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Bel and the Dragon

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Bel and the Dragon

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“Bel and the Dragon.” In *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 420-421. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.

BEL AND THE DRAGON

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

Two short stories, in Septuagint (Daniel 14) and Theodotion (Daniel 13), are part of Daniel traditions that probably circulated in a Semitic language; perhaps the account of Bel (Ba'al=Lord) was stimulated by Jeremiah (51:34-35, 44). Both stories present a polemic against the idolatry of pagans.

To discount the claim that the statue of Bel consumed vast quantities of food, Daniel anticipated Sherlock Holmes and spread ashes on the floor to show that priests had a secret passage into the temple. The statue, temple and clergy were destroyed (13:22). Historically this was the deed of Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.)

The *drakon* (snake, not dragon) was worshiped as a living deity, which Daniel destroyed, not with a weapon but through an inedible concoction. The Babylonians, protesting that the king had become a Jew (13:28), threatened him and he handed Daniel to them. As in Daniel 6:11-25, the hero was thrown to the lions (13:31-32). Not only was he safe for a week in the den but an angel (see Dan 6:23) whisked Habakkuk from Judea to Babylon with a meal for him (13:33-38). When the king discovered that Daniel was alive and unharmed, he express faith in the one God (13:41; see Dan 6:26-28). These stories would have confirmed Jewish faith for a general audience (see Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-19). The second may have been an attack on Egyptian worship of serpents.

See Otto Kaiser, *The Old Testament Apocrypha: An Introduction* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004) p. 48-53. Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) p. 117-149.

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