

Introduction to Daniel and the Story of Susanna

Expository Lessons from the Book of Daniel

I. Introduction to the Book of Daniel

- a. This fall, I will be teaching 4 to 5 times in various house church and all-church settings from the Book of Daniel.
- b. Daniel is a spiritual giant. His character, courage, integrity, and personal righteousness are a model for us all.
 - i. The time is around 550-600 BC. The temple has been destroyed, and Israel has been taken into captivity to Babylon. God's people are living in a foreign nation and culture filled with idol worship and other evil.
 - ii. Sometimes, the light shines the brightest in the darkness. We see this in Daniel's life and example.
- c. One could divide the Book of Daniel into two parts
 - i. Chapters 1-6 cover events from his life while in captivity in Babylon.
 - ii. Chapters 7-12 focus on various prophecies and visions of future events.
 - iii. I do not feel qualified to teach on these visions, of which there has been much speculation over the years. Therefore, I will focus my teaching on the first six chapters, the events from Daniel's life.
- d. Over the centuries, the Book of Daniel has been very important to Christians.
 - i. In the ANF volumes, the book is referenced nearly 250 times! (Chapters 1-6, which we will focus on, over 100 times.)
 - ii. As we go through these lessons, I hope we will discover together why this is such an inspiring and practical book for Christians.
- e. Let's turn to the beginning of the Book of Daniel.

II. Introduction to the Story of Susanna

- a. As we begin reading the beginning of Daniel, you might be surprised!
 - i. If you are reading from an Old Testament that has been translated from the Masoretic text (based on the Hebrew Scriptures), the Book of Daniel begins with King Nebuchadnezzar destroying the temple in

Jerusalem and hauling the Jews to Babylon, including Daniel as a young boy.

- ii. If you are reading from a version based on the LXX (which is based on the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, written several centuries before Jesus was born), Daniel begins with the story of Susanna, our story today!
- iii. While much of the LXX and Masoretic texts are similar, there are sections where they differ, including, like here, where an entire story is found in the LXX, but not the Masoretic text!
- iv. All Catholic and Protestant Bibles included this story in the late 1800s. However, it was removed from most Protestant Bibles around 1880-1890.
- v. For more background on the LXX, and why we should consider reading it, see
 1. *Sacred Writings: The Deuterocanonicals: Your Friend or Foe?* by David Bercot (<https://youtu.be/ZAh5681yVl4?si=FU3r-uWA6kVWjtpO>)
 2. *The Bible Jesus Read* by Chuck Pike (<https://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/topical-lessons/lessons/the-bible-jesus-read/>).
- b. The story of Susanna (also spelled “Susannah”) spotlights a remarkable woman of faith. It also introduces us to Daniel as a young boy.
 - i. The story ends: “Thus Daniel had a great reputation among the people from that day onward.” (**vs. 64**)
- c. Over the centuries, the Church has cherished the story of Susanna and looked to it for many reasons.
 - i. In the first century, Ignatius, an elder/bishop in Antioch and likely a personal disciple of one or more of the twelve apostles. He references the story of Susanna to make the point that young people have been used powerfully throughout the history of the Scriptures and that we should judge a righteous man not by his age but by his character and life.
 - ii. In the 200s, Cyprian, an elder/bishop in Carthage, North Africa, discusses how the foundation and strength of our hope and faith is the fear of God. He gives many examples in Scripture to make his point, including referencing Susanna.

- iii. Also in the 200s, Origen speaks extensively about the story of Susanna, stating, "... the History of Susannah, which is found in every Church of Christ in that Greek copy which the Greeks use...." (referring to the LXX).
 - 1. See *A Letter from Origen to Africanus*, ANF 4.386-387, defending the LXX and specifically the story of Susanna.
- iv. The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, written in the late 300s, references the two wicked elders who bring a false accusation against Susanna to explain how the church should deal with conflict and accusations against brothers and sisters in the Church.
- d. But perhaps most significantly, Christians throughout the centuries have looked to Susanna's example in the face of extreme persecution, including remaining faithful even to death.
 - i. *Martyr's Mirror* is a collection of stories of early Christian and Anabaptist martyrs over the centuries. Written to provide inspiration and courage to the church, which will face its own persecution (currently or in the future). Extremely moving. I want to read excerpts from a few letters that reference Susanna, providing courage to Christians facing death. This is what I need to make it to the end!
 - ii. LAST LETTER OF JEROME TO HIS WIFE, WRITTEN THE NIGHT WHEN HE WAS SENTENCED; HE WAS PUT TO DEATH ON THE 2d OF SEPTEMBER, A. D. 1551
 - 1. Grace and peace from God the Father, the unfathomable mercy of the Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the loving kindness and communion of the Holy Ghost be unto you, for an everlasting consolation, joy, gladness, and strength **in your bonds**, tribulation, sufferings, and vexation in your labor, and for strength in your faith, love and tribulation. To Him be praise for ever and ever. Amen."
 - 2. I wish unto you, my dearly beloved, chosen wife in the Lord, the true, genuine, penitent faith, which works by love, and a very firm, immovable, steadfast mind in my and your most holy faith. **I further wish you the crucified Christ for a bridegroom, who has chosen you for a daughter, bride and queen.** To this King of the Most High, to the everlasting Father and jealous, loving God, I have now commended you, my beloved in the Lord, that He will now be your Comforter and Bridegroom, since He has called and taken me first, with which I am well content, seeing that it was the will of the Lord;

eternal praise and glory be to the Lord for His great power which He has manifested in us.”

3. Therefore, my most beloved in the Lord, do not complain, or grieve much, because He has taken me first; for He has done all for our best, that I should be an example unto you, and **that you may follow me as valiantly as I**, through the grace of the Lord, who has made us both worthy to suffer for His name, shall go before you. Oh, my dear lamb, I humbly entreat you, not to listen to the papists or other sophists, but steadfastly to follow your Bridegroom, your immovable Bridegroom. Follow His footsteps, and fear not their threats, nor let their tortures terrify you; for they can do no more than the Lord permits them; they cannot hurt a hair of your head without the will of the Father which is in heaven. (Matt. 10:30).”
4. Hence, fear not, but continue firmly and steadfastly in the doctrine of Christ, and in the right truth; for the Lord will not forsake you, but will preserve you as the apple of His eye; yea; as His daughter and child, since it is impossible for God's elect to be deceived; for His sheep hear His voice, and follow Him; but they hear not the voice of strangers. Hence, no man shall pluck them out of His hand; for He is their Shepherd and Protector. Hence, fight valiantly, my chosen lamb, for the glory of the Lord, even as He fought so valiantly, for the salvation of our souls. **Be therefore of good cheer**, even though you have to lie yet a little longer in this den of lions. Your deliverance is nigh; it tarries not, but comes; and When He comes that will come with power, He will receive you as His bride and queen; for it is His pleasure to have His chosen with Him, since He delights in beholding them; and the day of the Lord is at hand. (Habakkuk 2:3; Ps. 45:14; Isa. 13:6.)”
5. **Therefore, my dear wife in the Lord, fight valiantly now, and fear not man, but rather say with Susanna, that you would much rather fall into the hands of man, than into the hand of God; for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.** (Susanna 24; Heb. 10:31.) Go to meet the Lord with ardent love as you have done hitherto by the grace of the Lord, who works in you; and fight valiantly, for the crown of life is prepared for you, since to those that overcome all things are promised, and they shall also inherit all things.... Therefore, trust firmly in Christ alone, and the Lord will not forsake you, and the crown of life is prepared for you.”

iii. THE SEVENTH LETTER FROM JAN WOUTERSS, TO HIS FATHER AND MOTHER

1. [Written in 1572, after he had been stripped in the bitter cold, hands tied behind his back and lifted up with his feet tied as well, and then beaten with rods. He was then told that this was only “child’s play.”]
2. The eternal merciful God, full of all comfort, grant you, my dearest, beloved father, and my dearest, venerable mother, His grace through Christ, and confirm the love of you both through His Holy Spirit; so that you may pass this short time to the praise of God, as a light to the world, a pattern to your children, and to the salvation of your souls. Amen.
3. After this my cordial wish. I beseech and exhort your love, that you henceforth yield your members as weapons of righteousness, and not as formerly in the old man; but mortify the old Adam; that is, put off the old man with his evil deeds, and put on the new man, in true righteousness and holiness, as the holy Scriptures teach, which serve us to eternal life. (Rom. 6:13; Col. 3:9, 10.)
4. **... Concerning this necessary trial to which many saints of God were subjected, we have many examples in the holy Scriptures; as Abel, Jacob, Moses, David, Job, the three young men in the furnace, Daniel, Susannah, the seven brothers with their mother, many prophets, apostles, and many saints after them....**

III. Read Daniel, v. 1-64

- a. Lessons from the key characters: the two elders, Susanna, and Daniel.

IV. The Wicked Elders

- a. While much of Daniel’s life will address the wickedness he encounters in Babylon, here we find great evil among God’s people, in the hearts and lives of their own leaders.
- b. Jehoiakim was a wealthy man and honored, married to Susanna. They have a big house with a garden attached, where two elders would come to settle disputes among the Jews.
- c. Ominous introduction of these two elders:
 - i. “In that year, two elders from the people were appointed as judges, concerning whom the Lord said, ‘**Lawlessness** came forth out of

Babylon from the elders who were judges, **who were supposed to govern the people.**” (vs. 5)

d. **Question:** What were the sins of these two elders?

i. Lusting after a married woman

1. The two “eagerly” watch her walking around the garden, and
2. “they desired her. They turned away their heart and averted their eyes from looking to heaven, and from remembering righteous judgments.” (vs. 8-9)
3. “... beauty deceived you, and desire turned away your heart...” (v. 56)
4. Leads to hiding in the garden, watching her bathe, then seeking to lie with her.

ii. Deceit/lying/false testimony

1. They end up extorting her, accusing her falsely of adultery.
2. Over-the-top story, bald-faced lies:
 - a. “a young man was hiding in the garden” (actually they were)
 - b. We exposed this lawlessness but could not hold him because he was so strong; he escaped
 - c. She wouldn’t tell us his name
3. When she refuses to cooperate, they are willing to condemn her to death by deception.

iii. No fear of God

1. “Look, the doors of the garden are closed, and no one will see us....”
 - a. They believe no one sees them, but God sees everything!
2. They are supposed to be caring for God’s people but, instead, are full of lust and deceit; and willing to murder an innocent woman, to cover up their own sin and protect their reputation.

e. **Question:** Could there be people like this in the Church today?

i. Paul, warning of wicked leaders who will come into the church.

1. Read **Acts 20:25-31**
2. Warning to the elders in Ephesus. The Holy Spirit had made them overseers, but “savage wolves will come in” not sparing the flock, and even some of you will lead people astray.
 - ii. Peter, speaking of false teachers who will come into the church
 1. Read **2 Peter 2:10-14**
 - iii. Let’s not be fooled. Wicked people will come into the church, even among its leaders.
- f. Also, a warning to us personally!
 - i. Hippolytus of Rome, who wrote around 200 AD, has a long writing about Susanna's story. He concludes with **an admonition to the Christians** after explaining how God punished the wicked, deceitful elders who sought Susanna’s death.
 - ii. He makes the point that we, too, should fear God so that we might not be overtaken by our own sin (like these two elders) and risk the loss of our souls,
 1. “...knowing as we do that God is the Judge of all; and the Word Himself is the Eye which nothing that is done in the world escapes. Therefore, always watchful in heart and pure in life, let us imitate Susannah.” (ANF 5.194)

V. Susanna

- a. Who is Susanna?
 - i. A married woman with children. She was “a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord.”
 - ii. Righteous parents, who had taught her according to the Law of Moses.
 - iii. Suddenly finds herself in this terrible situation, accused of adultery by leaders of her “church”/“congregation”.
- b. Susanna’s heroic moment and decision
 - i. Read **v. 22-24**
 1. She counts the cost.
 - a. Option 1: lie with them, commit adultery, and sin against God (and deal with His judgment).

- b. Option 2: refuse to lie with them, be falsely accused of adultery, and be killed (but be faithful to God).
2. Chooses Option 1, no wavering, no compromise, not going there! This is exactly what Jesus taught!
 - ii. **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **Do not fear, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:28-29)**
 - iii. Susanna’s example has inspired many in the face of death!
- c. THE FIRST LETTER FROM MAERTEN VAN DER STRATEN TO HIS WIFE
 - i. “I Maerten van der Straten, your dear husband and brother in the Lord (both unworthily, however) wish you, my affectionately beloved wife, Beliken van der Straten, who are with me, according to Paul's writing, in the mouth of the lion (II Timothy 4:17)....”
 - ii. Out of a fond heart permeated with love, an affectionate greeting to you, O my dearest love, whom I love with all my heart, in accordance with the Word of God, that a man shall leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife. For you, O my dear lamb, are flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bones; and no man, says Paul, ever yet hated his own flesh.; but nourisheth and cherisheth it. Eph. 5:29. Hence I have good reason to love you, as I also do, this the Almighty Lord knows, who, according to the words of Jeremiah, tries men's hearts..... Jer. 17:10.”
 - iii. Further, after this my proper and Christian salutation, know, my affectionately beloved wife, that I, according to the words of Sirach, add day to day through much tribulation, as one that lodges in the field, and receives, many a storm, hail and rain on his body. But God, who kills and makes alive, will, I hope, preserve me, that I shall with Eleazar prefer an honorable death to an ignominious life.”
 - iv. Furthermore, my dearly beloved, whom I took by the hand with tears of joy, I hope and trust that you are also well in soul and body, **ready with Susanna rather to fall into the hands of men, than to sin in the sight of the living God, who, with His eyes, which are like a flame of fire, penetrates all things.** Sus. 23; Rev. 1:14. The Almighty Lord of lords, who, according to Paul's writing, is rich in goodness, and abounds with grace and mercy, look upon you and us all with His gracious eyes, and deliver us from this misery; for I, like you, am at this time in great distress....”

- d. Susanna's poignant prayer to God.
 - i. Read **v. 42-44**
 - ii. She is ready to die. But, cries out to the God who knows all things
 - iii. "The Lord heard her voice... and aroused the holy spirit of a young boy whose name was Daniel."
 - 1. God sees and hears.
 - 2. God acts, using a young boy.

VI. Daniel

- a. Daniel's courage and care for the innocent
 - i. As a young boy, "... cried out with a loud voice, 'I am innocent of the blood of this woman.'"
 - 1. Think this got their attention?! (she is innocent, elders are liars, you people will be guilty if you let this happen!)
 - ii. "Are you such fools, O sons of Isreal?" Condemning a daughter of Israel "without examination or knowledge of the evidence."
 - 1. People are perplexed. A righteous woman, claiming her innocence versus two elders who are respected judges of the people. What to do?
 - a. They side with the elders. Someone is lying, and it can't possibly be the elders! (Wrong!!!)
 - 2. Daniel is incensed
 - a. How can you possibly condemn someone without examining the evidence?
 - b. Why so incensed? Because God had told His people what to do when there was a false witness, and they were not doing it! (forgotten or too afraid)
 - iii. Read **Deuteronomy 19:15-21**
 - 1. Quoted by Jesus in **Matthew 18** – need two witnesses. But, you need more! You need to examine the evidence. The witness (or two witnesses) may be false witnesses!
 - a. You are to make a "careful inquiry" of the evidence to determine what is true, not trust the witnesses.

2. What are to be the characters of accusers and witnesses.
 - a. **xlix. When, therefore, you are set down at your tribunal, and the parties are both of them present (for we will not call them brethren until they receive each other in peace), examine diligently concerning those who appear before you; and first concerning the accuser,** whether this be the first person he has accused, or whether he has advanced accusations against some others before, and whether this contest and accusation of theirs does not arise from some quarrel, and what sort of life the accuser leads. Yet, though he be of a good conscience, do not give credit to him alone, for that is contrary to the law; but let him have others to join in his testimony, and those of the same course of life. As the law says: "At the mouth of two or three witnesses everything shall be established." **But why did we say that the character of the witnesses was to be inquired after, of what sort it is? Because it frequently happens that two and more testify for mischief, and with joint consent prefer a lie; as did the two elders against Susanna in Babylon....** Let the witnesses therefore be meek, free from anger, full of equity, kind, prudent, continent, free from wickedness, faithful, religious; for the testimony of such persons is firm on account of their character, and true on account of their mode of life. But as to those of a different character, do not ye receive their testimony, although they seem to agree together in their evidence against the accused; for it is ordained in the law: "Thou shalt not be with a multitude for wickedness; thou shalt not receive a vain report; thou shalt not consent with a multitude to pervert judgment." **You ought also particularly to know him that is accused; what he is in his course and mode of life; whether he have a good report as to his life;** whether he has been unblameable; whether he has been zealous in holiness; whether he be a lover of the widows, a lover of the strangers, a lover of the poor, and a lover of the brethren; whether he be not given to filthy lucre; whether he be not an extravagant person, or a spendthrift; whether he be sober, and free from luxury, or a drunkard, or a glutton; whether he be compassionate and charitable." (*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, ANF 7.418, c. 380 AD)

3. **Question:** What does this tell us about Daniel, even as a young boy?
 - a. #1: He knows the Law/the Scriptures.
 - b. #2: He is courageous. (challenges the initial verdict, calls them fools, starts his own examination, strong words for the elders!)
 - i. “You old man of evil days”
 - ii. “You seed of Canaan and not of Judah...”
 - iii. “... for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to cut you in two, that he may destroy both of you.” (vs. 59)
4. **Daniel’s courage, it seems to me, is driven by his desire to protect the innocent and deal with wickedness in religious leaders, the same heart we see in Jesus.** Consider the following:
 - a. The words Jesus had for the Pharisees in **Matthew 23**, who are devouring widows, turning people into twice the son of hell as they are, neglecting justice, faith, and mercy, full of extortion and greed, outwardly appear righteous, but inwardly are full of lawlessness.
 - i. Hypocrites, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs, serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell?
 - b. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**
 - i. How God will treat his servants who are supposed to be taking care of their fellow servants, but instead are beating them.
 - ii. He will cut them into two! (Just like Daniel said would happen to the two elders.)

b. A comment about age

 - i. These older men were judges, respected, held in honor, hung out with wealthy, respected people. Seemed to be righteous, but they were not!
 - ii. chap. iii.—Honour your youthful bishop.

1. “Now it becomes you also not to despise the age of your bishop, but to yield him all reverence, according to the will of God the Father... **not having regard to the manifest youth [of their bishop], but to his knowledge in God; inasmuch as “not the ancient are [necessarily] wise, nor do the aged understand prudence; but there is a spirit in men.”** For Daniel the wise, at twelve years of age, became possessed of the divine Spirit, and convicted the elders, who in vain carried their grey hairs, of being false accusers, and of lusting after the beauty of another man’s wife.... (Ignatius of Antioch from *The Epistle of Ignatius to Magnesians*”, ANF 1.60, c. 75-100 AD, he was a disciple of the apostles!)
2. Young people among us, like Daniel, you can be wise beyond your years!

VII. Conclusion

- a. God sees everything. No one is getting away with anything, no Christian and no leader. Let us fear God and not allow our hearts to be deceived by sin and sweep us away to wickedness.
- b. For the young and old, may we have the courage we see in Daniel, to protect the innocent and stand up to wickedness wherever we find it.
- c. Let us take inspiration from Sussana, who feared God more than man and did not waiver in her day of trial. Our day may come. Let us be prepared with the same determination as Susanna and if called, go to our own deaths faithfully and courageously.