

Text: Dan 11.21-35

Last week I took you through Daniel 11.1-20, showing the prophecy back and forth between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucid empire of Syria, fighting over Palestine. The Jews would be caught in the middle and suffer much through these conflicts.

Finally, the Seleucids prevailed, led by Antiochus Epiphanes, but his brutality and blasphemy finally led the Jews into revolt. That is our story today.

Dan 11.21 "In his place a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue.

ANTIOCHUS IV Epiphanes (175-163)

The next section of the prophecy (vv. 21-35) deals with this king. He is called "a despicable person" because of the overall effects of his reign. He is the 'little horn' of Dan 8.19-12, 23-25. He is the foreshadowing of the little horn of Daniel 7.8 (see also Dan 11.36-39ff.).

Antiochus IV was the younger son of Antiochus III. His father had received Hannibal into his court after Hannibal's defeat by Rome in 202 BC. Hannibal was an instigator of Antiochus the Great's attempts at westward expansion into Greece. When the Roman's stopped his advance, they took his son, Antiochus as a hostage for twelve years.

Antiochus was not entitled to the throne by right of succession, so he is called one '**to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom**' but he took the throne for himself through intrigue, he came in during a time of '**tranquility**' and obtained the kingdom '**by intrigue**'. (The throne should have gone to one of his nephews, sons of his brother, Seleucus IV). He took the name "Epiphanes", ["the illustrious one", almost a term of deity]. The Jews nicknamed him instead "Epimanes", "the madman".

Antiochus was a political man, very adept in the politics of the day. He carried with him a sense of mission like Alexander's, with the goal to 'Hellenize' his kingdom. In a sense the more aggressive Seleucids were attempting to recover Alexander's kingdom and mission.

Dan 11.22 “The overflowing forces will be flooded away before him and shattered, and also the prince of the covenant.

One of the acts that established Antiochus as king was successfully turning away the attack of a foreign army (perhaps Egypt). Another early act of Antiochus was to interfere in Jerusalem. He replaced Onias III, the high priest or ‘**the prince of the covenant**’ with Onias’ brother, Jason, a pro-Greek high priest.

Jason’s installation resulted in a Greek gymnasium being built in Jerusalem and other pro-Greek activities in Judah. It also resulted in opposition by the orthodox Jews, known as Hasidim, ‘the pious’. Antiochus saw this reaction as a challenge to his authority and waited for opportunities to thwart it.

Later, another Jew, named Menelaus, of the tribe of Benjamin, offered a higher tribute to Antiochus than Jason to buy the high priest’s office. This action so scandalized the Hasidim that they now were ready to support Jason against Menelaus.

Dan 11.23-27 “After an alliance is made with him he will practice deception, and he will go up and gain power with a small *force of* people.²⁴ “In a time of tranquility he will enter the richest *parts of* the realm, and he will accomplish what his fathers never did, nor his ancestors; he will distribute plunder, booty and possessions among them, and he will devise his schemes against strongholds, but *only* for a time.²⁵ “He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he will not stand, for schemes will be devised against him.²⁶ “Those who eat his choice food will destroy him, and his army will overflow, but many will fall down slain.²⁷ “As for both kings, their hearts will be *intent* on evil, and they will speak lies *to each other* at the same table; but it will not succeed, for the end is still *to come* at the appointed time.

Antiochus worked by making treaties with potential enemies, then attacking them when they weren’t looking. The passage refers to a **league** he made with Ptolemy VI, king of Egypt. After making the treaty, Antiochus marched against Egypt and had an army in the Nile delta before the Egyptians became aware of the treachery. Antiochus used

the taxes from his vast realm (**'the richest part of the realm'**) to finance his efforts against his enemies, sometimes playing one against another. In this attack against Ptolemy, **the king of the south** (v. 25), Antiochus was victorious. He defeated Ptolemy's **'extremely large and mighty army'** and then proceeded to have a peace treaty, again pretending friendship with Egypt. Notice the emphasis on deceitfulness in v. 27. Both the Egyptian and the Seleucid told lies to one another at the conference of 'peace' that resulted from Roman intervention.

While Antiochus was occupied with Egypt, Jason, the former high priest, attacked Menelaus, the current usurper. Menelaus repulsed the attack but asked Antiochus for aid.

Dan 11.28 "Then he will return to his land with much plunder; but his heart will be *set* against the holy covenant, and he will take action and *then* return to his *own* land.

After leaving Egypt with much spoil, Antiochus was given what was left of the treasury of the temple. Since Menelaus was unpopular with the people he needed the favor of Antiochus.

Dan 11.29-30 ¶ "At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before.³⁰ "For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant.

Again, in 168 BC, Antiochus attacked Egypt (**'come into the South'**), but this time he was unable to conquer Egypt, because the Romans (in **'the ships of Kittim'** or Cypress) opposed him. "In a famous scene outside Alexandria, the Roman envoy demanded that Antiochus, before he stirred from a circle drawn around him in the ground, promise to evacuate Egypt."¹ This was a humiliating defeat, Antiochus **'will be disheartened'**.

Antiochus took his frustrations out on Judaea and Jerusalem, partly to ensure a strongly loyal state by those he left in power there. He ordered a Sabbath attack on the opponents of Menelaus, knowing that the

¹ Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1959), 81.

orthodox Hasidim would not fight on the Sabbath. The walls of the city were destroyed, and a new fortress was built for his forces to rule the city.

Dan 11.31 “Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.

Antiochus attempted to Hellenize the city by force. Laws were passed intended to remove the national distinctives and to require the worship of Greek deities. The **regular sacrifice** in the temple was abolished by law. Antiochus sent a philosopher to Judaea to reform her religion: the God of the OT was identified as Zeus, and a bearded image of the deity was set up on the Temple altar after a pig was sacrificed. This occurred on Dec 16, 168 BC. The Jews called this **the abomination of desolation**. “The Jews were compelled to offer a pig on the 25th of each month to celebrate Antiochus Epiphanes’ birthday.”²

Dan 11.32 “By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action.

The antagonism of Antiochus towards Judaism was intense. “Greek soldiers and their paramours performed licentious heathen rites in the Temple courts. Swine were sacrificed on the altar. The drunken orgy associated with the worship of Bacchus was made compulsory. Conversely, Jews were forbidden, under the penalty of death, to practice circumcision, Sabbath observance, or the observance of the feasts of the Jewish year. Copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were ordered destroyed.”³ Jews who were **‘those who act wickedly’** were corrupted by his **smooth words**.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1370.

³ Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, 81.

The people who know their God were the men who came to be known as the Maccabees. These men of the priestly family rebelled, displayed **strength**, and took **action**, by 142 BC established an independent kingdom that lasted about 80 years.

The Maccabean revolt began in 166 BC. Antiochus in his zeal to 'Hellenize' Palestine, ordered every town and village to set up a pagan altar and insisted that the people participate in pagan worship. In a small village called Modin (or Modein), an aged priest named Mattathias refused to offer the sacrifice. When another Jew timidly agreed to offer the sacrifice (fearing the wrath of Antiochus), Mattathias killed him as well as the emissary of Antiochus, on hand for the occasion. Mattathias and his five sons fled to the wilderness for safety but instantly became national heroes. [See *1 Maccabees 2.*]

A weakness of the Jews had been their unwillingness to fight on the Sabbath. Mattathias "reasoned that if all the Jews followed that example, there would soon be no Jews left."⁴ The rebels thus changed their policy and determined to fight the Syrians on the Sabbath if necessary. (cf. 1 Macc 2.32-41). The Hasidim, a group within Judah who were zealous for the law, joined forces with Mattathias and his family. "They waged war against Jews who complied with Antiochus, tore down heathen altars, circumcised children who had been left uncircumcised, and exhorted Jews everywhere to join their crusade."⁵

Mattathias died shortly after his flight from Modin. His third son, Judas, became the leader of the rebel group. Judas was known as 'the Maccabee' [the Hammer']. He and his allies waged guerilla warfare against the enemy. They became **strong** and did **exploits**. The family name was Hasmonaim, their rule is known as the Hasmonean dynasty. They are also referred to by the nickname of Judas as the Maccabeans.

⁴ "Between the Testaments" in Leon James Wood and David O'Brien, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Academie Books, 1986), 358.

⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, "Between the Testaments," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 184.

Dan 11.33-35 “Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for *many* days.³⁴ “Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy.³⁵ “Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because *it is still to come* at the appointed time.

The prophecy of Daniel looks forward to the struggle of the Maccabees with the Syrians in general terms. Many would **fall**, *i.e.* die, during this period. It would be a time of rough violence and turmoil. It would take 17 years before the Maccabees would finally win independence.

The pressure of Greek Hellenization, the reaction of faithful Israelites, the political maneuvers of the ruling Hasmoneans, and the disappointment of the Judeans at the later intervention of Rome are the major forces that shaped the Judea and Galilee of the New Testament.