

Daniel and the Lions

Daniel 6:1-28

If there is any story from the book of Daniel that most people know it is the wonderful story of Daniel in the lions' den. Many of us first heard this story as children in Sunday School or when our parents taught us Bible stories.

Daniel's deliverance from the lion's den is not the first great deliverance in the Book of Daniel, but it is the best loved. Daniel and his three friends are divinely delivered in chapter 1 from a confrontation with the Babylonian government and Nebuchadnezzar its king. God granted these men favor in the eyes of their foreign superiors, and they were allowed to eat vegetables, rather than the food set aside for them by their king. Because of their faithfulness, God gave these men an extra measure of wisdom, greatly impressing king Nebuchadnezzar, who gave them positions of influence and responsibility in his kingdom.

In chapter 2, once again God delivered Daniel and his three friends. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and his wise men could not reveal or interpret the dream. In anger, the king commanded the execution of all the wise men of the land, including Daniel and his friends. Daniel learned of the king's dilemma and was able to reveal to the king his dream and its meaning, sparing his own life and the lives of the other Babylonian wise men.

In chapter 3, Daniel's three friends refused to bow down before the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all people to worship. In anger, Nebuchadnezzar threw them into the fiery furnace. God was present with them there and preserved them from death, injury, and even the smell of fire. The king was so impressed he issued a decree guaranteeing the Jews freedom to worship their God without hindrance.

Chapter 4 tells about Nebuchadnezzar's deliverance. He is delivered from his sinful arrogance when, for a period, his sanity and kingdom are removed from him, and he must live like a beast of the field. From his own testimony, it appears he came to humble himself before God and to recognize the Lord's sovereignty and saving power.

Chapter 5 witnesses Belshazzar's condemnation in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar's conversion in chapter 4. Because of his rejection of the truth, and his blasphemy against the God of Israel, only one day in the life of Belshazzar is recorded in Scripture, the handwriting on the wall announced his condemnation and death.

Now, in chapter 6, Daniel's own life is in danger, and he will experience God's deliverance. Daniel 1 reveals what set Daniel apart from the rest of his Jewish peers and brought him to a position of prominence and power in king Nebuchadnezzar's administration. But chapter 6 identifies what sustained Daniel over the many years of his ministry and enabled him to survive the crises of his life.

Like Daniel, we live in a world of spiritual hostility where the temptation to compromise our faith is with us every day. In some parts of the world, standing up for Christ means suffering and death. In America today and in the future it may mean ostracism, ridicule, scorn, being left out and perhaps being passed over. If you don't compromise, you are sure to come into trouble sooner or later.

The story of Daniel and the lion's den reminds us that there is a spiritual battle raging all around us. 1 Peter 5:8-9 encourages us to:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Daniel resisted evil and stood steadfast in the faith. I hope that his story will encourage you to do the same.

As we approach this account let's remember a couple things to set the stage for what happens. First, Daniel is now a very old man. He came to Babylon as a teenager. Now he is over 80 years old. All his adult life has been spent serving in the courts of various pagan rulers. Second, there has been a major change in the government of Babylon. Darius the Mede rules in Babylon as a king in the Medo-Persian empire.

Daniel mentions him a number of times from chapter 5 on. He says at the end of chapter 5 that Darius was sixty-two years old when he received the kingdom. We know from chapter 9 that he was born into the royal family of the Medes. Secular history has yet to confirm the reign of Darius the Mede.

There are two other men named Darius mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah but they are Persian kings much later than Daniel's time. History tells of a general named Gubaru who served under King Cyrus the Persian, and who actually was the one who conquered the city of Babylon. Some scholars think Darius is another name for this general. Some say that Darius is actually another name for Cyrus himself.

Some critics have again called into question the reliability of the book of Daniel because of this lack of historical confirmation. I see it this way: We need no outside confirmation of reliability if we believe the Bible to be divinely inspired, accurate, and authoritative. For those who reject the Bible's authority, often it is true that all the historical confirmation in the world would be insufficient to change their minds. The skeptics would not take this chapter of Daniel seriously even if Darius were a well known king.

I believe what Paul writes is true: **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.** [2Tim. 3:16-17]

With that in mind, let's walk through this chapter expecting the Spirit of God to teach us.

I. The Decree of Darius

As this chapter opens Daniel is once again about to be promoted to high office. Darius recognized him as a man of integrity and wanted to make him second in command over the entire kingdom.

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 2 and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.

Darius recognized not only Daniel's wisdom but his integrity and faithfulness. Here was a man he could trust in a leadership position who would not cause him to "suffer loss." Recognizing his unique abilities, Darius planned to promote Daniel, placing him in charge of all the governors and the satraps. That's when the intrigue begins.

The thought of Daniel's promotion created much consternation. His ability must have threatened them, but more so his honesty. The king's concern is that he "**would suffer no loss.**" To the unethical leaders of the kingdom, Daniel's ability and honesty seriously threatened their corruption. They could neither corrupt Daniel nor deceive him.

4 So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

Daniel's testimony is awesome, his character and ability unsurpassed. His work is such that not even his enemies can bring a charge against him. His flawless faithfulness to the king and his obedience to the laws of the land forces his enemies to pass a new law aimed directly at him and his destruction. The only fault to be found with Daniel is that he is too godly.

This is what his enemies discovered when they examined his life: He was faithful in his duties. He was faultless in his character. He was fervent in his prayers.

Did you know that like Daniel the world is watching you? The people who watch you can tell if you work hard at your job. They observe what kind of character you have. And if they watch long enough, they will learn whether or not you are a person of prayer. No finer thing could be said than for your enemies to admit that they can find nothing wrong with you.

1 Peter 3 writes about the faithfulness and integrity we are to have as Christians and how the world will often react to it. He encourages us saying,

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. [1Peter 3:15-16]

Try as they might, his enemies found nothing wrong in his life. In the end it is they who would be ashamed.

Somewhere a conspiracy is born. A plan is hatched that his enemies hope discredit Daniel in the eyes of the king and force the king to kill Daniel even against his own desires.

6 So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

So the conspirators flattered Darius into passing a 30-day law forbidding anyone to pray except to Darius himself. Their proposal seemed to be in the king's best interest, helping to establish his rule over the former kingdom of Babylon. And it appealed to his pride. The conspirators insisted the decree be a law of the Medes and the Persians so it could not be revoked, even by the king himself. He had no idea that Daniel was the intended target.

II. Daniel's Devotion

The conspirators knew Daniel would keep on praying just as he had always done. So they watched him closely.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. 11 Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Daniel learned about the legislation the king had foolishly signed and executed. So what do you do when you discover that your enemies have passed a law aimed at one person, and you are that person? It's like walking around with a bull's eye on your shirt. How you respond at that point tells a great deal about your character. Verse 10 says that And he did as he had always done. Daniel was predictably faithful to God.

No wonder he simply went back to his room and started praying. A 70 year habit is hard to break. He wasn't about to stop praying just because some snot-nosed

satraps threatened his life. Daniel wasn't afraid to die. So when they tricked Darius into signing the 30-day law, Daniel just went ahead with his daily routine. He did it knowing that his adversaries would catch him.

Daniel had made up his mind to serve God no matter what. In a sense, his prior obedience made it easy for him. He had no decision to make. He just kept on doing what he had been doing all along.

So what do you do when they call for the lions? You don't change a thing. Keep on serving the Lord, keep on doing right, keep on living for Christ, and then let the chips fall where they may.

Now they think they have Daniel right where they want him.

12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 13 So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Darius now realizes he has been tricked.

14 And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

The King likes Daniel and immediately begins seeking loopholes to prevent him being thrown to the lions. But even the king could not repeal his own law because that would make him look weak and ineffective. No, the law must stand and Daniel must go to the lion's den. But Darius is rooting for the old man.

16 So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." 17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

What a testimony this is to the impact of Daniel's faith. The king himself says, **"Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."** (Daniel 6:16). Even unbelievers recognize true faith in God, and they respect it.

So Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, which was probably a pit dug into the ground with an entrance from the side for the lions and with a huge stone placed

over the top so there could be no escape. And sealed so that no one would tamper with it overnight.

III. The Lord's Deliverance

Daniel doesn't tell give us much detail about his experience inside the lion's den. Instead he tells us what happened to the king that night:

18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

The king had not slept well that night, if at all. He had been deceived by his ministers, and his most trusted servant had been set up, falsely accused, and cast into the lion's den. He rushed to the lion's den in the morning hoping that Daniel had been divinely delivered. What joy must have filled the king's heart when Daniel responded to his call. Daniel gave glory to God for delivering him through His angel.

21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Daniel had truly been innocent before both God and the king. Daniel's deliverance was attributed to his trust in God.

Daniel had discovered something worth dying for, which is why he kept on praying when others would have quit. Since he wasn't afraid to die, he had the courage to live for God in a hostile pagan world.

It's true that God didn't prevent him from being thrown in the den. But the Lord went in with him. That's why, when morning came, he was still alive, unharmed in any way.

The end of the story brings a complete reversal. First, the enemies who plotted against Daniel receive the death penalty that they wished upon Daniel.

24 And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions--them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.

God not only delivers His people from their enemies, He also delivers their enemies to the judgment they deserve for oppressing His people. Then Darius offers public praise to “the God of Daniel” (verses 26-27) who is the living God who endures forever.

25 Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

26 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

For He is the living God,

And steadfast forever;

His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,

And His dominion shall endure to the end.

27 He delivers and rescues,

And He works signs and wonders

In heaven and on earth,

Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

What amazing words coming from the lips of a pagan king. Darius declares that Daniel’s God is a far greater king than he, and that God’s kingdom is much greater than his earthly kingdom. He is the one who delivered Daniel. By inference, He is also the One to whom men should rightly address their petitions. Since God had done what the king could not do in delivering Daniel, God is the One whom men should worship and the One to whom their petitions in prayer should be made.

Lessons for today:

1. You can live a godly life in an ungodly world.
Daniel’s story demonstrates that if you make up your mind (or “purpose in your heart”) to serve God, you can do it even in the very center of pagan government. You can live for Christ on the job, in your office, in your classroom, or in your neighborhood. There is always a way to compromise for those who want to compromise. And there is always a way to obey God for those who want to obey God.
2. Christians who live for God should expect opposition.
If you set out to live for the Lord, sooner or later (probably sooner) trouble will come your way. This is part of what Jesus meant when he spoke about “taking up your cross daily” and following him. The jealous satraps are never far away. Ironically, the more godly you live often the sooner they will attack.
3. God is able to deliver his people from any danger they face.
If God can deliver Daniel from the lion’s den, he can surely deliver you. Generations of Christians have taken strength from this story because in

the end, the hero isn't Daniel, it's Daniel's God. Take heart and trust in God. He can deliver you from whatever is troubling you this very moment.

God can and sometimes does deliver in amazing and miraculous ways. Therefore, let us pray with confidence to a God who can stop the mouths of any lions we may face. And if God should choose to answer in some other way, we may rest secure that God makes no mistakes and (as King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way) "everything he does is right" (Daniel 4:37).

As we close, I would like to point out the gospel in Daniel 6. Daniel the man is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was innocent, was envied and hated and condemned to die. He too was let down into a pit of death and a stone was rolled across the entrance and an official seal placed across the stone.

Just as God sent an angel to Daniel, he also sent angels to announce "**He is not here. He is risen just as he said.**" From that pit of death came the One who has conquered death for ever and ever. He is Daniel's God. His name is Jesus. He is our Savior and our Lord.

The same God who rescued Daniel will rescue you from your sin if you will trust in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who trust in him are counted righteous in God's eyes and their sins are forgiven forever. If that's what you need, and if that's what you want, then run to the cross. Do not delay. Run to the cross and lay your sins on Jesus. In one shining moment your sins will be forgiven and you will receive a brand-new life. This is God's promise to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.