

“The Political ‘Soap Opera’ Before Christ” (based on Daniel 11)

Cast:

The North:

Seleucus I (Seh-LOO-cuss)
Antiochus II “Theos” (which means “God”)
Laodice, the queen (Lay-o-DEE-kay)
Servant
Person of Northern town
Antiochus III “The Great”
Antiochus IV “Epiphanes” (ee-PIF-an-eez) (means “God with us”)

The South:

Ptolemy I (TAHL-uh-mee)
Ptolemy II “Philadelphus” (meaning “lover of the city”)
Ptolemy III “Euergetes” (Yu-air-GET-eez) (means “does well”)
Ptolemy IV “Philopater” (meaning “loves father”)
Watchman of Egyptian army
Ptolemy V “Epiphanes” (Ee-PIF-an-eez) (meaning “God with us”)

Others:

Narrator
Gaius Popillius, a Roman general
Judah Maccabee (MACK-uh-bee) (a nickname, meaning “the hammer”)
Hasmonean 1 (Has-mo-NEE-an)
Hasmonean 2
First citizen of Jerusalem
Second citizen of Jerusalem
Third citizen of Jerusalem
Fourth citizen of Jerusalem
Fifth citizen of Jerusalem
Sixth citizen of Jerusalem
Seventh citizen of Jerusalem
Alexander (Jewish king/high priest)
Hyrcanus (*Hir-CANE-us*)
Aristobulus (*Air-is-TOB-u-lus*)
Pompey (*Pom-PEA*)
Parthian general
Herod
Babylonian Jew

SCENE 1: The founders of the dynasties

PTOLEMY 1: Well, Seleucus, congratulations on conquering the other two parts of Alexander’s empire (may he rest in peace!). And don’t ever forget, you did it with MY help!

SELEUCUS 1: Yeah, thanks, Ptolemy. You’re a pal for helping me out. It’s awesome to own three-quarters of Alexander’s empire! But don’t forget-- you only have one quarter of the empire down there in Egypt, and I am not obligated to listen to your advice. You have your empire and I have mine. And I have big plans for my empire-- I plan to make it even bigger! I might even take Palestine and Jerusalem from you someday.

PTOLEMY 1: We’ll see about that. You may have grand plans, but can you get your army to carry them out? You’re not Alexander, you know.

SELEUCUS 1: Oh yeah? Well, I won't give them a choice. They'll do it. And if you live long enough, you'll see my empire grow and become even greater than yours. Someday historians will credit me with founding a dynasty-- they'll name it after me: the Seleucid Dynasty. (*Seh-LOO-kid*)

PTOLEMY 1: I hope your son can keep your empire together after you are gone.

SELEUCUS 1: My son, Antiochus, can do anything. In fact, his nickname is "Savior."

PTOLEMY 1: Well, my son Philadelphus lives up to his name; he loves our cities and won't ever let anyone conquer them.

SELEUCUS 1: Good luck, Ptolemy. May Zeus be with you.

PTOLEMY 1: Zeus, and all of the Egyptian gods, too!

SCENE 2: The next generation...

PTOLEMY 2 "PHILADELPHUS": Now then, Antiochus, I have a proposal for you. I propose that our kingdoms be at peace with each other and this peace be guaranteed by the marriage of yourself to my daughter, Berenice.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": To me? But I am already married! I have two sons!

PTOLEMY 2 "PHILADELPHUS": You're the king. You can do anything you want. Just tell Laodice she can't be queen anymore. She'll understand.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": You don't know Laodice. This will be difficult. But I like the idea of joining our kingdoms and bringing back the glory days of Alexander's empire, when we were all united in one huge empire.

PTOLEMY 2 "PHILADELPHUS": So, will you do it?

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Well... I guess so.

PTOLEMY 2 "PHILADELPHUS": It's a deal then. The child born to you and Berenice will be the heir to both of our kingdoms. Just think of it-- the empire of Alexander will be reborn. Zeus be praised!

Scene 3: Divorcing Laodice

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Laodice, you are no longer the queen. I am officially divorcing you. Berenice, daughter of Philadelphus, is now my wife.

LAODICE: How could you do this to me? It's so unfair. I have born you two sons who were to be king someday. I hate you Antiochus! You are so unfair!

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Sorry, dear, it's nothing against you, really. It's just that Ptolemy and I want to reunite our kingdoms and recreate the glory days of Alexander's empire.

LAODICE: You'll never bring back the good old days, Theos. Never!

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Well, I am certainly going to try! Good bye, dear!

Scene 4: Several years later

SERVANT: I have important news for King Antiochus Theos.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Yes?

SERVANT: Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt and father of your wife, Berenice, is dead.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Dead? Are you sure?

SERVANT: Yes, sir. His son, Ptolemy Euergetes now rules Egypt.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": Well, I have been having my doubts about this scheme to reunite the empire. I really don't think it is going to work. I think I will divorce Berenice and take back my first wife, Laodice, again. The sons I have with Laodice will inherit my kingdom, not Berenice's son.

Scene 5: What Laodice did

LAODICE: Do you think you can just take me back again, Theos? What do you think I am-- your pet dog or something?

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": But honey, I really want you to be my wife again.

LAODICE: And so I shall, but on my own terms. I want Berenice and her son executed.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": What?

LAODICE: You heard me. Kill them!

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": If you insist dear.

LAODICE: I do insist. But before you go, dear, why don't you have a nice drink of this delicious wine?

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": All right, if you insist.

LAODICE: I do.

ANTIOCHUS 2 "THEOS": This wine tastes funny. *(pause)* This is.... this is.... aghhh! *(falls over dead)*

LAODICE: I'll finish your sentence for you. This is... poison. Yes, dear, that's how I say thank you for how you've treated me. I think the boys and I can manage on our own now, without you! Long live the king-- my son Seleucus Callinicus!

Scenc 6: What happend when Ptolemy Euergetes found out his sister was dead

PTOLEMY 3 "EUERGETES": I can't believe what those jerks in the north did to my sister! I am outraged! I'll get revenge on them! Guards, call up the army! We're invading the north!

NARRATOR: And so Ptolemy's armies marched northward. Surprisingly, many towns welcomed him and gladly switched their allegiance to Egypt.

PERSON OF NORTHERN TOWN: Here comes Ptolemy! Open the city gates for him!

PTOLEMY 3 "EUERGETES": Everyone who can fight, come along with me and join my army!

TOWNSPEOPLE *(everyone join together and shout)*: Hurray for Ptolemy! Hurray for Ptolemy!

NARRATOR: So Ptolemy Euergetes went right through the land of Israel, up into Syria, and got his revenge on Antiochus Theos. He wrecked many buildings and stole as many things as he could, including idols made of gold and silver. His ultimate revenge was killing Laodice.

LAODICE: Aaaa!!

Scene 7: What the northern kingdom thought of all this

ANTIOCHUS 3 "THE GREAT": I'm still angry over what that lousy Ptolemy Euergetes did to our kingdom! Even though it's been a few years now, I just can't forget about all the things he stole. I think I'll give Egypt what it deserves. I'll march south and they can see how it feels to be invaded!

NARRATOR: So Antiochus the Great took his armies and marched south.

WATCHMAN OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY: Sound the alarm! I have news from the north! I have been told that the army of Antiochus the Great is on its way south!

PTOLEMY 4 "PHILOPATER": I'll show Antiochus the Great that he isn't so great! Soldiers, march!

NARRATOR: The two armies met each other near the land of Israel, at Gaza. (Gaza had been the land of the Philistines during the time of King David.)

PTOLEMY 4 "PHILOPATER": Even though I only have 73 elephants and Antiochus has 102 elephants, I have more men. He only has 62,000 soldiers and I have many more than that. I will win!

NARRATOR: Egypt did win the battle. It was the year 217 BC.

ANTIOCHUS 3 "THE GREAT": I'll never accept defeat to the Ptolemies! Wait a minute-- I've got a better idea than battle. I'll try to trick Ptolemy Philopator into a marriage alliance between my daughter, Cleopatra, and his son, Ptolemy Epiphanes.

NARRATOR: This is not the Cleopatra that married Mark Anthony. This is Cleopatra the First. The one that married Mark Anthony was Cleopatra the Seventh.

ANTIOCHUS 3 "THE GREAT": My daughter will be able to work from inside the Egyptian kingdom and then I will have some allies down south.

NARRATOR: Great idea, but it didn't work. Once she was in Egypt, Cleopatra sided with the Ptolemies.

ANTIOCHUS 3 "THE GREAT": Drat! How could she do this to me! I have a traitor for a daughter! I think I'll vent my anger by robbing some temples.

NARRATOR: Antiochus the Great was killed as tried to rob a temple.

PTOLEMY 5 "EPIPHANES": Thanks for joining our side, Cleopatra. You'll help make our kingdom great. I think I'll write a long paragraph about my greatness. I'll tell my scribes to engrave it onto a large black stone in both Greek and Egyptian, so that everyone in my kingdom will be able to read it.

NARRATOR: This stone would become famous someday. It would be called the Rosetta Stone and it would allow language experts to figure out how to read Egyptian heiroglyphs.

Scene 8: The king of the north who defiled the Jewish temple

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": Finally, I am king! You think you've seen political intrigue? You haven't seen anything yet. I survive by my wits. My childhood was spent being a hostage in the Roman Empire. When I finally got back to my father's kingdom, I found my brother on the throne instead of me. Fortunately, one of my brother's generals assassinated him. Unfortunately, my brother had a baby who was then proclaimed king. Fortunately, babies are easy to get rid of and I arranged for the baby to be killed. Then I proclaimed myself king. Who cares that I had a nephew that should have been king instead of me? I say let the strongest man win!

Now that I am king, I am going to give those Egyptians what they deserve. I'm going to start going south slowly, though. I think I can bribe a lot of towns into accepting me as their king. That way I won't have to fight so much. In fact, I bet I can even bribe those Jews in Jerusalem.

NARRATOR: Antiochus Epiphanes did manage to bribe the Jews. In fact, Antiochus was able to install a high priest of his own choosing-- a priest who was more interested in politics than in worshiping God.

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": Things are going so well, I think I am ready to invade Egypt.

NARRATOR: He did. And while he was there, a rumor began to circulate that he had been killed. This rumor reached Jerusalem.

FIRST CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Did you hear that Antiochus Epiphanes is dead? With Antiochus gone, we can get rid of the terrible high priest he appointed and choose someone who really cares about God.

NARRATOR: The people of Jerusalem killed the high priest of Antiochus. When Antiochus heard this news, he was furious.

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": I'll deal with those rotten Jews! Rebel against me, will they? I'll teach them!

NARRATOR: Antiochus Epiphanes stormed into Jerusalem.

FIRST CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Oh no, he is headed for the temple!

NARRATOR: He stole all the articles of gold and silver from the temple and told the people it was now illegal to be a Jew. If they tried to practice their religion they would be killed.

SECOND CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: I think I'll just do what Antiochus says. I don't want to be killed.

FIRST ANOTHER CITIZEN: What? You can't do that. You must obey God.

SECOND CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: I don't want to end up dead. I'll just start speaking Greek and wearing Greek clothes and maybe they won't notice I'm a Jew.

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": Now that I have the Jews under control, I think I'll make a second try at conquering Egypt.

NARRATOR: Antiochus Epiphanes headed for Egypt, but before he got there he was met by a Roman general named Gaius Popillius.

GAIUS POPILLIUS: Antiochus, you'd better think twice before invading Egypt. The emperor of Rome wants Egypt and he will send out a huge army to fight you if you try to invade it. Are you going to invade Egypt?

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": I will discuss it with my council at the next meeting.

NARRATOR: At this point, Gaius Popillius drew a circle in the sand around the feet of Antiochus.

GAIUS POPILLIUS: Before you step out of that circle, I want your answer. Are you going to invade Egypt?

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": Well, I'm not totally stupid. You and I both know my forces won't stand up against the legions of Rome.

GAIUS POPILLIUS: Then off with you! Go home!

NARRATOR: Antiochus Epiphanes was seething with anger but he had to admit he could not stand up to Rome. Unfortunately, his way home went right through Israel.

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": I am still really, really angry about that stuck-up Roman general. I feel like taking it out on someone. I know-- I think I'll stop in and see those rotten Jews. I'll teach them another lesson. I'll enter the city in a big parade on the Sabbath day. I won't let them know what I am up to until it is too late.

FIRST CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Watch out everyone, here comes Antiochus Epiphanes again!

SECOND CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: I'm not afraid. He won't kill me. I'm one of his citizens now. I look and act like everyone else-- you can't tell I'm a Jew.

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": Soldiers, kill all these Jews!

BOTH CITIZENS: Ahhhh!!!!

NARRATOR: The army of Antiochus Epiphanes killed 40,000 Jews and enslaved another 40,000.

THIRD CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Oh no, Antiochus is heading for the temple!

ANTIOCHUS 4 "EPIPHANES": I'll show these Jews my power. Their god doesn't scare me! I'll put this statue of Zeus inside their temple. And just to insult their god, I'll sacrifice a pig on their altar. I've been told they think pigs are forbidden for sacrifice, and this will make their temple unusable. Good! They can just learn to pray to Zeus instead!

NARRATOR: After this, Antiochus went off to the east to fight other wars and left one of his generals in charge of Jerusalem.

Scene 9: The Maccabees

JUDAH MACCABEE: Now that Antiochus is gone, let's try to overthrow his general and get our temple back. Who is with me?

OTHER MACCABEES (*everyone join and shout*): We are! We are!

NARRATOR: Judah and his followers fought for three years and finally drove out the army of Antiochus Epiphanes.
JUDAH MACCABEE: Now that those foreigners are gone, we have the hard work of cleaning up our temple so that we can use it for the worship of God again.
EVERYONE: *various shouts of; "Hurray" "Let's go!" "To the temple!" "Praise God!" "Let's work!"*
JUDAH MACCABEE: Now that we are a free people again, we need to form a government. My brothers and I will now lead the nation of Israel. We will protect our new country from the Seleucids in the north and from the Egyptians in the south.
FOURTH CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: What about the Romans in the west? I've heard they are coming our way.
JUDAH MACCABEE: We'll deal with them when they get here. I'm not going to worry about that now. Right now we need to get organized.

Scene 10: The Hasmoneans bring in the Romans

NARRATOR: The Maccabee brothers were the beginning of a new line of kings in Israel, called the Hasmoneans. (*Has-mo-NEE-ans*) The Seleucids (*Seh-LOO-sids*) and the Romans kept a sharp eye on the Hasmonenas and monitored everything they did. Sometimes they fought with the Hasmoneans and other times they made treaties with them and agreed to leave them alone. With the encouragement of the Seleucids, the Hasmoneans decided that the king of the Jews should also be the high priest. This had never been done before.
FIFTH CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: I'm not sure this is a good idea. I think we should keep the offices of king and high priest separate, like we've done since the time of King David.
SIXTH CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: I agree with you. I'm not sure I trust the Hasmoneans.
HASMONEAN 1: I think we should be more like the Greeks. They are great thinkers. I admire them.
HASMONEAN 2: No! We are Jews. We should be different. We should try to follow the law of Moses in every detail.
HASMONEAN 1: Don't be so old-fashioned. You're no fun.
HASMONEAN 2: It isn't about fashion or fun. It's about following all the laws of Moses. What's wrong with that?
HASMONEAN 1: You are overly strict with all your rules and regulations. You're a Pharisee.
HASMONEAN 2: There's nothing wrong with being a Pharisee. We are the experts in the law. You Sadducees (*SAD-yu-sees*) shouldn't even call yourself Jews. You don't even believe that there is life after death.
HASMONEAN 1: But we represent a large part of our Jewish population. There are lots of people who think the same as we do.
HASMONEAN 2: You mean like our high-priest-king, Alexander? How could a Jew take such a Greek name, anyway? Alexander was an ungodly person. In fact, we Pharisees are so outraged we are going to demand that we go back to having a separate king and high priest.
NARRATOR: The Pharisees went to Alexander and demanded that he give up being high priest.
ALEXANDER THE PRIEST: I will not give up being high priest. Just for that, I am going to let the Sadducees run the temple however they want to.
PHARISEES (*everyone*): No! No! No!
SADDUCEES (*everyone*): Yes! Yes! Yes!
NARRATOR: There was a riot in the temple and the Sadducees won the fight. Then Alexander died. His wife was from a Pharisee family. Their oldest son, Hyrcanus, supported the Pharisees. Their younger son, Aristobulus, supported the Sadducees. Thus, the argument continued.
HYRCANUS: I will be the next king and we'll do it the Pharisee way!
ARISTOBULUS: No! I will be the king and we'll do it the Sadducee way!
HYRCANUS: Pharisee way!
ARISTOBULUS: Sadducee way!
HYRCANUS: Pharisee!
ARISTOBULUS: Sadducee!
SIXTH CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Look out! Here comes the Roman general, Pompey! His army has broken through the city walls, We've been invaded!
POMPEY: Okay, I'm taking over here. You guys are causing such a racket I can't stand it. I'm officially taking over the land of Israel. You are now officially part of the Roman Empire. But I don't want to govern this miserable little town myself, so I'll let one of you do it for me if you promise me you'll be faithful and not rebel against me.
HYRCANUS: I promise!
POMPEY: Okay, you can be in charge. Just make sure you behave!
HYRCANUS: You can trust me to do a good job, sir.
POMPEY: And while I'm in town, I want to look at your temple and see for myself this famous building that everyone is always fighting over.

NARRATOR: Pompey went into the temple and peeked into the Most Holy Place, thinking to find a statue of the Jewish god.

POMPEY: What? No statue? What kind of temple is this? There's just a bunch of paper scrolls here! I'm leaving. Good-bye.

Scene 11: The political landscape when Jesus came into the world

NARRATOR: While the Romans ruled Israel, the Parthians came from the east and attacked Jerusalem. The Parthians had been part of the Persian Empire and had now grown strong enough to take over that part of the world.

SEVENTH CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM: Oh, no! Not the Persians again! I thought they were gone!

PARTHIAN GENERAL: We're taking over now. Hyrcanus, you can't be king anymore. We are going to cut off your ears so that you'll never be able to be a priest ever again. We know you Jews have a rule that says the high priest can't be missing any body parts.

HYRCANUS: Aahhh!

PARTHIAN GENERAL: And now we're going to haul you off to Bablylon. You can live with the Jews who stayed there.

NARRATOR: Hyrcanus was taken to Babylon and he lived there for a number of years. Then the Romans attacked again and tried to drive the Parthians out of Israel.

PARTHIAN GENERAL: Oh no! Our side is losing! The Romans are going to beat us! I'm out of here!

NARRATOR: The Romans reclaimed Israel and appointed a man named Herod to be the King of the Jews. The Romans were not going to trust the Jews to rule themselves.

HEROD: Well, I am King of the Jews now. But I think I need to make sure that the previous king, Hyrcanus, is gone for good. I think I will dispose of him.

HYRCANUS: I just got an invitation from Herod to return to Jerusalem. He says I can be high priest again.

BABYLONIAN JEW: Don't go back. It's probably a trick! He'll kill you.

NARRATOR: It was a trick. And Hyrcanus did get killed.

HEROD: I'm the King of the Jews and I'll get rid of anyone who tries to take my place!