

BEL AND THE SNAKE^a

Daniel Proves Bel Is a False God

1 When King Astyages joined his ancestors in death, Cyrus of Persia succeeded him as king. **2** Daniel was one of King Cyrus' closest companions and was the most respected of all the king's friends.

3 The Babylonians had an idol called Bel. Every day they provided Bel with 12 bushels of flour, 40 sheep, and 60 gallons of wine. **4** King Cyrus believed that Bel was a god and would go to Bel's temple every day to worship him. But Daniel worshiped his own God. So the king asked him, "Why don't you worship Bel?"

5 Daniel answered, "I don't worship idols, which are made by humans. I worship the living God, who made heaven and earth and is the Lord of all people."

6 The king asked, "Don't you think that Bel is a living god? Don't you see how much he eats and drinks every day?"

7 Daniel laughed and said, "Don't be fooled, Your Majesty. This god of yours is only clay on the inside and bronze on the outside. It has never eaten or drunk anything."

8 This made the king angry. So he called for the priests of Bel. (There were 70 priests of Bel, not including their wives and children.)^b The king said to the priests, "Unless you tell me who's eating all the food given to Bel, you will all be put to death. **9** But if you can prove that Bel is eating the food, Daniel will be put to death because he insulted Bel."

Daniel said to the king, "I agree to everything you've said."

10 The king went with Daniel to Bel's temple. When they were inside, **11** the priests said, "Your Majesty, we're leaving now. Set out the food yourself, and pour the wine. Then shut the door, and seal it with your own signet ring. **12** When you return in the morning, if you find that Bel hasn't eaten everything, you can put us to death. But if he has eaten everything, Daniel must be put to death because he lied about us." **13** (The priests weren't worried at all, because they had made a secret entrance to the temple underneath the table. They used this secret entrance regularly to go in and eat the food given to Bel.)

14 When the priests were gone, the king set out the food for Bel. Then Daniel ordered his servants to bring some ashes and scatter them all over the temple floor. No one except the king saw them do this. Then they went outside the temple, shut the door, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and left.

15 That night, as usual, the priests, their wives, and their children entered the temple, and they ate and drank everything.

16 Early the next morning, the king went with Daniel to the temple. **17** The king asked, "Has the seal on the doors been broken, Daniel?"

Daniel answered, "The doors are still sealed shut, Your Majesty."

18 As soon as the doors were opened, the king looked at the table and shouted, "You are great, Bel! You really are a god!"

19 But Daniel laughed and stopped the king from entering the temple. Daniel said, "Look at the floor, and tell me whose footprints these are."

20 The king said, "I see the footprints of men, women, and children."

21 The king was furious. He immediately had the priests, their wives, and their children arrested. They showed him the secret doors that they had used in order to enter the temple and eat what was on the table. **22** Then the king had all of them put to death, and he handed Bel over to Daniel, who destroyed both the idol and its temple.

^a The book of Bel and the Snake is Daniel chapter 14 in some translations.

^b 8 The first part of verse 10 has been placed in verse 8 to express the complex Greek paragraph structure more clearly in English.

Daniel Proves the Snake is a False God

23 The Babylonians also worshiped a huge snake. **24** The king said to Daniel, "You can't tell me that this isn't a living god. So worship it."

25 Daniel said, "I worship the Lord my God. He's the [only] living God. **26** Give me permission, Your Majesty, and I will kill the snake without using a sword or a club."

The king said, "You have my permission."

27 So Daniel took some tar, fat, and hair and boiled them together. He made some cakes from this mixture and fed them to the snake. The snake ate them and burst open. Then Daniel said, "See what you've been worshiping!"

28 When the Babylonians heard about what had happened, they became very angry and staged a demonstration against the king. They said, "The king has become a Jew. He has destroyed Bel, killed the snake, and slaughtered the priests."

29 The Babylonians went to the king and demanded that he hand Daniel over to them. They threatened to have him and his whole family put to death if he refused to meet their demands. **30** When the king realized that they posed a serious threat to him, he was forced to hand Daniel over to them.

31 They threw Daniel into a lions' den, and he stayed there for six days. **32** Seven lions were in the den, and every day they were fed two humans^c and two sheep. But during the six days that Daniel was in the den, the lions were given nothing to eat so that they would surely devour Daniel.

33 At that time the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea. He had made some stew and had broken some bread into it. As he was taking the stew to some people who were harvesting in the fields, **34** an angel of the Lord said to him, "Take the food that you have to Babylon. It's for Daniel, who's in the lions' den."

35 Habakkuk said, "Sir, I've never been to Babylon, and I don't know where the lions' den is."

36 Then the angel of the Lord grabbed Habakkuk by his hair and, with a gust of wind, carried him to Babylon. The angel set him down in Babylon at the edge of the den. **37** Habakkuk shouted, "Daniel, Daniel! Take this food that God has sent you."

38 Daniel said, "You have remembered me, God. You have never abandoned those who love you." **39** Daniel got up and ate, and the angel of God immediately took Habakkuk home.

40 On the seventh day the king went to mourn for Daniel. But when he came to the den and looked inside, he saw Daniel sitting there. **41** The king shouted, "Lord, the God of Daniel, you are great! There's no other God except you!"

42 Then the king pulled Daniel out of the lion's den and had those who had plotted Daniel's destruction thrown into it. Immediately, they were devoured as the king watched.

^c 32 Or "two slaves."