

5 Daniel 12-14

12:1–4. The prophecy ends by announcing the deliverance of the people of God through the mediation of Michael, the angel protector of Israel. The names written in the book symbolize those who are truly the people of God—those whom God regards as his people because they have stayed faithful to him. There is no mention now of the everlasting kingdom on earth that we heard of in 2:44 and 7:14, but one presumes that there will be one, for those who were dead will rise, either to have a share in that kingdom or else to suffer the punishment they deserve. The new situation in which the good and the wicked find themselves will never change again: it will be forever. Those who will shine brightest are those who knew and taught the Law—those who “turn many to righteousness” (v. 3), not the martyrs. The book of Daniel goes further than the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel went. They spoke symbolically of a resurgence of the people in terms of a resurrection (cf. Is 26:19; Ezek 37); in Daniel as in 2 Maccabees 7:14, 29 the resurrection is real, not symbolic: “God reveals the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively. Hope in the bodily resurrection of the dead established itself as a consequence intrinsic to faith in God as creator of the whole man, soul and body. The creator of heaven and earth is also the one who faithfully maintains his covenant with Abraham and his posterity. It was in this double perspective that faith in the resurrection came to be expressed” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 992).

Moreover, Daniel proclaims the resurrection not only of martyrs (as happens in 2 Maccabees) but of all, for that is what the word “many” (v. 2) means. The Church, too, in the light of Jesus’ teaching, believes that “all the dead will rise, ‘those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment’ (Jn 5:29; cf. Dan 12:2)” (ibid., 998).

12:5–13. Now that he has been told what is going to happen, the next passage of the revelation is about the timing of events. The revealer is the same remarkable angel that appeared at the start of the vision (cf. 10:5–6), and the location is the same (cf. 10:4). The message is not communicated directly to Daniel (as the previous one was); it is given to another angel (cf. RSV note **h**) because it is a mystery that is known only in heaven but to which Daniel is privy. The words “a time, two times, and half a time” (v. 7) imply that the time is short (cf. 7:25). And although Daniel would like to know exactly what the last thing to happen before the end will be,

the only answer he is given is a clear call to be faithful in the midst of persecution (vv. 9–10). Still, he is told about two periods of time. The first, of 1290 days, from the date of the profanation of the temple, is one month longer than the three times (years) and a half (1260 days), and this may be saying that, although the time to the end is limited, it will be longer than he thinks. The second period, of 1335 days, mentioned in the context of a beatitude about patience or waiting, involves a month and a half more than the previous one; thus there is a stress on the need for perseverance in this waiting, even if the end is slow in coming. It is possible that mentions of these periods were later additions made to the text after the death of Antiochus IV, because he had died and yet the end had not come. In any case, those who die faithful, as Daniel will, do so hoping in ultimate resurrection. St Irenaeus says that these words were spoken to Daniel “so that he would understand that the promise made to him before (cf. 7:27) referred not to this life, but to eternity” (*Adversus haereses*, 5, 34, 2).

13:1–14:42. These chapters which, as we have said, are to be found only in the Greek manuscripts, form an end-piece to the book of Daniel that has been passed down to the Church. It fits in with the rest of the book because it, too, has Daniel as the main protagonist; but here he is not an interpreter of dreams or a seer of visions: he is a judge raised up by God to save the innocent (chap. 13), a wise man who shows how ridiculous it is to worship idols, as pagans do (chap. 14). Taken together, these two chapters set at the end of the book show that life goes on and that God ensures that justice is done, and that he exposes idols for what they are.

13:1–64. The episode of Daniel in the lions’ den, and this story of Susanna, with its well-drawn characters and scenarios, are the two most popular passages in the book of Daniel. The Susanna story is set in a Jewish community, and it forms an independent narrative; it probably existed on its own originally, independent of the other stories in the book. The version of Theodotion puts it at the start of the book, to act as an introduction to Daniel, whose name in fact means “God is my judge”. There are notable differences between the Septuagint and Theodotion texts; in the latter, the emphasis is put on Susanna’s innocence; in the former, it is on the wickedness of the two elders. Throughout the book of Daniel we have been shown that Daniel knows the secrets about the End; in the story of Susanna we see that he can read men’s hearts and judge accordingly.

Some Fathers of the Church read this story as an allegory. St Hippolytus, for example, writes: “Susanna suffered at the hands of the elders what we still suffer today from the kings of Babylon. Susanna is a figure of the Church; Joakim, of Christ. The garden beside their house is an image of the dwelling-place of the faithful, who are planted like fruitful trees in the Church. Babylon is the power of this world. The two elders stand for the two enemies of the Church—the Jews and the pagans. The words, [they] *were judges, who were supposed to govern the people*, mean that they handed down unjust sentences against the just” (*Commentarium in Daniele*, 1, 15).

13:1–14. This passage describes the context of the story—a well-to-do Jewish family, all God-fearing people. Susanna could be taken as a symbol of Israel. And then there are two wicked judges, who are supposed to give the people leadership. These two elders may have some link with the two false prophets who committed adultery and who are denounced in Jeremiah 29:21–23. The point is clearly made that what leads them astray is lust. A work attributed to St John Chrysostom comments on this passage: “If no passion undermines and corrupts it, the soul will remain clean and unstained. But if he does not guard his eyes, and looks at whatever he wants around him in the world, [...] the poison of desire will enter through a man’s sight and strike to the bottom of his heart; and he who was once a sober and modest man will be overwhelmed by a whirlwind of passions” (*De Susanna*, col. 591).

13:15–44. The dramatic tension reaches its climax with the sentence passed on Susanna. Faced with the dilemma of saving her life by sinning against the Lord, or dying by staying faithful to her husband and to God, Susanna opts for the second course of action. She is a model for the people in the trials they have to endure. She cannot prove her innocence to the people, but she can certainly assert it to God, who knows all hidden things; and then she waits (v. 42). “How often does the trickery of those moved by envy and intrigue force many noble Christians into the same corner? They are offered only one choice—offend God or ruin their reputation. The only acceptable and upright solution is, at the same time, highly painful. Yet they must decide: ‘Let me rather fall into your power through no act of mine, than commit sin in the Lord’s sight’ ” (St Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 68).

13:45–64. Nothing can be hidden from God (“He is a great eye, ever watchful: nothing that happens in the world can be hidden from him”: St Hippolytus, *Commentarium in Daniele*, 1,

33) and his judgments are just and true. Here he acts by rousing the spirit of prophecy (here called “the holy spirit”) in Daniel, who as a young man is very different to the elders. Daniel criticizes the people for being taken in so easily by the elders, and he convinces them to reopen the case. He tries to discover the truth, without being overawed by the seniority of the two judges. He uses a simple trick to divine the truth. All come to see that Susanna is a virtuous woman, true to her husband. She thus becomes a symbol of Israel’s faithfulness to her God. In the earlier part of the book Daniel was esteemed by foreign kings; now the text shows that his own people, too, hold him in high regard. This is a further reason for accepting the revelations made through him.

14:1–42. This chapter continues two popular tales—the story of the idol called Bel (14:1–22) and that of the dragon held to be a god (14:23–27), followed by another, similar to the one in chapter 6, about Daniel thrown into the lions’ den (14:28–42). The whole chapter is designed to show just how ridiculous idolatry is—the complete opposite of the salvation brought by the true God, the God of Israel. “Scripture constantly recalls this rejection of ‘idols, [of] silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.’ These empty idols make their worshippers empty: ‘Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them’ (Ps 115:4–5, 8; cf. Is 44:9–20; Jer 10:1–16; Dan 14:1–30; Bar 6; Wis 13:1–15:19). God, however, is the ‘living God’ who gives life and intervenes in history (Josh 3:10; Ps 42:3; etc.)” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2112).

14:1–22. The Septuagint gives this episode the title “From the prophecy of Habakkuk son of Joshua of the tribe of Levi”, perhaps to show that the various elements in the chapter link up together (cf. 14:33). The narrator sets this passage in the court of King Cyrus the Persian, who did in fact annex Media after he had defeated King Astyages in 550 bc. The point he is making really is that Daniel was an important man at court, irrespective of who the reigning king was. The main thing that emerges from the story is Daniel’s belief in the one true God and his shrewdness in exposing how pagan priests misled the people into believing that their idols consumed food and drink. “He does not want to triumph by reasons and arguments, but by deeds” (St John Chrysostom, *Interpretatio in Danielelem prophetam*, 14). No divine intervention takes place; human wisdom on its own is able to show that this is not the true God. However,

one can say, as St Cyprian does, that when Daniel speaks he is inspired by the Spirit of God and therefore that “he acted full of faith and with complete freedom” (*Epistolae*, 58, 5).

14:23–27. Unlike the idol Bel, a thing made by human hands, the dragon does eat and drink, and the king takes this to mean that it is a living god; Daniel kills the dragon without sword or club, showing up just how credulous the king was. There is no evidence of there having been a cult of the dragon in Babylon, but the Babylonians did depict gods in the form of animals; that may be the background to this little tale, which provides further evidence of Daniel’s shrewdness and wisdom.

14:28–42. It is ironic that instead of realizing that they have been victims of deceit, the Babylonians react against Daniel, who has removed the wool that had been pulled over their eyes. Their behavior shows how blind idolatry can make people—and they even force the king to go against his better judgment. The lions’ den episode is a repeat of that in chapter 6, though the story here is more lurid (with its human bodies as fodder, and the lions starved in anticipation of Daniel’s arrival), and we see God come to his rescue in a very unexpected way. We know nothing about the prophet Habakkuk other than what it says here. The man happens to have the same name as the prophet of the book of Habakkuk. Maybe he is brought in here to highlight the prophetic status of Daniel, but the episode seems in fact to be inspired by Ezekiel 8:3. It shows how God can use some people to put his plans for the salvation of others into effect—even in the exceptional ways that are described in this story.¹

¹ Gavigan, J., McCarthy, B., & McGovern, T. (Eds.). (2005). *Major Prophets* (pp. 868–881). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.