

Doukhan, Jacques. *Daniel 11 Decoded: An Exegetical, Historical, and Theological Study*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2019. xv + 341 pp. Softcover. USD 29.99.

Jacques Doukhan has engaged his attention for several decades on the book of Daniel, as is evidenced, for example, by his *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (1987) and *Secrets of Daniel* (2000, French original 1993). Ever since he suggested in these books that Daniel 11:5–45 describes a spiritual conflict between the North (religious power usurping God, symbolic Babel) and the South (human, secular power ignoring God, symbolic Egypt) that correlates historically to the phase of the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8, I have wondered how he would interpret the rich tapestry of prophetic details given in Daniel 11. With *Daniel 11 Decoded* he puts such an interpretation on the table.

The book is divided into introductory chapters (1–72), the main part of a verse-by-verse commentary on Daniel 11 (73–250), and a chapter each on the theology of Daniel 11, an excursus on Daniel 11 and Islam, and the conclusion (251–282). A bibliography (283–298) and Scripture and subject indexes (299–341) complete the work.

Doukhan lays the methodological basis and framework for his interpretation in the introductory chapters. He deals mainly with methods of interpretation, the connection of Daniel 11 to Daniel 8, the North-South symbolism, and structural considerations. First, he discusses critically the three major methodological approaches to Daniel 11 (preterist, futurist, historicist), to which he adds the “Islamist” approach as a fourth. He believes that across these approaches the interpretations of Daniel 11 are “all in various degrees rooted in the Maccabean Thesis” (20; cf. also 9), according to which the final stages of the development of the book of Daniel stem from the second century BC, with the events around the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC) in focus, and should be best explained by *ex eventu* prophecy, prediction after the event. Doukhan suggests that any reference in the historical interpretation to the wars between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids would reveal the influence of the Maccabean thesis. This is a bold statement. For him, it is a “blatant inconsistency” (10) if historicist or futurist interpreters see the history of Seleucids and Ptolemies in some verses, but remove any reference to Antiochus IV from the rest of the chapter (preterists see him in vss. 21–45), switching to a spiritual interpretation without clear textual criteria. But should historicists dismiss any reference to Seleucids and Ptolemies just because the preterist approach includes them? Could some verses refer to them, even to Antiochus IV, and the text is not *ex eventu* prophecy? This seems certainly possible. The historical interpretation of v(v). 5–13 to the Seleucid and Ptolemaic conflict is *not* an indication of a Maccabean thesis, as long as the main focus of

Daniel 11 rests on Antiochus IV. We should not categorically exclude a historical reference to these wars. The final word must be the text itself.

The presentation of the Islamist interpretation as an approach on its own is surprising. Doukhan admits that he could not find any official scholarly publication nor identify a clear representative of this view (75). Informed readers know that there are contemporary Adventist interpreters who lean towards interpreting some of the verses in Daniel 11 with regard to the contact between Christian history and Islamic history. However, this does not justify treating it as “a fourth approach” (8), as it is basically a variant interpretation within the historicist or futurist approach. Interestingly, Doukhan does not view Uriah Smith and Taylor Bunch as “Islamist” interpreters for the single reason that they are both influenced by contemporary events (22, note 5), something that could be asserted of the present “Islamist” interpreters as well.

A pillar of Doukhan’s specific interpretation of Daniel 11 is its relationship to Daniel 8. He argues that the absence of the fourth power in Daniel 8 means that pagan Rome cannot be found as an independent power in Daniel 11 either. I believe he is correct in suggesting that the little horn in Daniel 8 refers to the same power as the little horn in Daniel 7 (papal Rome) and does not include the fourth animal of Daniel 7 (pagan Rome), but I do not see that this necessitates that pagan Rome should not be found in Daniel 11. Although Daniel 8 and Daniel 11 show many parallels (46–50) the structural omission of pagan Rome—contrary to Doukhan, the successor kingdoms of Alexander’s empire are not omitted but mentioned in 8:8—should not be based on the assumption that the chapters are exactly parallel in the elements of historical succession—which they could be—but on the evidence of the text in Daniel 11 itself. To give another example, one should not argue that pagan Rome must be found in Daniel 8 for the simple reason that it appeared in Daniel 7.

Doukhan’s main textual argument for the omission of the kingdom of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, as well as pagan Rome, is his analysis of 11:4. The understanding of this verse is crucial for Doukhan’s main thesis. He forwards four arguments for skipping over kingdoms (79–80), but on closer inspection they are not as strong as they seem. First, Doukhan says that “the word *‘akharit* never refers to ‘posterity’ or ‘direct descendants’” in Daniel. This is correct, but the other occurrences of *‘akharit* in Daniel are in reference to time, not people and kingdoms, and thus cannot serve as a comparison to its use in 11:4 (for *‘akharit* as “descendants,” see Ps 37:37–38; 109:13; Sir 16:3). Second, Doukhan says that “these” in “for others beside these” refers to the kingdoms implied in *‘akharito* (“what comes after him”), but this statement only stands if the first argument is correct. Third, Doukhan states that “skipping over kingdoms is typical of Daniel’s method” and refers to 11:2, where the remaining Persian kings after Artaxerxes are

not mentioned. Yet, the skipping in 11:2 is not one of kingdoms per se (after all Greece follows Persia) but of kings and the skipping of entire kingdoms is certainly not *typical* of Daniel (it may be implied in 8:8 though). Hence Doukhan's argument is only a supporting argument, but not a sufficient reason. Fourth, Doukhan sees a parallel to the skipping of pagan Rome in Dan 8:8–9. However, as he himself observes astutely, the skipping needs to be shown in the text itself (80). A reference to Dan 8:8–9 is interesting, but again not sufficient.

The literary structure of Daniel 11 is a challenge for any interpreter. Doukhan suggests two different but related structures: a linear-chronological and a chiasmic-covenant structure, with its climax in v. 22 (see the “master tables” on 65–70). The former focuses on the historical course of predicted events, the latter on their theological significance. Both consist of several text blocs that do not exactly match. While Doukhan demarcates the text blocs in the linear structure by the back-and-forth movement between South and North, he bases the chiasmic structure mainly on Hebrew linguistic parallels. These parallels, however, are not always exclusive ones, which considerably weakens the force of the structure. For example, Doukhan regards *qets* in verses 6 and 40 as chiasmic parallels, but the word also occurs in v(v). 13, 27, 35, and 45. Or, he regards 11:9–13 and 11:28–39—two rather large sections—as chiasmic mirrors only because of the verb *shub*, which occurs three times in each section, but the verb also occurs in verses 18 and 19. To be sure, Doukhan's structural observations are valuable, but one should also take note of other possible structural features that might create text patterns, such as the major recurring verbs (e.g., *'amad* “stand,” *bo'* “come,” *shub* “return,” and *'asab* “do”), or the phrases (e.g., *'al-kanno* “in his place,” *kirtsono* “according to his will”) and the respective semantics fields in the expressions (e.g., motion, power, destruction, understanding, religion, and time). In this regard, it is unfortunate that Doukhan does not consider important book-length textual analyses of Daniel 11 (e.g., Hasslberger, *Hoffnung in der Bedrängnis*, 1977; Wildgruber, *Daniel 10–12 als Schlüssel zum Buch*, 2013).

The main part of the book is a verse-by-verse commentary. For each (part of a) verse, Doukhan provides a commentary including historical application, in which he closely observes the linguistic, literary, and thematic features of the text; the “Supportive Reading,” in which he quotes from other sources to support his historical applications; and the “Discussion of Interpretations,” in which he outlines and critiques the other approaches of interpretation (critical, futurists, classic Adventist, and Islamist). The various sources of the “Supportive Readings” are only identified in the endnotes, making it unnecessarily difficult to evaluate these sources. Doukhan's discussion of other interpretations pinpoints the cases where they deviate in their historical application from the biblical text, misinterpret it, or do not

interpret it at all. He specifically challenges the various applications to the Ptolemaic-Seleucid period (and pagan Roman period) as commonly held by interpreters of the different schools. It becomes clear once again how important a precise knowledge of history is for the interpretation of this chapter.

The comments on the Hebrew text itself are rich, ranging from close exegetical reading and observations of the use of vocabulary and themes to connections with other texts in Daniel and in the Old Testament. Here, Doukhan is at his best. He generally substantiates his views, argues cautiously when the text or meaning is difficult, and is not shy to admit that an issue has to be left undecided for lack of conclusive evidence.

Despite my comments on Doukhan's framework of interpretation in his introductory chapters, I often found myself surprised how well he fits the spiritual battle between the King of the North and the King of the South to the predicted events described in Daniel 11. He correlates the text blocs of the linear-chronological structure with following historical eras and reference points: the rise of Christianity, AD 284–476 (verses 5–8); crusades and inquisition, AD 476–1400 (verses 9–10); renaissance and rationalism, AD 1400–1600 (verses 11–12); wars of religion and persecution, AD 1600–1789 (verses 13–25a); the French Revolution and Napoleon, AD 1789–1798 (verses 25b–27); a theological radiology with no dates (verses 28–39); and the time of the end, AD 1798 onwards (verses 40–45). At times, Doukhan describes the historical interpretation in broad outlines and, then again, he pinpoints specific events in the text, for e.g., the Concordat in AD 1801 in verse 27a and the removal of the Papal States by Italy in AD 1870 in verse 40a. He provides a wealth of details, both textual observations and historical applications, some of them invite discussion, e.g., he regards the temporal references “within a few days” (v. 20), “only for a time” (v. 24), “some days” (v. 33) all as referring to the 1,260 years; and the “desire of women” (v. 37) as a reference to the Messiah.

In a few instances, when a text or phrase would not support or fit into a proposed historical course, there is a danger of explaining it by structural patterns not evident in the text (e.g., “over him” in v. 5 would refer back to the King of the North implied in v. 4) or by theological meaning (e.g., “shall return to his own land” in v. 9 would refer to “freedom from domination” and the whole of verses 28–39 would not continue the historical timeline) or not commenting on it all (e.g., the “great multitude” in v. 11). This raises the methodological question of how to decide in relation to the historical referent. What are the controls? What is possible and what is not possible, *and* why is this so? A satisfying answer is still missing.

A noteworthy point is that Doukhan departs from his previously suggested view that the “the prince of the covenant” in 11:22 is a reference to the King of the North. He now sees this figure as a reference to Christ (139–141), with the main focus in this verse not on Christ's death under

pagan Rome, but on the persecution of his people under papal Rome (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). Within the basic chronological sequence of the text, such a recourse to the death of Christ seems strange at this point. Doukhan views the reference to Christ's death in v. 22 not as a historical anchor text, as other historicists do, but as a theological anchor point. For him, the climax of the chiasm focuses on the cross *and* the eschatological Day of Atonement (259–260). He recognizes that the focus particle *gam* “even” emphasizes “the prince of the covenant” (139), but the particle typically adds an entity to an entity in the previous predication, i.e., in 11:22 “they” and “the prince” are both broken “before him.” The syntactic flow suggests that both the people and the prince are broken by the same power. Furthermore, Doukhan's suggested allusion to the 2,300 evenings and mornings rests solely on the verb *yishaber* “broken” in 11:22a and 8:25 (141), which seems hardly enough to serve as an explicit pointer.

Doukhan's book-length discussion of the exegetically challenging chapter of Daniel 11 is a treasure trove on an island of interpretation. He is building a much better case for his (still unique) position that the whole of Daniel 11:5–45 is about a spiritual war with papal Rome as major protagonist and that it “has nothing to do with Antiochus Epiphanes and the wars between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids” (51). Besides Doukhan's main idea that Daniel 11 is about a spiritual conflict in the time of Christianity, many detailed interpretations will not go unchallenged as well.

Still, it is refreshing to see his holistic approach to the text, especially his careful attention to literary features. He has done a great service in pointing out the weaknesses and discrepancies in interpretations and in emphasizing the preeminence of the study of the text itself. And he is methodologically on target when he argues that one should not mix literal/geopolitical and spiritual interpretations (267–271), at least once Christ has been introduced into history.

If Adventists delve into Daniel 11, Doukhan's commentary must be placed on the study table. It will be interesting to see how the forthcoming *SDA International Bible Commentary* on the book of Daniel, co-authored by Doukhan, treats Daniel 11. One thing is for sure, the interpretation of Daniel 11 requires both the best of exegesis and of historical research. It is about time to tackle this chapter as a team which combines these two expertises.

CORRIGIENDA:

On page 22 (note 5), “Brunch” should read “Bunch.”

On page 42 (last line), “8:10b” should read “8:9b.”

On page 49 (6th line from the bottom), “chapter 7” should read “chapter 2.”

On page 51 (5th line from the bottom), “in” is misplaced.

On page 70 (the first four paragraphs), there are wrong letters in brackets for the different text blocks.

On page 146 (lines 20–21), “sixth century A.D.” should read “first century B.C.”

On page 237 (note 8), “Darmstedt” should read “Damsteegt.”

On pages 25–27, just one table for the structure on Daniel 10 and 11 would have been sufficient and clearer, particularly since there is no indication of the beginning of the second table.

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Doukhan, Jacques. *Daniel 11 Decoded: An Exegetical, Historical, and Theological Study*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2019. xv + 341 pp. Softcover. USD 29.99.

*Daniel 11 Decoded* is the first book-length verse-by-verse commentary on Daniel 11 by any well-known Seventh-day Adventist scholar. It fleshes out Doukhan’s innovative reading, the most radical historicist interpretation of this biblical chapter, which he earlier sketched in his *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987; revised ed. 1989). Doukhan interprets “North” and “South” throughout Daniel 11, beginning with verse 5, as referring to “symbolic entities,” rather than geographical directions. He identifies them as “a religious and spiritual power, represented by Babylon (the King of the North), that replaces God, and a human, self-reliable, secular, political power, represented by Egypt (the King of the South), that ignores and denies God” (60).

Following a brief introduction, the first five chapters outline thus: Problems and Methods, Parallels of Structures, Significance of Daniel 8, North-South Symbolism, and The Literary Structure of Daniel 11. Chapter six, the bulk of the book, consists of verse-by-verse commentary. Chapter seven addresses the Theology of Daniel 11 and chapter eight is an Excursus on Daniel 11 and Islam.

The book has several positive features. It is well written with clear language, logically organized, exposes key issues, interacts with scholarly literature, and offers some helpful critiques of prior interpretations. Chapters two and five present detailed discussion and outlines of literary structures. The textual commentary elucidates meanings of many Hebrew words and expressions. Doukhan’s stated approach of analyzing the biblical text before identifying historical fulfillments is manifestly correct. He convincingly shows that the King of the North represents the papacy in the latter half of Daniel 11.

However, *Daniel 11 Decoded* contains numerous exegetical flaws, of which there is space here to identify only a few of the most prominent (see a