Daniel

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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Daniel

[Translated by Kevin P. Edgecomb] BEGINNING OF THE PROLOGUE OF JEROME TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL The churches of the Lord Savior do not read the Prophet Daniel according to the Seventy interpreters, using (instead) the edition of Theodotion, and I don't know why this happened. For whether because the language is Chaldean and differs in certain properties from our speech, (or) the Seventy interpreters were not willing to keep the same lines in the translation, or the book was edited under their name by some unknown other who did not sufficiently know the Chaldean language, or not knowing anything else which was the cause, I can affirm this one thing, that it often differs from the truth and with proper judgment is repudiated. Indeed, it is known most of Daniel and some of Ezra were written in Hebrew letters but the Chaldean language, and one pericope of Jeremiah, and also Job to have much in common with the Arabic language.

When I was a very young man, after the reading and flowery rhetoric of Quintilian and Cicero, when I had opened myself to the drudgery of this language and with much effort and much time I with difficulty had begun to pronounce the breathy and buzzing words, as though walking in a crypt to see a little light from above, I finally dashed myself against Daniel, and I was affected by such weariness that, sunken in desperation, I wanted to despise all (my) old work. Indeed, a Hebrew was encouraging me, and he was often repeating to me by his language "Persistent work conquers all," as in me (?) I saw an amateur among them, I began again to be a student of Chaldean. And so I might confess the truth, to the present day I am better able to read and understand than to pronounce the Chaldean language.

Therefore, I have shown these things to you as a difficulty of Daniel, which among the Hebrews has neither the history of Susanna, nor the hymn of the three young men, nor the fables of Bel and the dragon, which we, because they are spread throughout the whole world, have appended by banishing and placing them after the spit (or "obelus"), so we will not be seen among the unlearned to have cut off a large part of the scroll. I heard a certain one of the teachers of the Jews, when he derided the history of Susanna and said it to have been forged by an unknown Greek, to propose that which Africanus also proposed to Origen, these etymologies

to come down from the Greek language: ”to split” from ”mastich” and ”to saw” from ”oak” (απο του σχινου σχισαι και απο του πρινου πρισαι). On which subject we are able to give this understanding to those of our own (language), as we might, for example say it to have said of the oak tree (ilice), ”you will perish there (illico)” or of the mastic tree (lentisco), ”May the angel crush you like a lentil bean (lentem)” or ”You will not perish slowly (lente)” or ”Pliant (lentus), that is, flexible, you are led to death” or anything which fits the name of the tree.

Then he jested for there to have been so much leisure time for the three young men, that in the furnace of raging fires they played with (poetic) meter, and called in order all the elements to the praise of God. Or what miracle or Divine inspiration is it, either a dragon having been killed by a lump of tar or the tricks of the priests of Bel having been discovered, which things are better accomplished by the wisdom of a clever man rather than by the prophetic Spirit? When indeed he came to Habakkuk and had read (of him) having been carried off from Judea to Chaldea carrying a dish, he requested an example where we might have read in all the Old Testament any one of the saints to have flown with a heavy body and in a short time to have passed over so great a space of lands. To which, when one of us rather a little too quick to speaking had brought Ezekiel into the discussion (lit. ”middle”) and said him to have been moved from Chaldea to Judea, he derided the man and from the same scroll proved Ezekiel to have seen himself moved in the Spirit. Finally also our Apostle, namely as an erudite man and one who had learned the Law from the Hebrews, was also not daring to affirm himself taken away in the body, but was to have said ”Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows.

By these and arguments of such kinds he exposed (or ”accused”) the apocryphal fables in the book of the Church.

Concerning which subject, leaving the judgment to the decision of the reader, I warn him Daniel is not to be found in the Prophets among the Hebrews, but among those which they titled the Hagiographa. Since indeed all of Scripture is divided by them into three parts, into the Law, into the Prophets, (and) into the Hagiographa, that is, into five and eight and eleven books, which is not (necessary) to explain at this time. And to those things of this prophet, or rather against this book, which Porphyry accused, the witnesses are Methodius, Eusebius, (and) Apollinaris, who, responding to his madness with many thousands of verses, I do not know whether they are satisfying to the interested reader. For which reason I entreat you, O Paula and Eustochium, pour out prayers for me to the Lord, so that as long as I am in this little body, I might write something pleasing to you, useful to the Church, (and) worthy to posterity. I am indeed not greatly moved by the judgments of the present, which on either side are in error either by love or by hate.

END OF THE PROLOGUE

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