

## Daniel

During the second-century Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid (Greek) rulers of Judah, some Jews did not join the rebellion but thought that God would intervene to expel the non-Jews. This pacifist group of Jews produced the book of Daniel.

The first half of the book describes a man using his God-given wisdom to serve only God in a series of hostile environments. The same fidelity shown by his three friends is equally rewarded in chapter three, a chapter that is intended to take the focus off one hero (heroism being the Maccabean temptation) and make the reader view life as a contest between God and those who would harm the quietly faithful.

The second half of the book is a collection of visions. A key to their interpretation begins in 8:20:

As for the ram [Cyrus] that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia [united under Cyrus]. The male goat [Philip II of Macedon] is the king of Greece [and father of Alexander], and the great horn [Alexander] between its eyes is the first king [first in prestige as Alexander achieved more than his father]. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power [the descendants of Alexander's officers, including Seleucus I, weakened each other through frequent fighting].

The following verses refer to Antiochus IV, the last Seleucid to rule Judah, adding, 'But he shall be broken, and not by human hands.' This is dismissive of the Maccabean revolt but confident that Antiochus' rule will end.

Each of the remaining chapters repeats this story but with different symbols. For instance, in 11:5 'the king of the south' is one of the Ptolomies who were based in the Egyptian corner of Alexander's old empire. In 11:6 'the king of the north' is one of the Seleucids.

Having spent the opening chapters commending the wisdom of Daniel, the author now commends the wisdom of his own allies and acknowledges that they face execution for their refusal to accommodate Greek idols:

The wise among the people shall give understanding to many; for some days, however, they shall fall by sword and flame, and suffer captivity and plunder. When they fall victim, they shall receive a little help, and many shall join them insincerely' (11:33f).

The mention of 'a little help' is a lukewarm reference to the Maccabeans. The wisdom that is being esteemed includes the canniness of writing about current

events in terms that outsiders could not fathom. Hence Antiochus is never named but his self-designation 'Epiphanes' (divine manifestation) is in mind when he is said to 'exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god' (11:36). Antiochus' golden statue of Zeus is referred to as 'an abomination that desolates' in 9:27 and parodied in chapter three.

This statue was installed in the Jerusalem temple in 167 BCE, so the book of Daniel must have been written after this. The outcome of the contest between the Maccabees and Antiochus (the victory of the former in 164) is not mentioned because it has not happened at the time of writing. Hence scholars put the date of writing at 165 to indicate that the author has got the events of 164 wrong. He mistakenly predicts Antiochus conquering Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia before settling in Judah: 'He shall pitch his palatial tents between the [Mediterranean] sea and the beautiful holy mountain [Zion]. Yet he shall come to his end, with no one to help him' (11:45). In fact, Antiochus died in 164 over in Babylon, having never defeated Egypt, Libya or Ethiopia.

The author's impressive accuracy before this is meant to give solidity to his final description of Michael's triumph in chapter 12. 'Michael' means 'Who is like God?', a rebuke to gentiles who worship other gods, to Hellenized Jews who accommodate them, and to Jewish terrorists who choose not to wait for God to intervene.

It is ironic that the picture of God intervening through angels and through 'one like a son of man' (a standard way of saying 'human' in Hebrew, which is poor in adjectives) is entirely Greek in its theological assumptions, whereas the earlier biblical imagery of God intervening directly is felt to be too primitive to command the respect of a Jewish audience that has become aware of Greek ideas.

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