

Dan 11:40 and Literalism

Frank W. Hardy

Some years ago I came across a small book by Hal Lindsey entitled, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*.¹ It was very engagingly written. A couple of passages from this book are germane to what we're studying here in regard to Dan 11:40-45.

Finally, the prophets told us that a great northern confederacy will launch an all-out attack on the Middle East and Israel in particular (Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 11:40-45). For two centuries, Christian and Jewish scholars have identified this northern power as being Russia.²

This statement shows that Lindsey was including Dan 11:40-45 as an example of what he means by "a great northern confederacy." In the following statement he mentions only Ezek 38-39, but in his thinking Dan 11:40-45 is part of the same context.

Three times in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 it is forecast that Israel's great enemy will come from the 'extreme' or 'uttermost' north. Just take a globe and run your finger due north from Israel; you'll find yourself smack in the middle of Russia.³

If what we want is a literal interpretation, one could not be more literal than this, or more wrong. If we want the geographical coordinates in Dan 11:40-45 to be literal, then "north" is going to have to mean north and "south" is going to have to mean south – not "north" in the sense of papal forces from western Europe and "south" in the sense of Islamic forces from all over the Muslim world. Taking things only and purely as they read is something Lindsey is good at. We can't compete with him in that arena.

So let's not go down path X and call it path Y. Let's call what we do only and purely what it is. Adventism was not built on a platform of literalism and will not be strengthened by approximating such arguments. Literalism deflects attention away from the papacy and directs it to a popular villain on which all can happily agree. Focusing on Russia is not Adventism, and focusing on the papacy is not literalism. These two concepts have nothing in common.

As a follow up to the discussion Wednesday evening, consider that I merely point out that real events can be described with any kind of symbol, of without symbols. For example, Alexander's conquests can be described as a difference of metals (Dan 2), as a leopard with four wings (Dan 7), as a goat attacking a ram so fast its feet wouldn't touch the ground (Dan 8), or by simply saying he would rise and rule with great dominion (Dan 11). Any set of events can be described with any sort of words. So if the language of Dan 11:40b sounds military, with horsemen and ships and so on, that in

¹ New York: Bantam, 1981.

² Idem, 46.

³ Idem, 67

itself has no bearing on whether the events themselves are military. The nature of the facts and the nature of the words used to describe them, in this or any other body of literature, are unrelated.