

THE HISTORY OF BEL

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The Babylonians had an idol called Bel, and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour, and forty sheep, and six vessels of wine. And the king worshipped it, and went daily to adore it; but Daniel worshipped his own God.

And the king said unto him: "Why dost not thou worship Bel?" Who answered and said: "Because I may not worship idols made with hands, but the living God, who hath created the heaven and the earth, and hath sovereignty over all flesh."

Then said the king unto him: "Thinkest thou not that Bel is a living God? Seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day?" Then Daniel smiled, and said: "O king, be not deceived, for this is but clay within, and brass without, and did never eat or drink any thing."

So the king was wroth, and called for his priests and said unto them: "If ye tell me not who this is that devoureth these expences, ye shall die. But if ye can certify me that Bel devoureth them, then Daniel shall die, for he hath spoken blasphemously against Bel." And Daniel said unto the king, "Let it be according to thy word." Now the priests of Bel were three score and ten, besides their wives and children; and the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel.

So Bel's priests said: "Lo, we go out, but thou, O king, set on the meat, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast, and seal it with thine own signet. And to-morrow, when thou comest in, if thou findest not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death; or else Daniel that speaketh falsely against us."

And they little regarded it; for under the table they had made a privy entrance, whereby they entered in continually, and consumed those things.

So when they were gone forth, the king set meats before Bel. Now Daniel had Comanded his servants to bring ashes, and those they strewed throughout all the temple, in the presence of the king alone; then went they out, and shut the door, and sealed it with the king's signet, and so departed.

Now in the night came the priests with their wives and children (as they were wont to do), and did eat and drink up all.

In the morning betime the king arose, and Daniel with him. And the king said: "Daniel, are the seals whole?" And he said: "Yea, O king, they be whole." And as soon as he had opened the door, the king looked upon the table, and cried with a loud voice: "Great art thou, O Bel, and with thee is no deceit at all."

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Then laughed Daniel, and held the king that he should not go in, and said: "Behold now the pavement, and mark well whose footsteps are these." And the king said: "I see the footsteps of men, women, and children."

And then the king was angry, and took the priests with their wives and children, who showed him the privy doors where they came in, and consumed such things as were upon the table.

Therefore the king slew them, and delivered Bel into Daniel's power, who destroyed him and his temple.