



Jacques
Doukhan
**Daniel 11
Decoded:**
An Exegetical,
Historical, and
Theological
Study

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Jacques Doukhan has brought back for analysis and discussion Daniel 11, one of the most difficult passages in biblical apocalyptic literature, raising new questions and offering some new readings through the use of a new approach to the text. Doukhan’s academic training in literature and text analysis as well as his personal experiences and his interest in apocalyptic hope have qualified him well for the task at hand. The result of his study will raise new questions and will not go unchallenged.

After a short introduction discussing the coded nature of Daniel 11, Doukhan proceeds in the first chapter to deal with the important topic of methodology. He discusses the three major schools of interpretation (preterist, futurist, historicist) and a minor one—the Islamist interpretation. Doukhan argues that with respect to the interpretation of Daniel 11, all schools have been influenced by the preterist Maccabean thesis by finding in the chapter events related to the struggles between the Seleucids and Ptolemais and the role of Antiochus IV. He provides a penetrating critique of the Maccabean thesis not only in this chapter but throughout the rest of the book.

In the second chapter, Doukhan looks at the literary structures connecting Daniel 11 within its immediate context, understood by him to be Daniel 10 and 12, and with chapter 8 as its larger context. In order to help decode Daniel 11, Doukhan explores the literary connections between Daniel 9 and 10, identifying a chiasmic literary structure (understanding prophecy—10:1//9:1–2; praying and fasting—10:2–3//9:3–19; and fulfilling prophecy—10:4–21//9:20–27). The parallels are useful in several ways, but particularly in that they show that Rome is always implied in the prophetic sequence, including Daniel 11. He also finds a chiasmic literary structure in Daniel 11 and 12. This is, according to him, useful in that it demonstrates that the king of the North in Daniel 11:40–45 is identified with the little horn in Daniel 12:5–11. Doukhan also finds a significant number of linguistic and thematic parallels between Daniel 8 and 11.

In the third chapter, Doukhan explores the significance of Daniel 8 for the interpretation of chapter 11. This is a fundamental hermeneutical section for him. First he argues that Daniel 8 omits the kingdoms of Babylon and Rome found in Daniel 2 and 7 (a point that most historicist interpreters would take issue with). This allows him to omit these kingdoms in the interpretation of Daniel 11, though he recognizes that Rome is implicitly present in both chapters. Second, he argues that the composite animals representing the

kingdoms in Daniel 7 are symbols of the kingdoms, while the clean animals in Daniel 8 are portrayed as real animals (a ram and a goat). This, he adds, signals a reference to the Day of Atonement. Third, the parallels between Daniel 7 and 8 show that in both cases the little horn stands for the same power: papal Rome. In Daniel 8 the movement is from Persia and Greece to papal Rome, from literal kingdoms to spiritual entities. This finding is used to decode Daniel 11. The conflicts between the kings of the North and the South are spiritual conflicts and assume that they take place after Christ. Doukhan’s methodology includes the hermeneutics of the covenant according to which the prophecies before the coming of Christ are to be interpreted literally (e.g., literal Jerusalem and Babylon) and those after, when the new covenant was universalized, are interpreted spiritually (e.g., the heavenly Jerusalem and the mystical Babylon). He maintains that pagan Rome is implied in the text and that there are flashbacks to it in the prophecy (e.g., Dan 11:16), interpreted by him in a typological fashion—the oppressive power of pagan Rome was a type of the papal oppressive power, represented in both cases by their respective “abomination of desolation.”

Chapter 4 is dedicated to a useful discussion of the North-South symbolism, a key element in the structure of Daniel 11. It stands as a symbol of totality, religious power, human self-reliance, and conflict. All of these symbolic meanings are present in Daniel 11, representing the spiritual power of papal Rome in its struggles with different ones from the South. As a religious entity, the king of the North is a spiritual power claiming divine prerogatives (spiritual Babylon) and the king of the South functions as a self-reliant oppressive power (spiritual Egypt).

In chapter 5, Doukhan provides a very detailed and complex literary structure of Daniel 11 based on the interaction of the kings of the North and the South. According to him, the literary structure of the chapter could be read as reflecting a historical-chronological perspective depicting a conflict from the time of Daniel to the time of the end, thus emphasizing the theme of the cosmic conflict. The events, he adds, are not necessarily in chronological order. He finds a significant amount of linguistic and thematic parallels to support his view. Doukhan also suggests that Daniel 11 could be structured as a chiasmic-covenant structure whose center is 11:22, emphasizing the historical and theological progression of the oppression of God’s covenant people by the king of the North. It is an exploration of the theological significance of the linear-chronological

structure found within the text itself.

Chapter 5 is a detailed commentary of Daniel 11 based on the literary structure previously discussed and using Doukhan's hermeneutical principles. It is indeed a close reading of the biblical text. For the commentary Doukhan uses the linear-chronological structure of the chapter, delimited by the inclusion of the use of the phrase "Michael the Prince" in Daniel 10:21 and 12:1. This is followed by the prologue (Dan 11:1–4), a description of the East-West-East conflict related to the kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece. The rest of Daniel 11 deals with the work of the papacy. The following is a summary of Doukhan's interpretation of the sections:

Daniel 11:5–8 is about the rise of Christianity and the papacy and the beginning of its corruption; it includes the invasion of some of the barbarian tribes (AD 284–455). This is about the North (papacy) and the South (Rome).

Daniel 11:9–13a refers to the rise of the supremacy of the pope and includes matters related to the Ostrogoths, the union of state and church under Clovis and Charlemagne, and the Crusades and Inquisitions (AD 476–1400). Doukhan identifies the king of the South with Clovis (the Frankish Kingdom, Dan 11:9).

Daniel 11:11–12 describes the Avignon captivity (AD 1309–1377) and the rise of the Renaissance and rationalism (AD 1400–1600). The king of the South refers to secular royal powers of Europe.

Daniel 11:13–25a deals with the Counter-Reformation, particularly with the Council of Trent (AD 1545–1563), and includes the missionary expansion of the church as well as the persecutions (AD 1600–1789), particularly the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572). The king of the South refers to political powers supporting the king of the North. Daniel 11:22 contains a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus and His work as High Priest. The passage alludes to the prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan 9:25–27). Since for Doukhan the prophecy of Daniel 11 is mainly about the papacy, the mention of the "prince of the covenant," although alluding to Christ, is thematically about the suffering of God's people and not those of Christ. The flashback to the experience of the Messiah is used to associate God's people with the experience of Jesus. The breaking of God's people is identified with the breaking of the Messiah, thus showing the close connection between the two. Doukhan does not clearly identify of the king of the South mentioned in Daniel 11:25a.

Daniel 11:25–27 is taken to refer to the French Revolution (1789–1798) and the mortal wound inflicted on the king of the North.

Daniel 11:28–39 looks back to the work of the king of the North and reveals the implications of his work from a more theological perspective. In that sense the passage goes over the previous historical emphases of the chapter with a message of judgment (the Day of Atonement). Doukhan comments that this new focus does not totally exclude historical references.

Daniel 11:40–45 goes back to the attacks against the

church (Dan 11:25b–27), the wound and the recovery, and the final defeat of the king of the South that allows the king of the North to unify the church and secular powers in a final attempt to exterminate the camp of God (Armageddon).

After a careful and long commentary on Daniel 11, Doukhan discusses in chapter 7 the theology that flows from his analysis of the chapter. It is theologically rich and concentrates on the theology of history, the cosmic conflict, the denunciation of evil, and the Messiah's saving work. A useful excursus is included, dealing with Daniel 11 and Islam.

Doukhan challenges all of us to take a closer look at the biblical text of Daniel 11 and be ready to evaluate any interpretation of it. His linguistic discussions are certainly valuable and should be taken seriously since they can shed light on the meaning of a difficult text. His proposed literary structure of the chapter and its connections with chapters 8–10 and 12 provide us with an excellent starting point for analysis and interpretation.

Perhaps one of Doukhan's most important contributions is found in his willingness to question and reject finding in the chapter any reference to the struggles between the Ptolemais and the Seleucids—a reading of the text some of us have considered to be almost irrelevant within the chapter. The value of Doukhan's interpretation would need to be carefully assessed. This leads us to what may well be one of the points of significant debate in his hermeneutics.

In principle, Doukhan's reading of chapter 11 is determined by his reading of Daniel 8, which provides for him a point of departure, a perspective. The omission of Rome in chapter 8 has two significant contributions to his discussion. The first is that in Daniel 8, the prophet moves from Greece to papal Rome—to the Christian era. Second, using the hermeneutics of covenant, he concludes that we are now dealing with spiritual interpretations, not literal kingdoms. He takes these two elements to his reading of Daniel 11 because this chapter is directly related to and builds on Daniel 8. Therefore, after the brief discussion of Persia and Greece, Daniel 11 is about papal Rome, a spiritual power. If it could be demonstrated that Rome is not only implicit in Daniel 8 but actually present as a political power, Doukhan's interpretation of Daniel 11 would have to be modified.

The question of whether pagan Rome is only implied or actually present in Daniel 8 is debatable, and one we cannot develop here. Doukhan is sensitive to the need to keep pagan Rome present in the discussion—albeit implicitly—because it is present in a historicist reading of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9, and this prophetic period is directly related to the 2300 days in chapter 8. Besides, a horn usually grows out of the head of a beast, although the horns depicted in Zechariah 1:18–21 are not related to any beasts. This would give the impression that through the horns the whole beast is present—the part stands for the whole—not implicitly but in reality, because the horn is inseparable from it.

Doukhan also needs Rome implicitly present in the chapter because Daniel 11:22 mentions the death of the Messiah that took place under pagan Rome. He takes this to be a flashback to the death of the Messiah, but that is prophetically referring in Daniel 11:22 to the suffering and death of believers, thus providing a theological interpretation to their experience. The verse, according to him, is not a prediction of the death of the Messiah, but it assumes that He died under pagan Rome. This particular reading of the text needs to be strengthened before it can gain widespread support. It would appear that in Daniel 11:22 we have an explicit reference to the death of the Messiah in the flow of the historical line of the chapter. Besides, one would have to ask how useful a flashback is if what it is pointing to is not explicitly mentioned in chapters 8 or 11.

The discussion of the interpretation of Daniel 11 must continue, and it would be good to explore Doukhan's suggestion of ending the discussion of Greece in verse 4, but allowing for some discussion of the Roman Empire not only in verse 5 but also in some of the subsequent verses. This should be done after a

careful reading of the text and could be grounded on the fact that the first mention of the king of the South (Dan 11:5)—which, according to Doukhan, implies the presence of the king of the North—does not seem to be about an open conflict between the two of them.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in apocalyptic prophecy, and specifically in Daniel 11. Although Doukhan's exegesis is based on the Hebrew text, he transliterates and translates every Hebrew term and his expositions are very clear.



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The Lord can do but little for the children of men, because they are so full of pride and vain glory. They exalt self, magnifying their own strength, learning, and wisdom. It is necessary for God to disappoint their hopes and frustrate their plans, that they may learn to trust in Him alone.

Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Review and Herald, 1958), 61.