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Antiochus Epiphanes
11: 21-35

Antiochus Epiphanes DIG: How is it that the heart of man can contain so much evil and yet God can fulfill His purposes through him? When faced with persecution, what are the factors that make people turn back on their faith? This was a refining time for God's people. List some other times throughout history that have refined God's people. How did Antiochus Epiphanes come to power? Who did he foreshadow?

REFLECT: What are your feelings about believers being called to defend, with force, certain human religious rights and freedoms? When faced with persecution (as the Jews suffered under Antiochus and believers will suffer under the antichrist), what are the factors that enable people to stand firm in the faith, even to the point of death? Have you ever faced persecution in your life? If so, how did you handle it?

Antiochus Epiphanes was a picture of the coming antichrist.

After **fifteen verses** that cover the reigns of seven **Seleucid kings** over a period of around 150 years **(11:5-20)**, the next **fifteen verses** focus our attention on the reign of a single **Seleucid king**, **Antiochus IV**.[388] These verses serve as a climax to the section (**to see link click Du – Prophecies Already Fulfilled**). The historical preview (see **Dv – Alexander the Great**) was given in order to set the stage for the prophetical fulfillment of this eighth **Seleucid rule**r. We have already met this wicked **man**, who in **his** character and activities, pictures the future **antichrist** (see **Ck – The Ram and the Male Goat: The small horn**), and **he** was also seen when the persecutions of this madman would come in less than four hundred years after **Dani'el's** death (see **Cl – Living in the Valley of Darkness: Antiochus Epiphanes**). The prophecy's appraisal of **his** importance and **his** character is based solely on the turmoil that **his rul**e created in Jerusalem.[390]



Antiochus IV's rise to power (11:21-24): As related by Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his commentary on *Dani'el*, **the angel** (see **Dt – The Arrival of an Angel**) revealed that **Antiochus** would usurp the throne that rightly belonged to the last **king**, **Seleucus IV Philopator (11:20) will be succeeded by a contemptible person. He** gave himself the name **Epiphanes**, which means *glorious one*, but **the** unnamed **angel** called **him a contemptible person.** The Hebrew term **contemptible**, *nivzeh*, comes from the root *bazah*, meaning *to despise*. Among the ancient tyrants, **he** was the most brutal oppressor of **the Jewish people**.

While **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** was the son of Antiochus III the Great and, therefore, the brother of the former monarch, Seleucus IV, **he was not in line for royal succession (11:21a).** The rightful successor was Demetrius I Soter, son of Seleucus IV. After the Battle of Magnesia in 189 NC, the defeated **Seleucid king**, Antiochus III, was forced to sign a truce. One of the conditions of the treaty was that **he** had to hand over Hannibal (the general who had commanded the forces of

Carthage in their battle against Rome in the Second Punic War) as well as **his** own **son**, **Antiochus Epiphanes**, who remained a prisoner in Rome until 176 BC, when **he** was released in exchange for **his** nephew, Demetrius I. Thus, not only was **Antiochus Epiphanes contemptible**, but **he** was also an illegitimate **king**.

The next phrase in **the angel's** prophecy predicted that **Antiochus Epiphanes** would **invade the kingdom when its people feel secure. He** was in Athens when **he** heard that **his** brother had been murdered by Heliodorus **(11:20)**. At that point, his young nephew, probably around five at the time, became **the** rightful **king**. Heliodorus maintained the real power behind the throne. At that point **Antiochus Epiphanes** arrived in **Syria** and proclaimed **himself** co-**ruler** in an unlawful succession. **He** killed Heliodorus and sent **his** nephew into the background, pretending to be the boy's legal guardian. In 170 BC the boy died. It's possible that his **uncle** ordered the assassination. **The angel** revealed that **Antiochus Epiphanes** would **seize the kingdom through intrigue (11:21b).** The Hebrew word for **intrigue** is *chalaklakot,* meaning *smoothness*, and is better translated *intrigue* or *trickery* (JPS 1985).

Then **the angel** provides a prophetic description of **Antiochus Epiphanes'** consolidation of power. **Then an overwhelming army will sweep away his** enemies **before him** like **a flood**. Hence the prophecy stated that **he** would succeed in military conquests. This prophecy was fulfilled by numerous victories, including one in 170 BC when **he** fought **the Egyptians** in an area halfway between Gaza and the Nile delta (see **The First Egyptian Campaign** below). Then **the angel** mentioned **the prince of the covenant** without giving any further information about **his** identity **(11:22)**. As **verses 28** and **32** will show, this phrase refers to **the Jewish** high priest, who functioned as **a ruler** of **the Jewish people** at that time. As mentioned in the discussion of **8:9-14**, the rightful high priest was Onias III. In 175 BC, **Antiochus Epiphanes** forced Onias out of the office and replaced him with his brother Jason. In 172 BC, Onias was murdered by Menelaus, another brother of his, who bribed himself into the office of the high priest by sending money to **Antiochus** for the privilege.

Next, **the angel** deals with **Antiochus Epiphanes'** growth in strength. **After coming to an agreement with him.** The agreement mentioned in this verse historically refers to **Antiochus Epiphanes'** alliance with **Egypt**. Cleopatra I, his sister, was the de facto leader of the Ptolemaic Empire, and he took advantage of that familial bond for a time. But, as **the angel** predicted, **he acted deceitfully**. **Egypt** was, at the time, embroiled in a civil war between Ptolemy VI Philometor and

Ptolemy VIII Physcon. **Antiochus** backed Philometor because **he** believed that by doing so, **he** could eventually gain control of **Egypt**. Over time, **Antiochus Epiphanes rose to power**. **His rise to power** had nothing to do with the size of **his kingdom**, because it only had **a small force of people** left after its defeat by Rome **(11:23).**

Then, **the angel** prophetically describes the growth of **Antiochus Epiphanes'** wealth. **When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his ancestors nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers.** In fulfillment of this prophecy, **Antiochus Epiphanes** attacked other nations **when the richest provinces felt secure,** when **they** least expected it. In that way he was able to capture even **the richest provinces. His ancestors** had **looted** other nations in order to increase **their** personal wealth, and enjoy lives of luxury. **Antiochus**, on the other hand, **distributed the plunder to his followers.** This didn't mean **he** was a generous person; rather, **he** used the plundered money to bribe people and win favors. **He plotted the overthrow of fortresses** of **Egypt – but only for a time,** as it turned out, that was twelve years **(11:24).**

The First Egyptian Campaign (11:25-28): These verses prophetically describe the first of several campaigns **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** conducted against **Egypt**. The exact sequence of events that led to the invasion of **the neighboring country** is the subject of scholarly debate. To understand who participated in the campaigns, it may be best to review the familial ties of **the Seleucids** and **Ptolemies**. **Antiochus Epiphanes** had **a sister** by the name of **Cleopatra**. **She** was **the daughter** referred to in **11:17**. **Antiochus III**, **their father**, had wed **Cleopatra** to **Ptolemy V**, **the king** of **Egypt**. **Ptolemy** was a young boy at the time of the wedding. Thus, **his Seleucid wife** effectively became **the monarch** of **Egypt**. The couple eventually had three children: **Ptolemy VI Philometor**, **Ptolemy VIII Physcon**, and **Cleopatra II**. All three siblings will be mentioned in the discussion of **Antiochus Epiphanes'** first and third **Egyptian** campaigns.[390]

During this time there was a fresh outbreak of the old hostilities between **the Seleucids** and **Ptolemies**, **the king of the North** and **the king of the South. Verse 25** reveals the beginning of **the First Egyptian Campaign** in 170 BC. **With a large army Antiochus Epiphanes stirred up all his strength and courage against the king of the South.** At that time, **the king of the South** was **his** nephew, **Ptolemy VI Philometor**. **Egypt** had been given to **the Seleucids** as a dowry when Berenice married **Antiochus II Theos (11:6)**. Assuming that the

internal struggles for **the Seleucid** throne would make repossession of the territory easy, **the Ptolemies** were planning on invading **Isra'el**. Yet, **Antiochus Epiphanes** had no intention of letting **them** take one of **his** valuable assets.

Another reason for **Antiochus Epiphanes'** attack on **Egypt** was that **the Ptolemies** demanded the return of Coele-**Syria**, a region in the southwest region of **his kingdom**. When the empire of **Alexander the Great** was divided by his four generals, **Ptolemy I** took control of Coele-**Syria**, but ultimately it was given to **Seleucus I Nicator**. The successors of the generals were embroiled in a series of conflicts regarding this region, and now was one of those times. **Ptolemy I** and **Antiochus Epiphanes** met at Pelusium, an **Egyptian** frontier city east of the Nile Delta in northern Sinai. Although **the king of the South** came **with a large and very powerful army, he** was **not able to stand because of the plots devised against him.** Treachery determined the outcome of the battle. Historically, **Ptolemy VI's** most trusted advisors betrayed **him** to **Antiochus**. **Those who eat from the king's table will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle (11:25-26).**

The angel declared that **the two kings themselves** would also **lie to each other**. **The two kings** were **Antiochus VI** and **Ptolemy**, who was then held captive by **his uncle**. When the people of Alexandria heard that their **king** had been captured, they enthroned **his brother, Ptolemy VIII Physcon.** In order to achieve **his** goal of getting full control of **Isra'el, Antiochus Epiphanes** needed to be in control of all the affairs of **Egypt**. Yet, **the** new **king** posed a threat to **his** plans. Therefore, **Antiochus Epiphanes** pretended to befriend **his** nephew and captured **king Ptolemy VI Philometor**, promising to reinstate **him** as **ruler** of **Egypt** if **he** would help **him** in return. **Philometor** pretended to believe **his uncle**. In this way, the two men fulfilled the prophecy that **the two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail. Antiochus** only succeeded in making **Philometor a** puppet **king** of Memphis because the people of Alexandria rejected his reinstatement as **Egypt's ruler**. When **Antiochus** finally left **Egypt** empty-handed, the two brothers, **Ptolemy VI** and **Ptolemy VIII**, reconciled and agreed to **rule the kingdom** together instead of fighting a civil war. As the subsequent verses will show, **their** agreement didn't mean the end of the war **because an end** would **come at the appointed time (11:27),** and that **time** had not come yet.

Historically, **Antiochus Epiphanes** eventually **returned to Syria, with great wealth.** Yet **he** failed in **his** ultimate goal to take over all of **Egypt**, and that made

him angry. **His heart** was **set against the holy covenant,** meaning the theocracy of **Isra'el** under the leadership of the priests. While **he** was in **Egypt**, Jason, who was outbid for the high priesthood, began a revolt in Jerusalem against acting high priest Menelaus **(11:22)**, who wanted to Hellenize Jewish worship. On **his** way home, **Antiochus Epiphanes** put down that revolt. Then **he** fulfilled the prophecy that said **he** would **take action against the holy covenant** by plundering the land of **Isra'el** **(1 Maccabees 1:20-28; 2 Macc 5:11-17)**. **He** killed 40,000 men, women, and children, and took 40,000 other **Jews** into slavery, thus causing a great deal of suffering, **then he returned to his own country (11:28).**

The Third Egyptian Campaign (11:29-30a): **Dani'el Chapter 11** does not deal with **Antiochus Epiphanes** Second Egyptian Campaign, which took place in 169 BC. Historically, **Antiochus Epiphanes' Third Egyptian Campaign** occurred in 168 BC. **He** came at **the appointed time** to **invade the South again. He** had heard that **his nephews**, **Ptolemy VI Philometor** and **Ptolemy VIII Physcon**, had agreed to co-**rule Egypt**, and **he** felt betrayed by **Philometor**. **The angel**, however, had prophesied that **this time the outcome will be different from what it was before,** meaning that this time **Antiochus Epiphanes** would not be so victorious. Indeed, just when **he** was on the brink of annexing **Egypt** to **Syria**, **Roman** allies from **Cyprus came against him (11:29-30a).** With its own sights set upon **Egypt**, Rome warned **Antiochus** not to expand **his kingdom** in that direction. So when **the Syrian king** approached Alexandria, **he** was not confronted by **the Egyptians**, but by the Roman commander Gaius Popillius Laenas. As **Antiochus** stuck out **his** hand to greet him, the Roman commander handed **him** a decree from the Roman Senate telling **him** to leave **Egypt** alone. **He** was told to read it on the spot. When **Antiochus** said **he** wanted to consult with **his** friends before answering, Popillius drew a circle in the dirt around **the Syrian king** and demanded an answer before stepping out of it. Check mate. After a brief interval of embarrassing silence, **Antiochus** replied that **he** would do whatever the Romans demanded. Then **he** withdrew **his** army from **Egypt** and headed back to **Syria**, groaning all the way.

The persecution of the Jews (11:30b-35): On **his** way back to **Syria**, a humiliated and demoralized **Antiochus Epiphanes** once again stopped in Jerusalem. After being thwarted in **his** ambitions to annex **Egypt**, **he** showed up in a bad mood and allowed **himself** to vent **his** frustration **against the holy covenant.** A section of the **Jewish** population had become apostates. They

supported the enforcement of Greek culture, religion, and literature, and were led by the illegitimate high priest Menelaus. Therefore, those Hellenizers abandoned **the holy covenant**, just as **the angel** had prophesied. **First Maccabees 1:47 records the atrocity. "They set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice of pig's flesh and unclean beasts."** Besides the Sanctuary, **Antiochus Epiphanes** also profaned the fortress that guarded the Temple and **showed favor to those who forsook the holy covenant (11:30b). They fortified the City of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. They stationed there sinful people, lawless men. The rebels strengthened their position, stored up arms and food, and collected the spoils of Jerusalem which were stored there and became a great snare. It became an ambush against the Sanctuary, an evil adversary of Isra'el at all times. On every side of the Sanctuary they shed innocent blood, and defiled it (1 Macc 1:33-37).**

Antiochus Epiphanes even took away the continual **burnt offering** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ai – The Burnt Offering: Accepted by God**). **His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the Temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice (11:31a).** The reason **the Temple** is spoken of as **a fortress** is because **it** was used as a military citadel. In 167 BC **the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs of strange to the Land, to forbid circumcision, possessing the TaNaKh, burnt-offerings and sacrifices and drink-offerings (Leviticus 23:18) in the Sanctuary, and to forbid sabbaths and festivals** (see **Leviticus Dw – God's Appointed Times**) **on penalty of death (1 Maccabees 1:50 and 63). According to rabbinic commentaries, the suppression of the Jews in this manner lasted about three years.**

Yet, the desecration of the Holy Temple reached its climax on December 15, 167 **(First Maccabees 1:54)**, when **Antiochus Epiphanes set up the abomination that caused desolation (11:31b). He** erected an image of Zeus and offered up the sacrifice of a pig. The situation is described in **Second Maccabees 6:2-5: Not long after this the king sent Geron the Athenian to force the Jews to abandon the mitzvot of the Torah and no longer live by it, also to profane the Temple and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus, and the one on Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:12) to Zeus the Host of Strangers, as the people who dwelt in that place. This was harsh and utterly intolerable evil. The Gentiles filled the Temple with debauchery and revelry; they amused**

themselves with prostitutes even in the sacred courts. They also brought forbidden things into the Temple, so that the altar was covered with abominable "offerings" prohibited by the TaNaKh. The future **antichrist** will put **his** own image in **the Temple** when **he** breaks **his** covenant with **the Jews** in the middle of the Great Tribulation (see **Revelation Dr – The Abomination That Causes Desolation**).

In **verses 32-35**, **the angel** foretold how **the Jews** would respond to those atrocities, **starting with the rise of the Maccabees. With bribes he will corrupt those who have acted wickedly against the covenant.** Historically, **Antiochus Epiphanes** fulfilled the first part of this prophecy in the following manner. Those **Jewish** apostates who turned on their own **people** and **acted wickedly against the covenant he** encouraged by **corrupting them with bribes**. By pitting one element of the population against the other, **he** gained control of the entire population. Then **he** elevated the apostates into positions of authority. **His schemes led to revolt of the Maccabees. They were the people who knew their God.** As **the angel** foretold, **they firmly resisted him (11:32).** Eventually, **they** defeated every army that **Antiochus Epiphanes** sent against **them (1 Macc 2:1 to 13:53, 16:1-2; 2 Macc 8:1 to 15:39)**. One battle after another, **the Maccabees** proved victorious.

Verse 33 prophetically speaks of another element of **Jewish** society of the second century BC that is not well known, the Hasidim: **Those who are wise among the people will instruct many (11:33a).** The Hebrew term for **wise**, *maskile*, comes from the root *sachal*, meaning *to consider* or *to be prudent*. **In the books of Maccabees, those wise among the people are identified as the Hasidim (Hasideans, in English). For example, First Maccabees 2:42 states, "Then they were joined by a group of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Isra'el, all of them devoted to the Torah."** The Hasidim were known for their strict adherence to the Torah. To defend religious liberty and stem the tide of Hellenization, they joined **the revolt** of **the Maccabees** against **Antiochus Epiphanes**. **They** had no interest in politics per se, and as soon as **they** regained **their** religious freedom, **they** withdrew from **the Maccabean Revolt**. Historians typically attribute the disappearance of **the Hasidim** to their gradual assimilation with the Pharisees. Despite the similarity of their names, **the Hasidim** did not contribute to the development of either the Hasidic mysticism of the 12th-century Germany or the larger **Hasidic movement** in 18th-century Poland.

The angel called **the Hasidim the wise among the people,** prophesying that

they would **instruct many.** Historically, **the Hasidim** continued to instruct others in the way of **ADONAI** despite **Antiochus Epiphanes'** decree against teaching the Torah. Realizing that **he** would not stop **his** persecution of **the Jews** on peaceful grounds, **they** formed a small army that led a rebellion against **the Syrians**. Yet, just as **the angel** foretold, **they fell by the sword, and were burned, captured or plundered (11:33b).** The main reason for their defeat against **the Seleucids** was that **the Hasidim** did not fight on the Sabbath. When **their enemy** got wind of this policy, **they** purposefully attacked on the Sabbath day and quickly destroyed **them**. **When the Maccabees led the revolt, they removed that stipulation from their policy. Among those who died in the revolt of the Hasidim was Eleazar the Scribe, whose story is recorded in Second Maccabees 6:18-31. A second example is the mother of the seven brothers mentioned in Second Maccabees 7:1-42.** Both of these accounts may be legendary, but they still serve as **reasonable** examples of **Syrian** actions against **the Jews**.

Next, **the angel** predicts the fall of **the Maccabees**. **When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are deceitful will join them (11:34).** Historically, **the Maccabees** succeeded in freeing **Isra'el** from **the Syrians**, but at great cost. **There were five Maccabean brothers, and not one of them died of natural causes. Three died in battle, and two died by treachery.** All of this was in fulfillment of **the angel's** prophecy that **they will fall**. However, **the angel** also foretold that **many who are deceitful will join them.** Which is exactly what happened. Even some Hellenizers joined **the Maccabees** because of **their** military successes without agreeing with the theology or goals that motivated the rebellion in the first place. Later, the apostates succeeded in corrupting the descendants of **the Maccabees**, who became greater Hellenizers than those **they** had fought.

The angel's prophecy regarding **the Maccabean Revolt** ends with a description of **God's** purposes: **Some of the wise will fall, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end (11:35a).** Again, **the wise ones** were **the Hasidim, who fell** together with **the Maccabees**. **ADONAI** declared that **He** would allow the persecution of **His people** for three reasons: first, **so that they may be refined**; second, **they may be purified**; and third, that **they may** be **made spotless until the time of the end.** Then **verse 11:35b** provides a transitional prophecy that connects this file to the next major character in the book. **For it will still come at the appointed time.** Just as in **Chapter 8**, the prophecy moves from the discussion of **Antiochus Epiphanes** to

the antichrist. The reason for this was previously stated. **Antiochus Epiphanes** was a type of **the antichrist**. What **he** did in history, **the antichrist** will do in the future. As great as the persecution was under **Antiochus Epiphanes**, it will be nothing compared to the greatest trial reserved for **the appointed time** (see **Revelation Ch – The Beginning of the Great Tribulation**), **the far eschatological future**.[391]

You can see how unbelieving liberal "scholars" think these prophecies were written after they happened historically because of the amount of exact detail in them.

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **Your** wisdom in knowing the future, in exact accurate detail! Though the future is unknown to our thinking, **You** know all, even future events, as though they had already happened. How wonderful that in times of trial your children can be at peace and even rejoice, knowing for certain that all of **Your** prophesies will come true. Living for **You**, focused on pleasing **You**, and looking forward to an eternity in heaven is so much more important than living for any small temporary goal that will soon be over. Heaven and hell are both real and the choice is made by who is most loved while living on earth**.** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*