

Is the Switchback Interpretation of Daniel 11:20-31 still valid?

At the 1919 SDA Bible Conference, Christian M. Sorenson stated “I do not think we are through with this chapter (Daniel 11). This is one of the great chapters (that) will be able to help men to see the hand of God is in human history.” And yet over 100 years later, we are still not “through” with this chapter.

Chronology Smith’s interpretation of verses 20-32

I will attempt to chart the verse and date of the Smith interpretation below:

Verse	Date	Interpretation
20	27BC	Caesar Augustus (Octavian) becomes emperor
21	14AD	Tiberius becomes emperor
22	31AD	Jesus is crucified

Switchback

23	161BC	The league between the Jews and the Roman Republic
24	31BC	Roman Civil War, Cleopatra VII, Mark Antony, and war booty
25	>31BC	Struggle between Mark Antony and Octavian
26	>31BC	Struggle between Mark Antony and Octavian
27	>31BC	Struggle between Mark Antony and Octavian
28	70 AD	Wars with Egypt and the destruction of Jerusalem
29	330	Constantine moves the capital to Constantinople
30	455	Vandals sack Rome
31	508	Clovis starting Frankish-Papal alliance

Time Gap

When I began studying the various interpretations of this chapter, one of the first questions I had about both the Smith and the Islam positions was about time gaps in Daniel 11. There are no large time gaps in previous chapters, so why would Daniel have those in his final prophecy? Based on the rise to power and then a power check, there should only be a forward gap in time BETWEEN each kingdom, not within each kingdom.

In the Smith position, there is a “Switch Back” in time of 190 years between verses 22 (the cross) and 23 (Jewish-Roman league). Yes, we have some recapitulations within a time period consistent with Hebrew parallelism and the concept of working from cause to effect versus effect to cause (see Dan. 9:26&27). Yet, in the previous chapters of Daniel, nowhere do we see a switch back from the current kingdom (Imperial Rome) to a previous kingdom (Greek Seleucids).

Additionally, Dr. Tarsee Li pointed out at the 2021 Daniel 11 Conference that the “contemptible person” (KJV “vile person) in verse 21 as the King of the North is represented in the following pronouns. If you add in Dr. Li’s notes from his 2023 paper on verse 23, you have the following: “After the making of an alliance with him he (contemptible person) will practice deception.” Therefore, the “alliance” cannot be referring to the Roman-Jewish League of 161bc, it must be an agreement with Imperial Rome.

Hermeneutical Challenges to the Smith Position:

- Based on the previous prophecies on the 4th beast (2:33,40; 7:7,12,17,19, 23; 8:9,10a,23; 9:26,27a), what elements are being repeated and enlarged upon in verses Da 11:23-28?
- Does Daniel use any other switchbacks outside of Hebrew parallelism and effect-to-cause recapitulation to this length?
- Where is the power checked in the Imperial Roman period?
- Does the Battle of Actium and wars with Egypt affect God's people in the "glorious land"?
- In verse 27, how do you justify Mark Antony as King of the South? When was he ever given royalty?
- Do these six verses regarding the Roman Civil War really help us "understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days" (Daniel 10:14)?
- This interpretation is outside the guardrails of the Spirit of Prophecy. The Smith view gives six verses about the Jewish-Roman league, a civil war, and battles with Egypt that Ellen White never mentions in all of her writings.

Verse 24 and the Word for Year

In verse 24, the Smith position believes the word "time" here refers to a 360-year period between the Battle of Actium in 31BC and the movement of the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople in 330AD. In Strong's, the word for "year" שָׁנָה 'êth, ayth is from H5703 meaning: "time, especially (adverb with preposition) now, when, etc.:— after, (al-) ways, × certain, continually, evening, long, (due) season, so (long) as, (even-, evening-, noon-) tide, (meal-), what) time, when."

Nowhere is this word used for a prophetic year. Instead, 'idān is used for a year of prophetic time from Strong's H5732 in Daniel 4:16 and 7:25.

Another question arises, and that is "why 31 BC?" Why not count from 163 BC and the Jewish-Roman league? Or 27 BC and the actual beginning of the Roman Empire? What is the principle-based reasoning for using the start date from a war that had no effect on God's people?

A final note here is that Milan was the administrative capital of the empire in 330 AD - not Rome - when it was moved to Constantinople. The Edict of Milan in 313 AD was so titled because that was where Constantine's administrative capital was.

Verse 31 and Forces from Him

Smith see this as the starting point for the Frankish-Papal alliance started by Clovis 1st in 508. It is undoubtedly true that this verse is speaking of the power of the Papacy to take away the "daily/continual." Even so, there appears to be no indication in the texts themselves that this is a transition from Imperial Rome in verse 30 to Papal Rome in this verse. The SDA Bible Commentary suggests the "forces" or "arms" come from the Papacy's "sanctuary of strength," either from the city of Rome itself or against the heavenly sanctuary. With the focus of this text being the Papacy and the sanctuary, there is little to suggest the text refers to Clovis I or the Frankish-Papal alliance in its infancy. Furthermore, while the Franks in 508 were converting conquered people - both pagans and Arians - to Catholicism in a general sense, they were by no means enforcing Papal dogma with the sword.

For the above-stated reasons, I would suggest the following interpretation consistent with the Divided Kings of Daniel 2 and the Little Horn of Daniel 7 and 8. Additionally, Daniel 11 verses 23-31 parallel the

previous verses in 3-31 where two rival kings emerge with the king of the south having the upper hand and control over God's people. Yet, through a great struggle, the king of the north gains the upper hand and takes control of God's people. Both Kings of the North (Antiochus III or the Great and the Papacy) magnify and exult themselves (see verses 16-19 and 36-39 respectively)

Years of 31BC – 70AD: Imperial Roman Empire (Verses 20-22)

20 In his place will arise one who sends out an exactor for the splendor of the kingdom. But in a few days he (subj the one who sends out an exactor/king of north) will be broken, but not in anger or in battle.

- Augustus instituted efficient taxation and census-taking system, using the funds for elaborate architecture, and expanded the network of Roman roads leading to the expression, "All roads lead to Rome." On these roads, the Gospel spread to all parts of the world.
- On August 19, 14 AD, near Naples, Italy, Caesar Augustus died after some months of declining health neither in "anger nor in battle."

21 In his place will arise a contemptible person. Royal dignity was not conferred on him (obj contemptible person/ king of north). He will come in quietly, and will seize the kingdom by smoothness.

- Tiberius Caesar was in power at the time of Jesus' crucifixion 33 years later. Though a great military commander, he spurned court life and politics. Augustus attempted to groom his nephew, then a grandson, and still, another adopted son for the throne. Each died before Augustus, leaving only Tiberius, the bottom of the barrel, left for the throne.
- Tiberius was initially a good ruler, but after the death of his son, he soon fell out of favor with the people. He became eccentric, aloof, and reclusive. He would leave the city to ruthless leaders who abused the people while he went off to the paradise island of Capri and committed numerous sexual debaucheries. Tiberius dies a lonely, old man in 37 AD.

22 The sweeping arms will be swept away before him, and will be broken, also the prince of the covenant.

- First, we have a political statement: "Armies shall be broken and utterly swept away before him (or the Roman army)."
- Then, we have a religious statement: "The Prince of the Covenant shall be broken and utterly swept away before him (or Rome)."
- This text is unquestionably about the power of Rome through its crushing legions, not only devouring nations around them but, more importantly, being the power who through Pilate issued a death decree and carried it out on Jesus, the Prince of the Covenant. Even so, the Gospel of Salvation - through a condemned and executed innocent Man- spread like wildfire to all the nations of the world.

Years of 508-ca1215: Establishment of Church-State System in Europe (Verses 23-31)

23 After the making of an alliance with him he (subj contemptible person) will practice deception.

He will go up and become mighty with a small people.

- Starting in 476, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Papacy had to make temporary alliances with its barbarian neighbors in order to survive. The alliance with the Franks beginning in 508 would not only be stronger than all the rest but would remain steadfast until the time appointed of 1798.
- At this time, because of the Barbarian invasions and Arianism, Catholicism was small but began to spread rapidly throughout southern, central, and western Europe through missionaries and with the sword of the Franks.

24 *He will come quietly and into the rich areas of the province. He will do that which neither his fathers nor his forefathers have done. He will distribute to them plunder and spoil and wealth. Against the fortifications he will devise his plans, but only for a time.*

- In 533, the Papacy began the process of receiving a temporal dominion with the Byzantine Emperor giving the pope the city of Rome.
- Simony, the practice of buying and selling ecclesiastical privileges, church offices, or promotion, began as early as 498.
- The pope of Rome had to “devise plans” to be a temporal ruler, using monastic establishments to spread spiritual rule throughout Europe and leverage against the Emperor who had the Bishop of Constantinople at his side.
- “*But only for a time*” is a significant phrase. The word “*time*” means “the time of an event.” And the Papacy would engage in scattering plunder, spoil, and goods among those who honor them until the time of the end in 1798.

25 *He will arouse his strength and his heart against the king of the south with a large army. The king of the south will be stirred up for the battle with a great and very strong army. But he (subj. king of the south) will not stand. For plans will be devised against him.*

- 535-554 The Gothic Wars with Byzantine General Narses (KOS) and an overwhelming force defeated the Ostrogoths, again liberating Rome at the Battle of Taginae of 552 and vanquishing the remaining Ostrogothic army for good.
- As to “*plots shall be devised against him*”, this can clearly be seen in the fact that Papacy initially supported the Arian Ostrogoths and in the subsequent interplay between the popes, Ostrogoths, and the emperor.

26 *And those who eat his provisions will break him. His army will be swept away, [textual variant] and many will fall slain.*

- None of the alliances with the Barbarian nation could give the Papacy temporal power against Constantinople during this period. The Exarchate of Ravenna, under the authority of the Byzantine emperor, dominated the region. The populace of the peninsula had been devastated by war, famine, and disease. Also, the Papacy had lost control over papal elections. The Papacy would not gain the upper hand on Constantinople until 800 with the crowning of the French king, Charlemagne.

27 *As for the two kings, their hearts will be set on evil. At the same table they (subj the two kings) will speak lies. But it will not succeed. For the end is still for an appointed time.*

- 711 Pope Constantine traveled to Constantinople to end a dispute over the Quinisext Ecumenical Council with Emperor Justinian II. However, the pope’s real motive was the split over sacramental marriages. A compromise was reached where Pope Constantine gave ground on “Economia” or the handling, management, and disposition, of the council, but he held firm on most papal concerns. It was truly a compromise borne in diplomatic speak between the two rival “kings” where many words were spoken but accomplished little towards ending the rift between the two parties.

28 *He (subj contemptible person/ king of the north) will return to his land with great riches, with his heart set against the holy covenant. He will take action. Then he will return to his own land.*

- After 756 and the establishment of the Papal States, territories in the majority of the Italian Peninsula gave direct temporal sovereign rule to the Pope.
- In 787, the 2nd Council of Nicaea approved idol worship and declared that tradition superseded Scripture.

29 *At the appointed time he will again come into the south. But the latter event will not be as the first.*

- The pope, as KON with his Frankish armies, attacked Constantinople, the KOS again. Charlemagne, with sizable force, attacked the Byzantine peripheral states of Venice and the Dalmatian coast. The Byzantines were not in a position to send a force to their aid. Additionally, the pope refused to acknowledge Irene as Byzantine Emperor in 797. In 811, a peace treaty was finally signed between Charlemagne and Byzantine emperor Michael I, where the Byzantine Empire would accept Charlemagne as king of the Franks, and Charlemagne would give back the Dalmatian coast region.

30 Ships of Kittim will come against him, and he (subj "him" / king of north) will be disheartened.

He will again be indignant against the holy covenant and take action. He will again pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant.

- Out of their Mediterranean Sea bases, Arab pirate raiders sacked Rome in 843, which caused the Papacy to withdraw and form the Italian League of Papal, Neapolitan, Amalfitan, and Gaetan ships to fend off the Arab pirates and won the famous naval Battle of Ostia in 849.
- In 870, at the Fourth Council of Constantinople, the Covenant was again attacked with the sanctioning idolatry and veneration of Mary.

31 Arms will arise from him and will profane the sanctuary fortress. They (subj arms) will remove the continual worship and set up the desolating abomination.

- At this point in time, the Papacy held all ecclesiastical authority in the Western Church. The pope's "forces" were the temporal powers in Europe, the increased focus of the inquisition beginning in the 1250s, and later with the Jesuit Order beginning in 1540
- At the Fourth Council of Lateran in 1215, it was ordered that parishioners must keep the annual reception of penance and the Eucharist. They also used the term "transubstantiation" to explain the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist and the Sacraments, the Catholic church has removed the Daily/Continual sanctuary ministries of lay members. Congregants no longer study the Bible for themselves, pray directly to God, or witness to their neighbors.
- In 70 AD, the Imperial Roman flags or standards with the iconic eagle were set up in the temple of Jerusalem commemorating their victory, which was the abomination prophesied in 31 AD by Jesus. Likewise, starting around 1215 with the sanctions of its counsels, the Papacy harnessed the use of secular forces to enforce the church dogmas, which were in direct contradiction to the teachings of the Apostles and of Scripture, especially in the areas of the sanctuary which set up the Papal Roman abomination of desolation.

This interpretation enlarges on Daniel 2s "mixing of iron and clay" and presents how church and state are combined using what Ellen White called "church craft." It explains how the eleventh or little horn of Daniel 7 grew out of Imperial Rome, how it was different as a religio-politico entity, and three uprooted horns were entirely annihilated during the Gothic war. This interpretation details how the medieval papacy, as the Little Horn of Daniel 8 received a "host" or massive following, took away the Christian's daily or regular form of worship, "throw truth to the ground" through its church councils, and how it would "act and prosper." Furthermore, it describes the Great Schism in the Christian Church which exists to this day, explains what happens when church and state unite, and details how false worship creeps in to replace true worship. The Medieval Divided Kingdoms period (the feet) set the stage for the End-time Divided Kingdoms (the toes) where ecumenicalism, the union of church and state, and false worship will be orchestrated and directed by the Vatican Papacy.