

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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The Book of Daniel by R. H. Charles

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DANIEL

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MAP

SYRIA, ASSYRIA, BABYLONIA, &c.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

INTRODUCTION

§ I. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF BOOK OF DANIEL : ITS PSEUDONYMOUS CHARACTER : ORIGINALLY UNILINGUAL, BUT SUBSEQUENTLY BILINGUAL : ITS VARIOUS VERSIONS.

IN the closing years of the Syrian domination of Palestine, Antiochus Epiphanes sat on the throne of Syria. With his struggles with Egypt and other powers we are not here concerned, but only with his dealings with the Jews. His ambition was to hellenize the various provinces and peoples in his great Empire. In this aim he met with little opposition except in Judæa, and even there he secured without difficulty the support of the hellenizing High Priests. Thus the High Priest Jason, a creature of Antiochus, who had superseded his brother, the faithful High Priest Onias III, set up a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem, to join in the games of which the very priests abbreviated the sacred services of the Temple. Through his agency also contributions were sent for the celebration of the festival of Heracles at Tyre. Jason was succeeded by Menelaus, who had secured the High Priesthood by the promise of a huge sum of money to Antiochus, a sum which he was unable to raise save through plunder of the Temple treasury. For rebuking this treacherous act, Onias III, referred to above, paid for his fidelity with his life. In 170 B. C., while Antiochus was warring in Egypt, the rumour that he had fallen encouraged the exiled Jason to make an attempt to recover the High Priesthood. This attempt led to much bloodshed in Jerusalem, and Antiochus on his return treated the Jews with the utmost severity.

Multitudes of men, women, and children were put to the sword, and thousands were sold into slavery. This

visit of Antiochus closed with his seizure of the last treasures of the Temple. Thus the Jews suffered from without as well as from within, but the cup of their sorrow was not yet full. Two years later Antiochus marched with a vast force into Egypt with the intention of making the kingdom of the Ptolemies a province of his own Empire. But when his plans seemed on the eve of fulfilment he was met by envoys from Rome, who required him, on the penalty of joining issue with the Republic itself, to withdraw at once from Egypt. Enraged and embittered Antiochus turned homeward, resolved now to devote all his power to the hellenization of Judea. With this object in view he forbade the observance of the Sabbath and the practice of the rite of circumcision. The sacrifices of the Temple were done away with, and every form of Jewish worship and ceremonial. The sacred books were destroyed, and the Temple dismantled and laid waste. The walls of the city were overthrown, and a fortress erected commanding the Temple enclosure. But the culminating horror of this awful time was yet to come. On the 15th of December, 168 B.C., a heathen altar was planted on the site of the great altar of burnt offering, in honour of Olympian Zeus. On the 25th of the same month the profanation of the sacred precincts was consummated by the sacrifice of swine on the altar. Furthermore, every city and village was required to build temples and raise idolatrous altars on which swine were to be sacrificed daily.

At last the anguish of the faithful Jews became unendurable and an insurrection burst forth at Modein, under the leadership of Mattathias and his five stalwart sons. All that were zealous for the Law and the Covenant speedily joined them, and amongst these notably the *Hasidim*, or the league of the pious ones. This small body of Jews met with many marvellous successes. Notwithstanding, in the face of the vast forces of Syria, the Jews could repose no hope in their own powers. If they were