

In Catholic Bibles, the Book of Daniel is regarded as one of the Major Prophets, the reason being that the book contains dreams and visions that reveal coming events. But most scholars today do *not* consider Daniel to be a prophetic book. Many view Daniel as somewhat like Esther, Judith, and Tobit, an edifying book of stories to help the reader place his/her trust in God during a difficult time.

Historical context. Even though the book presents itself as the composition of a wise Israelite, during the fifth century B.C. (Babylonian Exile), scholars believe the book was actually written much later during the reign of Antiochus IV, a wicked Persian king who persecuted the Jews in the second century B.C. *“The author was sensitive to the national despair brought on by this persecution, and so told six legend-like tales...stories as inspirational narratives to hearten the faithful of his time. Then he used the four visions of Daniel as ways of interpreting the meaning of the present crisis and establishing hope in the ultimate victory of the saints of God”* (Fr. McBride’s Guide to the Bible, p.139). Because this was written at a time similar to the historical context of 1-2 Maccabees, I have placed Daniel right after Maccabees in my table of contents.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

PART ONE: Six Stories (Chs 1-6). The first section of Daniel consists of six romantic stories, sometimes called “court tales,” intended to edify and teach proper religious attitudes. These chapters tell stories of a young hero and a ‘wise man’ and a great interpreter of dreams who lived under great danger in the courts of the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar II, and the king of the Persians. These stories tell how Jews could live in a Gentile environment and remain faithful to their religious traditions. Our modern situation of religious people seeking to live in a secular world is not so far removed from ancient Jews living in the pagan world of Babylon, or Christians living in a hostile environment in the Arab world today.

PART TWO: Daniel’s visions (Chs 7-12). This is the apocalyptic section of Daniel. These chapters “take the form of a kind of resistance literature that encouraged those experiencing persecution under Antiochus IV to persevere because the end of the time

of tribulation was at hand” (Collegetown Commentary p.534). More specifically, this section tells of four visions in which Daniel learns about coming occurrences either in a dream or through an angel. These all contain an explanation of past and future events that will culminate in the destruction of Israel’s enemies and their wicked allies in a battle conducted from heaven itself.

PART THREE: Appendix (Chs 13-14). These chapters consist of three further stories about the hero Daniel, his wisdom and his refusal to worship the false gods of the Babylonians. This section of Daniel is only found in the Septuagint or Greek version of the Old Testament and is not a part of the Hebrew or Protestant canon of scripture.

Since Daniel is not regarded as a prophetic book like Isaiah and the other books in the Prophetic Writings of the Bible, and since the book was written during the same period as 1-2 Maccabees, I am placing Daniel after the books of Maccabees. Daniel was addressed to the youth who were persecuted during the reign of Antiochus IV and his hellenization policies. The Jewish youth might suffer like Daniel and his three companions, but God was all-powerful and would save them, if not in this world, then in the next life.

COMMENTARY

PART ONE: DANIEL AND THE KINGS OF BABYLON (CHAPTERS 1-6)

CHAPTER 1: The food test

“The king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites...young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight and competent to serve in the king’s palace.” (vv 3-4)

“Daniel was resolved not to defile himself with the king’s food or wine.” (v.8)

As stated above, the first six chapters of Daniel contain six stories told to teach and edify proper religious attitudes.

The first story about Daniel transpires against the background of the Babylonian captivity and the slaves

of the king who have decided that the cream of the conquered population should be brought into his service. Four of the youth are Daniel and his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The first problem they encounter has to do with being asked to eat foods forbidden by their religion. Daniel had resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine he drank (v.8). So the first thing we notice about Daniel is his courage and his willingness to stand up for his beliefs against a powerful king. Daniel proposes that they be put on a vegetarian diet, assuring that they will be as healthy as the others after a ten-day period. Daniel surprises the chamberlain when after ten days they come out looking healthier and better fed than any of the young men who have eaten from the royal table.

The point is not at all to recommend vegetarianism, but to demonstrate how God looks after those who keep his laws. Equally, the youths' spectacular success, surpassing all the wise men of Babylon, is attributed not to their intelligence but to the favor of their God.

So Daniel and his companions pass the probationary time with flying colors. They show themselves to be ten times smarter than their competitors.

Pause: Do you have concerns about young people being seduced by the pagan influences of our secular culture?

CHAPTER 2: Daniel interprets the king's dream

"During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision." (v.19)

The second story illustrates Daniel's ability to interpret the king's complex dream. Upon waking up, the king cannot remember, let alone understand its meaning. The 'wisemen' of his court are unable to help him. Then Daniel is called in who displays his wisdom by recalling the contents of the dream and their meaning.

The statue made of various metals represents the different empires that have ruled the world. The feet of clay signifies that all of them are destined to fall apart. The small stone that rolled against the monstrous image and overcame it personifies the small community that is faithful to God and is seeking

justice. This little stone eventually rose until it became a mountain that touched the heavens. "The stone that struck the statue became a great mountain" (Daniel 2:35).

Then follows an "awards ceremony." Like Joseph in the book of Genesis, Daniel becomes the second most important man in the empire, and his friends who stand by him are also promoted. Surely not every encounter with worldly and heathen powers ends on such a happy note. The villain does not always "see the light" and turn to repentance. The faithful, God-fearing man is seldom rewarded by worldly rulers. And yet the truth behind the dream remains—the ultimate victory of God is assured and those faithful to God will share in his victory.

Pause: In your opinion, who has been the wisest and most godly ruler the world has seen in the last century?

CHAPTER 3: The fiery furnace

"Who is the God who can deliver you out of my hands?" (v.13)

"[Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answer King Nebuchadnezzar:] 'There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If our God, whom we serve, can save us from the white-hot furnace and from your hands, O King, may he save us! But even if he will not, know, O King that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.'" (vv 16-18)

The third story is a conflict in the court of Nebuchadnezzar between the king who orders all in his kingdom to worship a statue, and Jews who refuse to obey the king's command. On a deeper level, the story is a battle between the God of Israel, who has the ability to deliver those who remain loyal to him, and the gods of Nebuchadnezzar. After threatening Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with death for failing to worship the statue, the king throws down the gauntlet directly to God: *"Who is the God that will deliver you out of my hands?"* (v.15). That God, of course, is the God of the Jews who does in fact deliver his faithful servants from the fiery furnace unharmed.

Verses 16-18, quoted above, are considered one of the great dramatic scenes in Old Testament literature. This scene has served as a model for every tiny group of resisters standing before tyrannical authority. In

the three Jews standing before Nebuchadnezzar, one can see the forebears of Peter and the Apostles before the High Priest in the council saying: “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). As far as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are concerned, it doesn’t matter whether or not God saves them from the fiery furnace. They have decided to remain loyal to him and not worship the king’s statue. Before they enter the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar gives orders to turn up the heat, seven times more than the usual heat level. So huge is the fire that it devours the men who throw Daniel’s friends into the furnace (v.22).

In the middle of the narrative section of this chapter, we have two lengthy prayers (vv 26-90) which are not found in the Protestant Bible.

Prayer of Azariah (i.e. Abednego) (vv 26-45). The prayer begins with a standard Jewish benediction, followed by a collective psalm of lament in which the right of God to punish Israel is acknowledged. The present unhappy state of Israel is declared (“at this time, there is no prince, no prophet...no place to make an offering”), and an appeal for deliverance is made.

Prayer of the Three Young Men (vv 52-90). After an opening benediction, the song exhorts all aspects of creation to bless the Lord.

Enter the angel of the Lord (vv 46-51). As the fire reaches its peak, an angel of the Lord enters and replaces the fiery flames with a ‘dew-laden breeze’ (v.50). The presence of the divine figure in the fire symbolizes God’s presence with his suffering people.

Nebuchadnezzar praises the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (vv 91-97). Astonished to hear the singing, and bewildered at seeing four men still alive in the midst of the flames, Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel and his friends out of the flames. When the king sees that the three men are unharmed, he blesses their God for sending them an angel of deliverance and issues a decree forbidding anyone to speak blasphemy against their God.

Pause: What do you admire most about the three young men in the story? What are some examples of ‘truth speaking to power’ today?

CHAPTERS 3:98 – 4:34: Vision of the Great Tree

“Therefore I, Nebuchadnezzar, now praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.” (v.34)

The fourth short story is written in the form of a testimonial letter from Nebuchadnezzar to his subjects (see 3:98-100). A dream and experiences of madness and restoration have convinced the king that the God of the Jews governs all human kingdoms and determines who will rule them. In this undated narrative, the king of Babylon recounts a lesson in humility taught him by the King of heaven (see 4:34). (Collegeville Commentary, p.563)

This story can be divided into five scenes:

Scene 1: The king’s hymn of praise to God (3:98-100). This prayer in the mouth of a powerful pagan king shows God’s power over such rulers. Even the evil powers of the world are obliged to testify to God’s greatness.

Scene 2: Nebuchadnezzar’s dream report to Daniel (vv 1-15). In contrast to Chapter 2, the king this time remembers his dream, and only asks that the interpretation be made known to him.

After the Chaldean magicians show themselves to be of no help, the king calls in Belteshazzar, the Babylonian name for Daniel, in whom the king has supreme confidence (v.6).

The king proceeds to tell Daniel his dream (vv 7-14) in which he describes a great flourishing tree providing food and shelter for man and beast. Then a heavenly messenger arrived announcing that the tree would be cut down, leaving only its stump with a band of iron and bronze, and that a man would be struck with a disease that would make him like an animal for seven years.

Scene 3: Daniel interprets the dream (vv 16-24). “*With polite reserve, Daniel explains to Nebuchadnezzar that he is the tree that will be cut down and he is the man who will become like an animal if he fails to realize that ‘the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he wills’* (v.22). *The stump will recover when the seven years of punishment have passed, but Daniel appeals to the king to atone for his sins by good deeds and*

thus avoid punishment (vv 16-24; compare Sir 3:30)” (Collegeville Commentary, p.563).

Scene 4: Fulfillment of the dream (vv 25-30). Twelve months later as predicted, Nebuchadnezzar is struck down for his pride for thinking that Babylon was built by his own achievements. As foretold, the king goes mad and eats grass like an animal.

Scene 5: The king’s restoration and concluding hymn of praise (vv 31-34). “*Nebuchadnezzar, speaking in the first person again, says that at the end of the seven years of punishment, his health, sense, and kingdom were restored and he blesses the Most High. He closes his letter to his subjects, not denying the existence of the Babylonian gods, but explaining that he now praises and exalts ‘the King of heaven, because all his works are right and his ways just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble’ (v.34). In this story, acknowledgement of the Lord brings health and prosperity to a foreign king*” (Collegeville Commentary, p.564).

Final comments on Chapter 4. To an oppressed community living in the age of the brutal Antiochus IV (second century B.C.), a story about a mighty ruler being humbled would be welcome news. To believers of every generation, Chapter 4 sends the message that though the arc of justice bends slowly, it bends down at last, and that the mighty of this world who have no regard for God will sooner or later be pulled down from their thrones.

Pause: What speaks to you most in chapter 4?

CHAPTER 5: Another story about God’s sovereignty

“[The queen said to the king:] ‘*There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy God; during the lifetime of your father, he was seen to have brilliant knowledge and God-like wisdom...*’” (v.11)

“*When the king’s heart became proud and his spirit hardened by insolence, he was put down from his royal throne and deprived of his glory.*” (v.20)

The fifth short story is a mystery story of God’s swift judgment and punishment on a king for his sacrilegious use of Israel’s sacred vessels. At a royal banquet, under the influence of wine, the king Belshazzar calls for the sacred gold and silver vessels from the Jerusalem temple and uses them as goblets

for himself and his guests to toast the Babylonian gods (vv 1-4). His desecration is dramatically halted when a human finger, unattached to a body, appears and writes a mysterious message on the wall (vv 5-6). The terrified king offers a reward to the wise interpreter of Babylon who can read the message, but none can be found. Hearing of the king’s distress, the queen comes before him and suggests that Daniel be summoned (vv 10-12).

Daniel is brought into the king’s presence, and proceeds to speak truth to power. He lectures the king on failing to learn the lessons on humility that God had taught his father. Instead of humbling himself before God, he exalts himself. Equally bad, he has desecrated the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem.

Then Daniel turns his attention to the writing on the wall, which brings into the story an element of a mystery thriller. Out of thin air, as it were, there appears a solitary ghostly hand which begins to write words on the wall. Daniel reveals that the words are God’s judgment on the king. The days of the Babylonian Empire are numbered, and so are the king’s days. That night, the king is slain. The lesson of the story is that retribution will catch up with those who, like the king, show no regard for the God who holds their life and destiny in his hands. Again, this message would have been good news for the Jews living in the second century B.C. who were oppressed by the pagan and brutal policies of Antiochus IV.

Pause: Why do people, like the King, fail to learn from the past?

CHAPTER 6: Daniel in the lions’ den

“[Daniel answered the king:] ‘*My God has sent his angel and closed the lions’ mouths, so that they may not hurt me. For I have been found innocent before him.*’” (v.22)

The sixth and final story in this section of Daniel strongly resembles the story of the three young men in the fiery furnace. Here, the hero is Daniel. The purpose of the story is to encourage and strengthen the good Jew who is seeking to remain faithful to God in a hostile situation. The story can be divided into three scenes.

PART TWO: DANIEL'S VISIONS (CHAPTERS 7-12)

CHAPTER 7: Vision of four beasts

Scene 1: Daniel's co-workers conspire against him (vv 1-10). Because Daniel "outshone all his fellow supervisors in the entire kingdom" (v.4), they look for ways to undermine him in the eyes of the king, much like the Pharisees who will seek to undermine Jesus in the eyes of the authorities in his time. Failing to catch Daniel in any misconduct, they go to the gullible king and get him to sign a foolish law that forbids all people in the empire from praying to their god for a thirty-day period.

Scene 2: Daniel is caught violating the royal decree (vv 11-18). When Daniel hears about the royal decree, he continues his practice of quietly praying to his God. This is a perfect example of a man "obeying God, rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Daniel's faith in God is stronger than his fear of the lions. Because the decree is irrevocable, not even the king, who loves Daniel, can prevent him from being thrown into the den. The king even prays that Daniel's God may protect him (v.17).

Scene 3: Daniel is saved (vv 19-29). After a sleepless night, the king rushes to the lions' den hoping to find Daniel alive. Daniel tells the king that an angel of the Lord "closed the lions' mouths so that they could not hurt him" (v.23). King Darius is filled with joy. Daniel is released, and his detractors and their families are thrown into the den of hungry lions. Most likely they omitted their grace before meals prior to their breakfast! Then the king sends out a decree throughout his kingdom, testifying to the power and sovereignty of the living God of Daniel. The story of Daniel in the lions' den has been proverbial for all who find themselves in any form of adverse circumstances. In his book *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, John Collins writes: "The tales in Daniel 1-6 have been aptly said to present 'a lifestyle for the Diaspora.' Their message to the Jews in exile is twofold: participate in the life of the Gentile world and be loyal to the king, but realize that your ultimate success depends on your fidelity to your God and his laws" (p.562).

Pause: Where is it most difficult for you to maintain your identity as a Christian in our secular society?

"As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, he received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed." (vv 13-14)

In this section, the genre changes from short stories about Daniel and his three companions to apocalyptic visions (revelations) written in the first person and attributed to Daniel. In part two of Daniel, we have four visions concerning the course of world history, Daniel is not the interpreter of mysteries but rather the recipient of secret revelations. Through symbolic visions (chs. 7, 8) and direct revelations (chs. 9, 10-12), Daniel learns of divine actions soon to occur.

The word "Apocalyptic" comes from the Greek word *Apokalypsis* which means "revelation" or "unveiling." Concerning this type of literature, Fr. Kenneth Baker, S.J., writes: "Apocalyptic literature uses symbols and bizarre figures of imagination in order to explain the unfolding of God's plan for the world; it predicts a final intervention of God into human history, which will take the form of judgment."

Anthony Giles writes that apocalyptic literature is "concerned principally with the cosmic struggle between good and evil. In reality, apocalyptic writers said, the earthly struggles we see going on all around us are symbolic of the transcendent, universal conflict between the spiritual power of evil and the spiritual power of good. All creation is caught up in this universal warfare between good and evil. Yet God is in firm control, and on some final day, at the end of all time, he will conquer wickedness once and for all and inaugurate his universal rule in its full glory" (The Story Behind the Old Testament, p.136).

The message of Daniel in this powerful and obscure vision is that human pagan kingdoms (the four beasts) which act arrogantly against God and treat his people in a brutal way will receive divine retribution. In place of these kingdoms, God will set up his own kingdom, delegating his rule to the faithful among his people. In biblical poetry, the sea is often a symbol of chaos, of all that is opposed to God. That is the point Daniel

makes when he represents the kingdoms as beasts from the sea.

The ‘Ancient One’ on his throne (v.9) is God who judges human kingdoms. The identity of the ‘one like the son of man’ (v.13) has been controversial. The gospels interpret the Son of Man as Jesus. Scholars believe Daniel might have had in mind Michael the Archangel who represented the Jewish people on a heavenly level. The reference to the presence of the Son of Man suggests that the Jews were not alone in their struggle against human tyrants—in this case, Antiochus IV, who was seeking to impose a pagan religion on them. The purpose of the vision was to encourage the Jews living under the persecution of Antiochus the Terrible. Beast-like tyrants such as Antiochus would eventually be overcome by the power of God who one day would establish a new age characterized by a faithful and obedient people. The images in this chapter have been used over and over to give hope to people in time of oppression. It provides language to express the power of evil that erupts from time to time in human affairs (e.g., the Holocaust), and it can express a hope that does not depend on human power. A similar symbolic vision is found in the next chapter of Daniel.

Pause: When wild scary things occur in our world or in our lives, what helps you to cope with them?

CHAPTER 8: Vision of the ram and he-goat

“After their reign, when sinners have reached their measure, there shall arise a king, impudent and skilled in intrigue. He shall be strong and powerful, bring about fearful ruin, and succeed in his undertaking. . .but when he rises against the prince or princes, he shall be broken without a hand being raised.” (vv 23-25)

The following is the full text of the *Collegetown Commentary* on Daniel 8.

This vision, which is dated two years after chapter 7 (v.1), tells of a battle between a two-horned ram (representing the Medo-Persian Empire) and a he-goat (Alexander the Great). Using another set of symbols, this vision recapitulates the historical story told in chapter 7. The he-goat easily defeats the two-horned ram (v.7; reference to Alexander’s defeat of Persia in a series of battles between 334 and 331 B.C.

Then, at the height of the he-goat’s power, its great unicorn is broken off (v.8; reference to Alexander’s early death in 323 B.C.) and four horns sprout in its place (v.8; symbols of the four areas into which Alexander’s kingdom was divided: Macedonia, Asia Minor, Syria-Babylonia, and Egypt). One of the horns sprouts its own little horn (v.9; Antiochus IV Epiphanes). This little horn attacks earthly and heavenly powers, coming into combat with the prince of the host (seemingly God, though possibly the high priest, Onias III, who was assassinated in 170 B.C. by Antiochus) and desecrating the temple (vv 10-12).

For this vision, Daniel (who is awake) is transported (compare Ezek 3:12; 8:3; 40:1) to Susa, the capital of Persia, to the banks of the river Ulai (vv 1-2). There he meets the angel Gabriel (one of the archangels, according to 1 Enoch), who reveals that the appointed time of God’s wrath is drawing near when Antiochus will be overthrown (vv 15-25). The vision of the two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings that are to pass before the purification of the temple (vv 13-14, 26) is confirmed as true (these 1150 days equal three years and seventy days, which is remarkably close to the actual time that elapsed between the desecration of the temple by Antiochus in 167 B.C. and its reconsecration on the twenty-fifth of Chislev in 164 B.C.; see 1Macc 4:52-59; compare 2Macc 10:3). Daniel is enjoined to keep secret all that he has seen. The note that he felt weak and ill for some days afterward and that he did not fully comprehend all that he had experienced closes this second vision (v.27; compare 9:22, where Gabriel gives Daniel understanding) (pp 565-566).

CHAPTER 9: Daniel’s prayer and Gabriel’s message

“I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. I prayed to the Lord, my God, and confessed, ‘Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, you who keep your merciful covenant toward those who love you and observe your commandments! We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws.’” (vv 3-5)

“I was still occupied with my prayer...when Gabriel...came to me in rapid flight...and instructed me in these words....” (vv 21-22)

A prophecy of Jeremiah (25:11-12) is the background for Daniel’s prayer and Gabriel’s message. Jeremiah prophesies in the seventh century that the land will be

subject to Babylon for seventy years. Reflecting on the prophecy of Jeremiah leads Daniel to pray an act of contrition for his own sins and the sins of the nation (vv 3-19). The prayer of penitence begins with a confession of the failure of a whole people—from the king to the lowliest people of the land—to heed the word given them in the name of God by the prophets.

Then Gabriel interrupts Daniel’s prayer with a reinterpretation of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the seventy years. He is told that not seventy years but seventy weeks of years (= 490 years) must pass before desolation will come to an end. This number of years takes us into the horrible reign of Antiochus IV.

Pause: What things would you include in a national act of contrition for our nation?

CHAPTERS 10-12: Vision of the Hellenistic wars

“But then a hand touched me, raising me to my hands and knees. ‘Daniel, beloved,’ he said to me, ‘understand the words which I am speaking to you; stand up, for my mission now is to you.’ When he said this to me, I stood up trembling. ‘Fear not, Daniel,’ he continued; ‘from the first day you made up your mind to acquire understanding and humble yourself before God, your prayer was heard.’” (11:10-12)

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” (12:2)

Daniel’s fourth and final vision can be divided into three parts:

- Long introduction describing God’s messenger to Daniel (ch 10).
- Revelation that rehearses the history of the relationship between the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria, and ends with the death of Antiochus (11:1-12:4).
- Epilogue that closes with the sealing of God’s secrets until the end of time (12:5-13).

“Chapters 10-12, which are actually a historical retrospective written in the form of prophecy, were most likely composed shortly before the death of Antiochus (163 B.C.E.), since the details of his death

are inaccurately predicted (11:40-45).” (Collegeville Commentary, p.567)

Following a three-week fast, Daniel receives a vision. The angel explains that he was delayed in coming to Daniel because he was engaged in a battle with the patron angel of Persia until, finally, Michael, the patron angel of Israel, came to his aid (vv. 10-13). Prior to the vision, Daniel falls down three times and the angel touches him to help him get ready to hear the message.

The vision (11:1-12:4). The vision includes a brief account of the historical events from the time of Cyrus the Great to Antiochus IV (vv 2-20) and a lengthier description of the reign of Antiochus IV (vv 21-45). Much of the detail here is veiled and difficult to decipher.

The *Collegeville Commentary* states: *“According to the poetic conclusion (12:1-3) to the revelation of what is written in the book of truth (11:2-12:4), the great tribulation of the end times will result in the vindication of the elect of God. Michael, Israel’s patron angel, will arise to assist the redemption of Israel (v.1). Many who sleep in graves will awake to live forever, others to be given to everlasting horror (v.2). This promise of resurrection for individual reward and punishment is nearly unparalleled in the Old Testament (compare Isa 26:19). The faithful who have stood fast during the times of persecution are promised eternal reward (compare the more widespread Old Testament view that all the dead inhabit Sheol, which, though not a place of retribution, was a place where communion with God was cut off - see Isa 38:18; Ps 88:10-12)” (pp 568-569).*

APPENDIX CHAPTERS 13-14

(These two chapters are not included in the Jewish or Protestant canon of scripture.) This third section of Daniel is a collection of three edifying stories whose purpose is to teach that faithfulness triumphs over adversity and that foreign powers can be convinced of God’s sovereignty.

CHAPTER 13: Susanna’s virtue

“But Susanna cried aloud: ‘O eternal God, you know what is hidden and are aware of all things before they come to be: you know that they have testified falsely against me. Here I am about to die, though I have

done none of the things with which these wicked men have charged me.’” (vv 42-44)

The story gives us a picture of Daniel that is different from what we find in the previous stories. Here he is not a royal official, but a young man in an exiled Jewish community in Babylon.

In the story, two wicked old men who are judges in the Jewish community lust after the beautiful Susanna. Refusing to give in to their demands, she shouts for help. The wicked men create a false story which leads to Susanna’s condemnation and almost her death. Susanna protests her innocence and prays (vv 42-43). God hears her prayer by stirring Daniel to speak and win for Susanna a new trial in which Daniel questions Susanna’s accusers. In accordance with the Law of Moses (Deut 19:16-21), the two men must suffer the very same fate they have meted out to the one they falsely accused.

The story teaches that it is wrong to judge by appearance. By reason of their standing, the two elderly male judges are presumed to be wise and righteous. In this case, however, the young man (Daniel) proves to be wiser, and the woman (Susanna), all too often regarded as inferior in a patriarchal society, is the shining example of virtue. Susanna also teaches that purity, truthfulness and the practice of prayer are rewarded by God.

Pause: Have you ever had the experience of being falsely accused? If so, what was that experience like for you? If you did not have that experience, how do you think you would deal with it?

CHAPTER 14: Bel and the dragon

“[Daniel said to the king:] ‘I adore the Lord, my God, for he is the living God. Give me permission, O king, and I will kill this dragon without sword or club.’” (vv 25-26)

This final chapter of Daniel has two detective stories that make fun of pagan idolatry. Daniel proves to the king that it is stupid for him and his people to worship Bel and the dragon. The people become so angry that the king is forced to throw Daniel into the lion’s den. Then the prophet Habakkuk is carried by the hair of his head from Jerusalem to Babylon and feeds Daniel Irish stew and soda bread. When the king discovers

that Daniel is still in the lion’s den after seven days, he praises the God of Daniel: *“You are great, O Lord, the God of Daniel, there is no other besides you”* (v.41). Daniel’s wisdom is once again proven and rewarded, and a foreign pagan is convinced of the sovereignty of the God of Israel.

Pause: What are some lions that Christians face today? Who are the Bels and Dragons in our midst that we may be tempted to worship?