

Statement No. 10
Consistency of Meaning: A Rule of Prophetic Interpretation
Statement Sponsor
John Witcombe

Statement: When a word or phrase is used in a specific, prophetic scenario, the meaning of that word or phrase remains consistent from start to finish. The immediate context helps determine the interpretation of that word or phrase.

In Revelation 12, the word *woman* is used 8 times. This word *woman* represents the unfallen church. There's nothing in this chapter that would indicate that this word should mean anything other than an unfallen church for each of the 8 times it is used.

In Revelation 17, the word *woman* is used 6 times. This word *woman* represents the fallen church. There's nothing in this chapter that would indicate that this word should mean anything other than a fallen church for each of the 6 times it is used.

In Daniel 4, the word *beasts/beast's* is used 8 times. In this chapter it clearly refers to a literal animal. There are no internal indications that this word *beast* should mean anything other than an animal from the start of the prophecy through to the end.

In Daniel 7, the word *beast/beasts* is used 10 times. In this chapter it clearly refers to civil kingdoms. There are no internal indications that this word *beast* should mean anything other than a civil kingdom from the start of the prophecy through to the end.

I have shown above that the same word can mean two different things in prophetic writings, but the two meanings are not commingled within a specific prophetic scenario. I believe that we have identified here a rule of prophetic interpretation that we could apply to Daniel 11. That rule is:

When a word or phrase is used in a specific, prophetic scenario, the meaning of that word or phrase remains consistent from start to finish. The immediate context helps determine the interpretation of that word or phrase.

For instance, we don't go to Daniel 4 to find out the meaning of the word "beast" for chapter 7. The correct interpretation of the word will be best understood by examining the immediate context in which the word is used.

Now to apply this rule to Daniel 11:

In Daniel 11 the word *ships* is mentioned twice, once in verse 30 and once in verse 40. In verse 30 it is generally held that this word *ships* refers to literal ships that ply the waters. Based upon the rule of consistency, the word *ships* in verse 40 would also need to refer to literal ships. But for many, this second mention of *ships* is seen to be a figurative term for economic power. The rule of consistency would require them to either both be understood figuratively or both be understood literally.

In Daniel 11, the word *king/kings/king's* is used 15 times. In the first 11 instances where this word is used, it clearly refers to a historical, identifiable civil ruler. There are no internal indications within the immediate context that would indicate that this word *king* should mean anything other than an identifiable civil ruler for the last 4 uses of this word.

In Daniel 11, the word *south* is used 9 times. In the first 8 instances where this word is used, it clearly refers to the southern regions of Alexander's Empire. There are no internal indications within the immediate context that would indicate that this word *south* should mean anything other than this specific geographical region for the final use of this word.

In Daniel 11 the word *north* is used 8 times. Most Bible students believe that the first six times this word *north* is used it refers to “one of the four compass points or cardinal directions. It is the opposite of south and is perpendicular to east and west.” The rule of consistency would require that the remaining two *norths* found in the chapter be understood to mean the same. However, many place a figurative meaning upon the word *north* found in verse 40 and verse 44.

In Daniel 11, the phrases - *king of the north* and *king of the south* - are used 13 times. In the first 10 instances, they clearly refer to civil rulers of the northern and southern regions of Alexander’s Empire. There are no internal indications within the immediate context that would indicate that these two phrases should mean anything other than a reference to specific civil rulers of literal, geographical regions for the last 3 uses of these phrases.

This inconsistency is not practiced in any other prophecy of the Bible. The violation of this rule will guarantee a false interpretation of the prophecy. Once the meaning for a word or phrase is determined, that meaning must be applied to that word or phrase wherever else it may be found in that prophecy.