

The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

Chapter 13 (Susanna)

Verses 1, 2. *"Now there was a man that dwelt in Babylon whose name was Joakim; and he took a wife whose name was Susanna, the daughter of Helcias, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord"* (Vulgate: God). Having expounded to the best of my ability the contents of the book of Daniel according to the Hebrew, I shall briefly set forth the comments of Origen concerning the stories of Susanna and of Bel contained in the Tenth Book of his *Stromata*. These remarks are from him and one may observe them in the appropriate sections (i.e., of Origen's work).

Verse 3. *"And being righteous folk, her parents had educated their daughter in conformity with the law of Moses"* (Vulgate: because they were righteous, they had instructed...). This verse should be used as a testimony in order to urge parents to teach their daughters in accordance with God's law and holy Word, as well as their sons.

Verse 60. *"And the whole congregation (Vulgate: assembly) cried out with a great voice and blessed God, who saveth those who trust in Him. ..."* If the whole congregation put them to death, the view which we mentioned earlier is apparently refuted, namely that these were the elders Ahab and Zedekiah, in conformity with Jeremiah's statement (chap. 29). The only other possibility is that instead of taking the statement, "They killed them," literally, we interpret it as meaning that they gave them over to the king of Babylon to be put to death. That would be just like when we say that the Jews put the Savior to death; not that they smote Him themselves, but they gave Him over to be slain and cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (John 19:15).

Verse 63. *"But Helcias and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna. ..."* Like true saints they praise God after a worthy fashion, not simply on the ground of Susanna's deliverance from the clutches of the elders ---- for that would hardly be sufficient matter for praise or of any decisive importance, even if she had not been so delivered ---- but rather on the ground that no immorality was found in her.

End of Chapter 13 (Susanna)

Verse 5. *"And there were two of the elders of the people (the Vulgate omits: of the people) who were appointed judges that year."* There was a Jew who used to allege that these men were Ahab and Zedekiah (variant: Alchias and Zedekiah), of whom Jeremiah wrote: "The Lord do to thee as Ahab and Zedekiah, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire because of the iniquity they had wrought in Israel and because they had committed adultery (variant: were committing adultery) with the wives of their citizens" (Jer. 29). [In Jer. 21:23; 29:21 they are mentioned as Ahab, the son of Koliah, and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah, two false prophets who were denounced by Jeremiah.]

"It was concerning them that the Lord said that iniquity came forth from Babylon on the part of the ancient judges who appeared to govern the people. They used to frequent the house of Joakim. ..." Very appropriately it is not said of these sinful elders, "They governed the people," but rather, "They appeared to govern." For those who furnish good leadership to the people are the ones who govern them, but those who merely have the title of judge and lead the people unjustly only appear to govern the people rather than actually doing so.

Verse 8. *"And they were inflamed with lust for her, and they perverted their own mind and turned their eyes away that they might not look toward heaven nor remember just judgments."* What the Greeks call *pathos* we render more correctly by "emotion" than by "passion." And so it was this emotion, this lustful desire, which aroused or even smote the hearts of the elders. But in order that they might lay some basis for it in their hearts and might plan how to satisfy their desires, they perverted their own minds. And as their minds were subverted, they turned away their eyes that they might not regard heavenly things or remember righteous judgments, or God, or honor, or character, the factors for good which are inherent in all men. "And behold, Susanna was taking a walk according to her custom." [This is Verse 13 according to the Septuagint, not according to Theodotion, who does not include the verse at all.] It has been stated already that Susanna was actually in the habit of taking walks in the mornings. For the sake of pleasing those people who seek out Scriptural precedent for everything we do, it would not be inappropriate to seize upon this passage about taking walks, and say that it is a good thing for a person to take walks for the invigorating of his body. Origen says that he has taken this particular passage from the Septuagint; by this statement he shows that he has not discussed the rest of the chapter on the basis of the Septuagint translation.

Verse 19. [Vulgate: XIII:22] *"Susanna sighed and said: 'I am straitened on every side.'"* Anyone who has attained to the acme of perfect virtue never says that she is faced with a crisis of decision, when she is unable to escape the hands of adulterers who say, "Consent to us and have intercourse with us; for otherwise, if thou art unwilling, we will witness against thee that a young man was with thee and thou sentest away thy maidens from thee for this purpose." It is of course a characteristic of human frailty to fear a death which is inflicted upon one because of his uprightness. To be sure we might interpret her distress as arising not from the prospect of death but from the contumely and disgrace which would be heaped upon her by those accusers who would claim: "A young man was with her, and she sent away her maidens for that reason."

Verse 22. *"For if I do this, it is death to me; but if I do not. ..."* She speaks of sin as death. For just as in the case of one who commits adultery, the adultery means death, so also every sin which results in death is to be equated with death. And we believe we die as often as we sin unto death. And therefore on the other hand we rise again and are made alive just as often as we perform deeds which are worthy of life.

Verse 23. *"But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing the deed than to sin in the sight of the Lord."* In the Greek the word is not *hairetoteron*, or "better" [actually: more preferable], but *haireton*, which we may render by "good" [more accurately: "preferable"]. And so she chose her words well when she avoided saying, "It is better for me to fall into the hands of my enemies, the elders, than to sin in the sight of the Lord"; for thus she avoided calling something *better* in comparison with sin, which was not a good thing at all. But, she remarks, it is good for me not to do the wicked thing, and to fall into your clutches without sinning in God's sight. Therefore one should not use the comparative and say, "It is better for me to fall into your clutches than to sin in God's sight," but rather the positive, "It is good for me not to do the wicked thing and fall into your clutches, rather than to commit sin in God's sight."

Verse 24. *"And Susanna cried out with a great voice. ..."* Her voice was great, not because of the intense vibrations it sent through the air nor because of the outcry that came from her lips, but because of the greatness of the chastity with which she called out to the Lord. And so for this reason the Scripture did not attribute a great voice to the outcry of the elders, for the following statement is merely: "The elders also cried out against her."

Verse 42. *"But Susanna cried out with a great voice. ..."* Her voice was rendered the clearer because of the emotion of her heart, the honest sincerity of her avowal, and the uprightness of her conscience. And so, although men would not listen to it, her outcry to God was great.

Verse 45. *"And as she was being led away to die, the Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young boy."* By this language it is shown that the Holy Spirit did not then enter into Daniel, but rather that He was already within him, and only because of the tenderness of his years He had remained inactive. Nor could He show forth His works until an occasion arose and the Lord stirred him up on behalf of the holy woman.

Verse 46. *"And he cried out with a great voice: 'I am innocent of the blood of this woman. ...'"* Because the Holy Spirit was roused up within him and dictated to the boy what he should say, his voice was great. And if there is any place in Holy Scripture where the voice of a sinner is called great, it has (yet) to be noted.

Verses 54 ff. *"Tell me under which tree thou sawest them conversing with each other.' And he answered, 'Under the mastic tree.' And Daniel said to him, 'Well hast thou lied against thine own head; for behold, the angel of God, having received His sentence from Him, shall cleave thee in twain.' And a little while later the other elder said, 'Under the holm tree.' And Daniel said to him, 'Well hast thou lied against thine own head; but the angel of the Lord waiteth with a sword to sever thee in twain.'" Since the Hebrews reject the story of Susanna, asserting that it is not contained in the Book of Daniel, we ought to investigate carefully the names of the trees, the *skhinos* and the *prinos*, which the Latins interpret as "holm-oak" and "mastic-tree," and see whether they exist among the Hebrews and what their derivation is ---- for example, as "cleavage" [Latin (*scissio*) is derived from "mastic" [Greek *skhinos*], and "cutting" or "sawing" [Latin *sectio*, *serration*] is derived from "holm tree" [Greek *prinos*, which resembles the Greek word for "to saw": *prio*] in the language of the Greeks. But if no such derivation can be found, then we too are of necessity forced to agree with the verdict of those who claim that this chapter [Greek *pericope*] was originally composed in Greek, because it contains Greek etymology not found in Hebrew. [That is, because Daniel twice makes a sinister wordplay based upon the Greek names of these two trees, and a similar pun could not be made out from the Hebrew names, if any, of these trees, the story itself could never have been composed in Hebrew.] But if anyone can show that the derivation of the ideas of cleaving and severing from the names of the two trees in question is valid in Hebrew, then we may accept this scripture also as canonical.*