

APPENDIX FIFTEEN

Importance Of Antiochus Epiphanes

Quotations from book by R.D. Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel*
(New York, 1917), pages 270, 271-276.

Importance Of Antiochus Epiphanes

The time has now arrived to grapple with the most insidious and treacherous attack that has been made upon the Book of Daniel. . . . There remains but one important obstacle standing in the way of the Christian who desires to follow Christ and the apostles in their apparent acceptance of the Book of Daniel as being what it purports to be. It is the fact that Antiochus Epiphanes looms so high in the mind of the prophet. It is difficult to account for the prominence given to this “contemptible” monarch in the midst of a narrative that opens with an account of Nebuchadnezzar the king of great Babylon that he had built, that thinks Cyrus the founder of the Persian empire to be worthy of the merest reference, and that alludes to Alexander the Great in the most cursory fashion. Why should Epiphanes be selected from all the successors of Alexander, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, Perdiccas, Eumenes, Antigonus, Demetrius Poliorcetes, and the rest? Why should he be given forty verses, or more, of a book which barely squints at the Persian kings, and never gives but a glimmering intimation that the Roman fleets and legions were to become in his time the masters of the world? Why should a vision predicting with such accuracy and detail the campaigns of the kings of the North and the South never allude to that unequalled family of heroes who were to begin at Modin the liberation of God’s people and scatter like the leaves of Vallombrosa the numerous and frequent hosts of deadly enemies who were to desolate the homes and attempt to suppress the religion of that Jehovah in whose name the prophet spoke? Why above all was his detailed vision to cease with the renovation of the temple and fade off into dim outlines when it passed beyond that time into the more distant vistas but the more glorious hopes of the Messianic kingdom? Why especially should he describe the true course of events in Epiphanes’ expedition against Egypt till the year 169 and then picture another campaign which according to the critics never occurred at all?

These and similar questions have vexed the righteous souls of many who would like to believe in the real Daniel and who have no prejudices against the possibility of the kind of predictive prophecy alleged to be found in the book. They can accept the first six chapters which record the striking occurrences in the lives of Daniel and his companions. They can accept the principle of the possibility and the fact of divine revelation of future events. But they hesitate at accepting the whole, at least, of Daniel, because they see no good and sufficient reason why he should have narrated with such length and clearness the history of the Seleucids up to the death of Epiphanes and have given so much emphasis to the deeds of this tyrant while barely mentioning such superlatively and relatively important events as the resurrection, the judgment, and the kingdom of the Messiah.

Now, in order to remove this hesitation, it may seem to some sufficient to affirm our belief that these predictions might have been made by God through Daniel, even though we could perceive no good reason for them. We think, however, that we can perceive a good and sufficient reason for them, one at least that justifies them in our estimation, and we shall proceed to state it, in order that if possible we may make the ways of God appear just to the men of little faith.

It appears to us, then, that the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes was one of the most important events in the history of the church. It can be rivalled only by the call of Abraham, the giving of the Law, the Captivity, and the Incarnation. Among all the crises to which the people of God have been subjected, it can be compared only with the dispersion in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. The return of the exiles had been definitely foretold by Jeremiah, and Jeremiah’s prediction was known and pondered by Daniel. He was not needed, nor was it given to him, to supplement the work of his great predecessor. But he performed a greater

and more lasting service for the church. He showed clearly that all the tyrants of the earth were under the control of the God of heaven, that the kingdoms of this world were fore-ordained by Him and should at last be superseded by the Kingdom of the Messiah and His saints, and he encouraged the people not merely of his own time but of all time to be steadfast in the midst of fiery trials and deadly perils of all kinds in view of the certainty that God could and would eventually circumvent or crush the tyrants and deliver the innocent for time and for eternity.

Now, the deadliest peril that the church has ever confronted was the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to suppress it utterly. For reasons of state, and perhaps also of religion, he determined to enforce conformity of worship throughout his dominions. His plan of operations was the most astute that has ever been devised. He ordered the cessation of circumcision, the sign of the covenant between the people and their God and that which held them together as a race. He stopped the services in the temple and instituted in their stead the worship of Jupiter. He set up idol altars in every city and demanded that every Jew should sacrifice according to the heathen ritual which he had introduced. He commanded that the holy writings should be destroyed so that the laws and customs and institutions might be gradually but surely forgotten and eliminated. And for all who refused to accept these severe and stringent regulations and requirements he pronounced the penalty of death; whereas he crowned with honours and emoluments all who apostatized and renounced the God of their fathers. The result of his well calculated machinations was almost complete enough to equal the most sanguine expectations. Most of the Jewish people seem to have cast away without any apparent qualm the hereditary claims of race and country and religion, and to have grasped with eagerness the proffered hand of the subtle enemy of their faith. The blood-thirsty tyrant executed his threats of death upon all who opposed his will. Men, women, and children were ruthlessly slaughtered. Whole families were extirpated for the guilt of one of their number. The chosen people were on the point of being annihilated and the promises and the hopes of the covenant of being annulled for ever.

There never was, before or since, such a period of desperation and despondency in the history of the church. Pharaoh's aim had been to destroy the race, but the promise to Abraham had been fulfilled through Moses and Joshua. Nebuchadnezzar had carried the people captive and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple; but the sacred books had been preserved, apostasy was rare, and through God's servants, the kings of Persia, the people and the temple were at length restored to their former worship, as it had been foretold by the prophets. But, now, under Epiphanes, was attempted what had never been proposed by Babylonian conqueror or Persian friends, the entire destruction of people and religion at one fell blow. Prophecy had ceased. The tribes of Israel were scattered over the earth, some foreign cities like Alexandria and Antioch having more Jewish inhabitants than Jerusalem. The Holy Land was largely in possession of the Gentiles. The Jews themselves had become indifferent to the Law. The High Priests were murdering each other and one of them when deposed at Jerusalem built a rival temple in Egypt. The whole polity of the Jews was disintegrated, all their fortresses and cities were in the hands of the enemy, they had no army and no leaders, and all seemed lost.

Then it was that one man stood up and defied the haughty king. His name was Mattathias. He lived at a village named Modin. The heathen had constructed an altar. The priest was ready to sacrifice the victim, when Mattathias slew him and made a fiery appeal to his fellow citizens to take arms against the tyrant. To hearten them, he called to mind the great deeds of their fathers and the faith that had inspired them. In the climax of his speech he referred to the fiery furnace and to Daniel in the den of lions. This recalled to them that their God could and would save those who put their trust in Him. They rallied round Mattathias and his five

noble sons, the most valiant and able of them all. The pious sprang to arms and after many a hard fought fight the Syrians were overcome and the kingdom of the Jews was re-established under the Asmonean rulers. **Had the attempt of Antiochus succeeded, the preparation for the coming of the Messiah could not have been completed. A people waiting for his appearing would not have been existent. A Diaspora eager to receive and disseminate the gospel would not have been ready. In short, the continuity of the church would have been destroyed, the records of the Old Testament might have disappeared as utterly as the archives of Tyre and the memoirs of Hannibal, the New Testament could not have been written, the life of Jesus would have been entirely different, the method of the early propagation of the gospel must have been altered and the whole plan of salvation changed.** But, it will be said, how did the time when these alleged predictions of Daniel were written affect all this? Only in this respect, that it affords sufficient reason for their having been made so many years before. Just as the deliverance of the three children from the fiery furnace and of Daniel from the lions' den on account of their faith in Israel's God gave Mattathias a fitting climax in his speech inciting the people to steadfastness in their trials, so the knowledge that their evil condition had been foretold nearly four hundred years before would strengthen the hearers' confidence that the rest of the prediction would be fulfilled in the overthrow of the oppressor and in the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God. The stupendous crisis justified the prediction; the prediction justified the expectation of deliverance.

R.D. Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel* (New York, 1917), pp. 270, 271-276.