypt, Antiochus returned to Syria. On his way, he passed through Palestine where he plundered the temple and expressed his hostility against the holy covenant.

At the appointed time he will return and [once again] enter [the kingdom of] the South. But this time the outcome will not be the same as [his] previous [expedition].

In the course of time Antiochus launched out on yet another expedition against Egypt, but this time the results were not as he had expected.

Ships from the western coastlands will oppose him; he will be intimidated and retreat. [Then] he will vent his fury against the holy covenant and take action [against it]. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.

Antiochus was to find that the Egyptians were no longer divided: the two brothers who had unwittingly allowed Antiochus to set them against each other while he took advantage of their feud had been reconciled through the efforts of their sister. By 168 B.C. the two brothers had together gained the support of Rome. From their naval bases on the island of Cyprus and along the western coastlands, the Romans
stood ready to defend Egypt. When Antiochus besieged Alexandria, the Roman ambassador confronted him with Rome’s demand that he return to Syria. In humiliation Antiochus withdrew from Egypt. As he returned through Palestine, Antiochus vented his rage against the people of God. Being admitted into Jerusalem by those Jews who had supported him, Antiochus let loose his army, which then pillaged the city and massacred many of the devout Jews.

31He will send armed forces to desecrate the sanctuary, the [place of] refuge. They will take away the daily sacrifice and set up in its [place] the abomination that causes desolation.

Some time later, in 167 B.C., Antiochus responded to Jewish resistance by sending his troops into Jerusalem with the purpose of wiping out the biblical religion. The daily sacrifices were forbidden, as were the observance of the Sabbath and the sacrament of circumcision; the Scriptures were confiscated and burned; and a pagan idol to the Greek god, Zeus, was set up in the temple courtyard—this is referred to as “the abomination that causes desolation.” Government agents patrolled the land, intent on stamping out the biblical religion and forcing “conversions” to paganism.

32By means of persuasive words he will cause those who have transgressed against the covenant to become apostates. But the people who know their God will be strong and take action [against him].

By persuasive words, Antiochus succeeded in causing a number of Jews to deny the faith. But those “who know their God,” (i.e., those who are genuine believers in the LORD), refused to deny the faith, even at the risk of their lives.

33Those who are wise among the people will instruct many; though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or be captured or be plundered.

Godly teachers stood up at this time in Israel to instruct the people of God and to exhort them to remain faithful to the LORD and His covenant. Their efforts met with no small measure of success; but their very success caused them and their followers to be persecuted unto death.

34Now as they fall, they will receive a little help; and many shall join themselves with them, but not sincerely.

As the faithful people of God fell before their persecutors they received “a little help” (a reference to the Maccabees.) At Modein, a village west of Jerusalem, there lived an elderly priest named Mattathias. When the Syrian agent commanded him to offer sacrifice to the pagan idol under penalty of death, Mattathias slew the agent. He and his five sons then fled into the hills of Judaea. One of his sons, Judas Maccabeus, led a revolt against the Syrians by the use of guerilla warfare. The Maccabees won a series of brilliant victories, and in 164 B.C. the temple in Jerusalem was cleansed and re-dedicated. But the revolt of the Maccabees is called “a little help” because the
deliverance eventually degenerated into earthly nationalism and self-ambition. The descendants of the Maccabees established a monarchy that became just as corrupt as the nations around them. In order to maintain their independence from Syria, the Maccabees had entered into an alliance with Rome. Eventually, in 53 B.C., the Romans came and took control over Judaea. The revolt of the Maccabees is also identified as only “a little help” because it brought many hypocrites into the fold: the combination of the strong influence of the godly teachers and the early successes of the Maccabees put a societal pressure, as well as the fear of reprisal, upon many, influencing them to outwardly return to the biblical religion without any true conversion of heart.

35Some of those who are wise shall fall in order to refine them, purge them, and make them pure for the end time; because [the end] is still to come at the appointed time.

This whole period of trial and persecution is said to have the beneficial effect of purifying the people of God, a purifying process that has a definite terminus and shall not continue without end; and this whole sequence of events shall occur in the appointed time.