

Chapter 14 [Bel and the dragon]

Servants' preparation:

English sermons by Fr. Matthias Shedad

<https://soundcloud.com/stpaulhouston/daniel-14-bel-the-dragon-bible>

Read the chapter from Coptic reader or use this link → https://st-takla.org/pub_Deuterocanon/Deuterocanon-Apocrypha/El-Asfar/El-Kanoneya/El-Tanya/7-Daniel.html#Chapter%2013

Remember last chapter:

Last chapter, we learned the beautiful story of Susanna and how she was falsely accused of adultery but as soon as she raised her eyes to heaven, putting her problem in front of God, He sent Daniel to stir the course of the events and prove that the judges were liars.

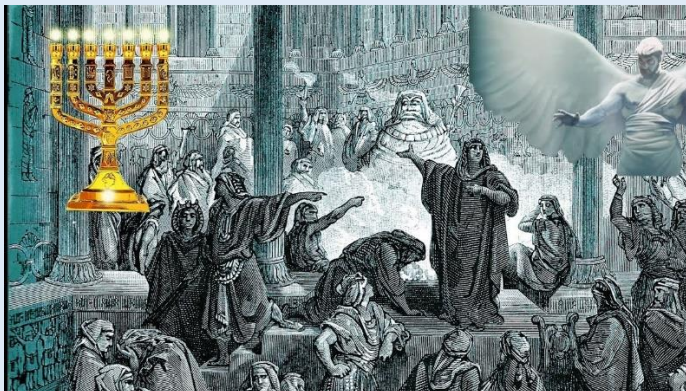
Chapter Outline:

There are three parts to the story of Bel and the Dragon. They all take place under the rule of the Persian king Cyrus.

- The Story of Bel: V1-22
- The Story of the Dragon: V23-27
- The Story of the Lion's Den: V 28-43

Chapter details:

The Story of Bel: V1-22



- At the heart of these stories is the issue of idolatry. What makes a god worthy of being worshipped? Cyrus, the Persian King, thought a god should be worshipped if it was a "living god."
- According to the story of Bel and the Dragon, Daniel is honored above all others by the new Persian king, Cyrus. The king asks Daniel why he does not worship the statue of Bel, to which the people have been offering great quantities of food every day.
- Daniel pointed out that Bel was made up of clay covered by bronze. It definitely was not a living god. The King completely disagreed and argued that of course Bel was alive because every day they gave him enormous amounts of food and every morning the food was always gone. Daniel chuckled.

- Maybe it was the way Daniel chuckled upon hearing that, or maybe the king simply didn't like being challenged. In any case, the king became very angry and called all the priests together. He proposed a test. Either they would show that Bel was eating all the food, or they would die. If Bel was eating the food, then Daniel would die! Suddenly, a random conversation with the king turned into life and death stakes for the participants.
- Daniel, however, was not discouraged because he trusted His God. He and the king met inside Bel's temple. All the priests stepped outside. The king laid out all the food and wine, and then came out and sealed the door shut with his signet ring. The priests understood that if the food wasn't gone by morning, their lives were on the line. What they didn't know is that before the king and Daniel left the temple, Daniel had his servants sprinkle ashes all over the floor.
- The next morning, the king breaks the seal and sees that the food has been eaten. He begins to praise Bel when Daniel points out the evidence in the ashes. There are footprints of men, women, and children leading to a secret door in the wall. The seventy priests and their families have been sneaking in nightly to eat the idol's offerings.
- The king flew into a rage, and the priests confessed that they had built a trap door under the altar and had gained access to the food on a nightly basis. The king immediately ordered them all put to death. He gave Bel over to Daniel, who destroyed the idol and the temple.

The Story of the Dragon: V23-27



- The second part of Bel and the Dragon involves an actual living dragon, which Cyrus again tells Daniel to worship. Since the dragon is flesh and blood, Cyrus claims, it is superior to Bel and should be honored.
- Even though, it was the same king seeing the power of Daniel's God when he destroyed Bel, it was not hard for him to add a god to his list, so God of Daniel is real, and this dragon is a real god too.
- Daniel told the king the snake was not a living god because he could kill it without using a sword or even a stick. Once again, the king took the challenge.
- Daniel prepared a mixture of pitch, fat, and hair. He fed it to the snake and shortly thereafter the snake burst open. Daniel again mocked the false idol that the king had been worshipping.

The Story of the Lion's Den: V 28-43



- Daniel is being thrown into the lion's den, this time by Cyrus, not Darius, as in Daniel 6.
- This time, the king had to deal with a rebellious population. They had just seen two idols discredited and destroyed. So, they rallied themselves against the king, wanting him to hand Daniel over to them or else they would go after the king's family.
- Finally, the king relented and handed Daniel over. Without further ado, the people threw him into the lions' den where there were seven hungry lions. Each day these lions were fed two humans and two sheep. But now, the lions were fed nothing but Daniel – for seven days!
- Of course, Daniel didn't have any nourishment either, which is why God got the prophet, Habakkuk involved. He was living at the same time of Daniel but all the way in Judea with the rest of people who were not exiled, so far from Babylon and the exiled people.
- Habakkuk had made a stew for the workers there, when an angel told him that that stew would be given to Daniel. Habakkuk answered saying "I have no idea where Daniel is, nor do I have a way to get to Babylon with this food"
- Immediately, the angel grabbed Habakkuk by the hair and whisked him over to the pit in Babylon where Daniel sat with the lions.
- Needless to say, Daniel was filled with gratitude because he knew that he had not been forgotten by the God he loved. He partook of the stew, and Habakkuk found himself back in his country.
- After seven days, the king approached the pit expecting to mourn the loss of Daniel. To his great surprise, there sat Daniel among the lions.
- The king rejoiced, praised Daniel's God, and threw his accusers into the pit. The lions wasted no time in devouring them.

Why did God send Habakkuk from far away instead of sending an angel to feed Daniel?

1. Habakkuk in his prophecy book had questioned God why He allowed His people to be taken into the exile, showing their enemies that their God did not help them. So, God wanted to show Habakkuk that He did not leave His people in the exile, the wicked people did not win and that He is glorifying His name through Daniel, Habakkuk was relieved.
2. Habakkuk would also be a witness for Daniel in Judea, telling the rest of the Jews how Daniel is keeping his faith.
3. God likes to have church members help each other to be the one body.

Live Application:

The value of these stories to the Jews and to us:

- These stories had value for the Jewish people in the OT who were struggling with idolatry. The first story illustrates how silly it is to worship something that man has created with his own hands. And the second story concurs that it is just as foolish to worship one of the creatures God had created.
- Jews should simply stay with the source, the one God, who created all and was all. So, these stories had some edifying aspects for idolatrous Jews.
- In the extreme, the stories show that there is no point in worshiping anyone or anything other than "the living God." For the Jews who were living among other nations, there was a great temptation to worship along with their gentile neighbors. When they didn't, they oftentimes suffered both religiously and economically. It would have been highly edifying to hear this story where Daniel stood up against the idolatrous king and was protected by God for his stance.
- Similarly, we encounter many people mocking religions and specifically Christianity, we should remember that our God is always watching over us and will glorify His name through us just as He had done with Daniel.
- God does not always work through heavenly miracles, but He uses things and people on earth in a miraculous way to serve His plan. For e.g.: If God is planning to heal someone from a disease, it does not have to be a miracle while he is sleeping but He could use the advancement in medicine and work with the doctors for this person to be healed. God is behind everything we see around us. He uses all threads and make them work together for our benefit.

How did Daniel preach?

- Throughout the book of Daniel, we never saw him disrespect idol worshippers or refuse to work with them because they worship fake statues. He would only witness to his God when they ask him why you don't join us or force him to forsake his God. He was willing to risk his life for witnessing for God.
- We should learn to do the same in our lives, we are asked by God to preach others but not necessarily by mocking other people's views but with all respect, we witness for what we believe in and explain why we believe that way. Remember our goal is to win people not to win arguments.
- It also depends on our relationship with those around us, Daniel might not have elaborated his reasons if he had not been close to the king. He could have said, I have another God to worship.
- These stories suggest there was a very close relationship between Daniel and the king. Daniel laughed, restrained the king from entering the temple and the king was not offended ! This would indicate their relationship was both intimate and long-standing.
- May God grant us wisdom to witness for Him everywhere we go, knowing that He is the only living God that protects His people from every evil.

Memory Verse:

Daniel 14:25 And Daniel said" I adore the Lord my God: for He is the living God".