

Introduction to the Apocrypha

Torah in Motion

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Class 4: The Daniel Stories: Daniel, Azariah and the Three Companions, Bel and the Dragon, Susanna

1. Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.³ So the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. When they were standing before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up,⁴ the herald proclaimed aloud, ‘You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.’⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews.⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘O king, live for ever!¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue,¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O king. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up.’

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king.¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, ‘Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up?¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?’

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter.¹⁷ If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us.¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.’

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace to be heated up seven times more than was customary,²⁰ and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire.²¹ So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their

trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire.²² Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.²³ But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counsellors, 'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True, O king.'²⁵ He replied, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.'²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!' So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.'³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

2. Azariah and the Three Companions

(Additions to Daniel, inserted between 3.23 and 3.24)

¹ They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord.² Then Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud:

³ 'Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise;
and glorious is your name for ever!

⁴ For you are just in all you have done;
all your works are true and your ways right,
and all your judgements are true.

⁵ You have executed true judgements in all you have brought upon us
and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our ancestors;
by a true judgement you have brought all this upon us because of our sins.

⁶ For we have sinned and broken your law in turning away from you;
in all matters we have sinned grievously.

⁷ We have not obeyed your commandments,
we have not kept them or done what you have commanded us for our own good.

⁸ So all that you have brought upon us,
and all that you have done to us,
you have done by a true judgement.

⁹ You have handed us over to our enemies, lawless and hateful rebels,
and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world.

¹⁰ And now we cannot open our mouths;
we, your servants who worship you, have become a shame and a reproach.

¹¹ For your name's sake do not give us up for ever,
and do not annul your covenant.

¹² Do not withdraw your mercy from us,
for the sake of Abraham your beloved
and for the sake of your servant Isaac
and Israel your holy one,
¹³ to whom you promised
to multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven
and like the sand on the shore of the sea.
¹⁴ For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any other nation,
and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins.
¹⁵ In our day we have no ruler, or prophet, or leader,
no burnt-offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense,
no place to make an offering before you and to find mercy.
¹⁶ Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted,
¹⁷ as though it were with burnt-offerings of rams and bulls,
or with tens of thousands of fat lambs;
such may our sacrifice be in your sight today,
and may we unreservedly follow you,
for no shame will come to those who trust in you.
¹⁸ And now with all our heart we follow you;
we fear you and seek your presence.
¹⁹ Do not put us to shame,
but deal with us in your patience
and in your abundant mercy.
²⁰ Deliver us in accordance with your marvellous works,
and bring glory to your name, O Lord.
²¹ Let all who do harm to your servants be put to shame;
let them be disgraced and deprived of all power,
and let their strength be broken.
²² Let them know that you alone are the Lord God,
glorious over the whole world.'

3. Bel and the Dragon

¹ When King Astyages was laid to rest with his ancestors, Cyrus the Persian succeeded to his kingdom. ²Daniel was a companion of the king, and was the most honoured of all his friends.

³ Now the Babylonians had an idol called Bel, and every day they provided for it twelve bushels of choice flour and forty sheep and six measures of wine. ⁴The king revered it and went every day to worship it. But Daniel worshipped his own God.

So the king said to him, ‘Why do you not worship Bel?’ ⁵He answered, ‘Because I do not revere idols made with hands, but the living God, who created heaven and earth and has dominion over all living creatures.’

⁶ The king said to him, ‘Do you not think that Bel is a living god? Do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?’ ⁷And Daniel laughed, and said, ‘Do not be deceived, O king, for this thing is only clay inside and bronze outside, and it never ate or drank anything.’

8 Then the king was angry and called the priests of Bel and said to them, ‘If you do not tell me who is eating these provisions, you shall die. ⁹But if you prove that Bel is eating them, Daniel shall die, because he has spoken blasphemy against Bel.’ Daniel said to the king, ‘Let it be done as you have said.’

10 Now there were seventy priests of Bel, besides their wives and children. So the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel. ¹¹The priests of Bel said, ‘See, we are now going outside; you yourself, O king, set out the food and prepare the wine, and shut the door and seal it with your signet. ¹²When you return in the morning, if you do not find that Bel has eaten it all, we will die; otherwise Daniel will, who is telling lies about us.’ ¹³They were unconcerned, for beneath the table they had made a hidden entrance, through which they used to go in regularly and consume the provisions. ¹⁴After they had gone out, the king set out the food for Bel. Then Daniel ordered his servants to bring ashes, and they scattered them throughout the whole temple in the presence of the king alone. Then they went out, shut the door and sealed it with the king’s signet, and departed. ¹⁵During the night the priests came as usual, with their wives and children, and they ate and drank everything.

16 Early in the morning the king rose and came, and Daniel with him. ¹⁷The king said, ‘Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?’ He answered, ‘They are unbroken, O king.’ ¹⁸As soon as the doors were opened, the king looked at the table, and shouted in a loud voice, ‘You are great, O Bel, and in you there is no deceit at all!’

19 But Daniel laughed and restrained the king from going in. ‘Look at the floor’, he said, ‘and notice whose footprints these are.’ ²⁰The king said, ‘I see the footprints of men and women and children.’

21 Then the king was enraged, and he arrested the priests and their wives and children. They showed him the secret doors through which they used to enter to consume what was on the table. ²²Therefore the king put them to death, and gave Bel over to Daniel, who destroyed it and its temple.

23 Now in that place there was a great dragon, which the Babylonians revered. ²⁴The king said to Daniel, ‘You cannot deny that this is a living god; so worship him.’ ²⁵Daniel said, ‘I worship the Lord my God, for he is the living God. ²⁶But give me permission, O king, and I will kill the dragon without sword or club.’ The king said, ‘I give you permission.’

27 Then Daniel took pitch, fat, and hair, and boiled them together and made cakes, which he fed to the dragon. The dragon ate them, and burst open. Then Daniel said, ‘See what you have been worshipping!’

28 When the Babylonians heard about it, they were very indignant and conspired against the king, saying, ‘The king has become a Jew; he has destroyed Bel, and killed the dragon, and slaughtered the priests.’ ²⁹Going to the king, they said, ‘Hand Daniel over to us, or else we will kill you and your household.’ ³⁰The king saw that they were pressing him hard, and under compulsion he handed Daniel over to them.

31 They threw Daniel into the lions’ den, and he was there for six days. ³²There were seven lions in the den, and every day they had been given two human bodies and two sheep; but now they were given nothing, so that they would devour Daniel.

33 Now the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea; he had made a stew and had broken bread into a bowl, and was going into the field to take it to the reapers. ³⁴But the angel of the Lord said to Habakkuk, ‘Take the food that you have to Babylon, to Daniel, in the lions’ den.’ ³⁵Habakkuk said, ‘Sir, I have never seen Babylon, and I know nothing about the den.’ ³⁶Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown of his

head and carried him by his hair; with the speed of the wind he set him down in Babylon, right over the den.

37 Then Habakkuk shouted, ‘Daniel, Daniel! Take the food that God has sent you.’ ³⁸Daniel said, ‘You have remembered me, O God, and have not forsaken those who love you.’ ³⁹So Daniel got up and ate. And the angel of God immediately returned Habakkuk to his own place.

40 On the seventh day the king came to mourn for Daniel. When he came to the den he looked in, and there sat Daniel! ⁴¹The king shouted with a loud voice, ‘You are great, O Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is no other besides you!’ ⁴²Then he pulled Daniel out, and threw into the den those who had attempted his destruction, and they were instantly eaten before his eyes.

4. Susanna

There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Joakim. ²He married the daughter of Hilkiah, named Susanna, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord. ³Her parents were righteous, and had trained their daughter according to the law of Moses. ⁴Joakim was very rich, and had a fine garden adjoining his house; the Jews used to come to him because he was the most honoured of them all.

⁵That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: ‘Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people.’ ⁶These men were frequently at Joakim’s house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there.

7 When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband’s garden to walk. ⁸Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. ⁹They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. ¹⁰Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, ¹¹for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. ¹²Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.

One day they said to each other, ‘Let us go home, for it is time for lunch.’ So they both left and parted from each other. ¹⁴But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone. Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. ¹⁶No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. ¹⁷She said to her maids, ‘Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.’ ¹⁸They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding. When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. ²⁰They said, ‘Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. ²¹If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.’ Susanna groaned and said, ‘I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. ²³I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.’

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. ²⁵And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. ²⁶When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. ²⁷And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna. The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, ²⁹‘Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim.’ ³⁰So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. Now

Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance.³² As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty.³³ Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping. Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head.³⁵ Through her tears she looked up towards Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.³⁶ The elders said, ‘While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids.³⁷ Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her.³⁸ We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them.³⁹ Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we are, and he opened the doors and got away.⁴⁰ We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was,⁴¹ but she would not tell us. These things we testify.’ Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, ‘O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; ⁴³you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!’ ⁴⁴ The Lord heard her cry.⁴⁵ Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel,⁴⁶ and he shouted with a loud voice, ‘I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!’ All the people turned to him and asked, ‘What is this you are saying?’⁴⁸ Taking his stand among them he said, ‘Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts?⁴⁹ Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.’ So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, ‘Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.’⁵¹ Daniel said to them, ‘Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.’ When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, ‘You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past,⁵³ pronouncing unjust judgements, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, “You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.”⁵⁴ Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?’ He answered, ‘Under a mastic tree.’⁵⁵ And Daniel said, ‘Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut you in two.’

Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, ‘You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart.⁵⁷ This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness.⁵⁸ Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?’ He answered, ‘Under an evergreen oak.’⁵⁹ Daniel said to him, ‘Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split you in two, so as to destroy you both.’ Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him.⁶¹ And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbour.⁶² Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day. Hilkiah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joakim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed.⁶⁴ And from that day onwards Daniel had a great reputation among the people.