

## Handout: Daniel Lesson 8

*A single witness will not suffice to convict anyone of a crime or offense of any kind; whatever the misdemeanor, the evidence of two witnesses or three is required to sustain the charge. If someone gives false evidence against anyone, laying a charge of apostasy, both parties to this dispute before Yahweh must appear before the priests and judges then in office. The judges will make a careful inquiry, and if it turns out that the witness is a liar and has made a false accusation against his brother, you must treat the witness as he would have treated his brother. You must banish this evil from among you.*

Deuteronomy 19:15-21

The Appendix to the Book of Daniel:

1. Chapter 13 presents the story of Susanna, a righteous and beautiful Jewish woman, living in a Jewish community as an exile in Babylon with her wealthy husband who is falsely accused of adultery by unscrupulous Jewish elders.
2. Chapter 14 has two stories in which Daniel risks his life to prove to King Cyrus the futility of worshipping false gods.

The stories in Chapters 13 and 14 have all the elements of folktales with a didactic religious purpose that focus on obedience to the Ten Commandments and ordinances of the Law even while living in pagan lands.

The story in Chapter 13 mentions or alludes to God fifteen times:

1. The narrator in verses 5, 9, 44, and 45 (also verse 62 in the Septuagint)
2. The righteous elders in verse 50
3. Susanna's parents and relatives in verse 63
4. The people of the Jewish community in verse 60
5. Susanna in verses 2, 23, and 42
6. Daniel in verses 53, 55, and 59

Only the wicked elders fail to mention God which is, after all, the core of their problem. They were not at all concerned about their accountability to God (cf. verse 9).

The problems with Chapter 13:

1. The physical setting of the story is in a Jewish community in Babylon. Daniel did not live in a Jewish community but at the royal palace of King Nebuchadnezzar.
2. The description of the Jewish community gives every indication of it being independent and self-governing with the right to execute its lawbreakers and with no pressures to abandon their religion to worship pagan gods. This condition is in sharp contrast to the stories in Daniel Chapters 1-6.
3. Daniel's role in the trial and his first reaction to the elders is problematic. He accuses the elders of lying before he examines the evidence for or against their claims (13: 49).
4. While Daniel as a boy could give evidence, an elder would have to act as judge in pronouncing Susannah innocent and condemning the lying elders to death. Nevertheless, the story of Daniel and Susanna presents a lesson in the necessity of upholding God's commandment concerning giving false evidence in the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 5:20 and the dire consequences for breaking that law.

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Chapter 14 presents two confrontational narratives:

1. The story of how Daniel reveals the fraud of the priests of Bel (verses 1-22).
2. The story of how Daniel destroys a dragon worshipped by the Babylonians (verses 23-43).

The problems with the two stories in Chapter 14:

1. The personality of Daniel in Chapter 14 is not like Daniel in the other stories in which he has a relationship with pagan kings. In those stories, Daniel is deferential and humble.
2. In the two stories in Chapter 14, he is bold to the point of being confrontational and disrespectful, even laughing at the king; something a subject of a great king would never do.
3. For a king who is supposed to be very fond of Daniel, Cyrus seems to have very little concern for Daniel's life.
4. The prophet Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah who lived in Judah before the exile.
5. Verse 33 identifies Habakkuk's location as Judea. Judea was the Greek and Roman name for Judah. The use of "Judea" suggests Chapter 14 was written not earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC during Greek domination and not during Daniel's lifetime in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.
6. Despite their displeasure, the citizens of Babylon would never have threatened the life of Cyrus the Great or his family as they did in the story of the dragon because he commanded an army of Persians loyal to him that could have destroyed the city.

The purpose of the two stories about Bel is to ridicule paganism. In both stories, Daniel risks his life to disprove the divinity of two revered Babylonian gods and to prove that Yahweh, God of Israel, is the only true God to whom he owes his worship, loyalty, and obedience.

The Book of Daniel provides a lesson of hope for all God's covenant people living in hostile environments, encouraging them to maintain their faith in the Lord and to continue their obedience to His commands because, as Jesus promised, "*I am with you until the end of time*" (Mt 28:20).

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