

Eating Your Pieces
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
Nov 25, 2019

Dan 3:8

(BHS)

(ESV)

כָּל־קַבְּל דְּנָה בְּהִזְמִינָא	Therefore at that time
קִרְבוּ גְבָרִין כְּשִׁדְאִין	certain Chaldeans came forward
וְאַכְלוּ קִרְצִיהוֹן דִּי יְהוּדָיָא:	and maliciously accused the Jews

The verse you are looking at is not Hebrew, it is Aramaic. That is why you might be struggling with it. Note, for example, the **alephs** on the end of words. They form the definite article, instead of Hebrew’s *h-* prefix. The last word in the verse is “the Jews”—look for “Judah” in it. Compare also “Chaldeans” to the Aramaic *Kasday*. The masculine plural ends with *-in* in Aramaic, instead of the Hebrew *-im*. The middle word of line 2 is “men,” yielding “men of the Chaldeans.” You may recognize that word, as for example in the name *Gabriel*, “man of God.”

Look at the third line in ESV, “maliciously accused.” Other English translations gloss similarly: “brought charges” (NASB), “denounced” (NIV), “informed on” (NLT). But look closely at the first word of the line in Aramaic, which has a Hebrew cognate. Do you recognize it? It is the verb “to eat.” Its object is the next word, which denotes something like a pinched-off piece of clay. English Bibles correctly identify the idiom, which means to disparage or backbite, but something is lost in translation. A woodenly idiomatic rendering is, “they ate the pieces of the Jews.”

“Pieces” of the three faithful Hebrews were “eaten”—ultimately resulting in hot persecution, being cast into the fiery furnace. Similarly, Daniel was later

thrown into the den of lions. The lions were expected literally to eat his pieces. Those who ate Daniel's pieces (6:24, same idiom again), were later crunched by those lions.

Do you see the connection? Idolatrous and self-serving politicians do the same thing to the faithful as if they were the lions in the den. Those Chaldeans, as it were, are the beasts who seek to devour the saints. The culture that subjugates the people of God threatens to gobble them up. In Daniel, heathen nations are depicted in visions as monstrous beasts seeking to devour one another. Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 actually metamorphoses into a beast. This motif in Daniel of hostile kingdoms threatening to consume Israel is introduced in our verse, with the Chaldeans "eating the pieces of the Jews."

From the cross, Jesus quoted the opening line of Psalm 22, which speaks of Jesus' enemies as those who "gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (22:13, KJV). The psalm continues to give words to Jesus' passion, "save my soul ... from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth" (22:20 – 21). This psalm was on Jesus' mind as he hung.

Jesus was devoured for you. It began with his accusers eating his pieces when they made false accusations, but it ended with his death. But like the happy ending of the three Jews and Daniel, Jesus returned from the point of no return to new life. He was raised in power. He now offers his newness of life to all who believe. Like him, and like the Jews emerging from the fire and Daniel emerging from the lion's den, we also can emerge from our deathly state into real spiritual life today.

One lesson here is that the saints should expect to have their pieces eaten. What will you do, when because of your testimony to Jesus your pieces are on the menu? “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Make no mistake: you are a target. Daniel and the three Jews were ready with an answer, and willing to be devoured by fire for the truth of God. You must also be ready. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:11).

It may seem bizarre to have your trials compared to a lion’s den. You will hardly be eaten by wild beasts. But you will be ravened by something. Perhaps it will be cancer. Perhaps some other wasting disease. And in the end, you will be consumed by the grave.

But that’s okay. Like Daniel emerged from the lions’ den, like the heroes from the fiery furnace, and especially like Jesus from his tomb, you also will return to the land of the living—because Jesus will come for you, call your name, and you will be raised in glory and joy. We struggle against those who mistreat us now—while awaiting our final vindication. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!