

Daniel in the Den of Lions

A Study of Daniel 6:1-28

The events of Daniel 6 are likely the best known of all the accounts given in the book of Daniel. It's a thrilling account of God's power, and of Daniel's lovely character. Strangely enough, only a brief, passing reference to the event is found in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of some "who through faith . . . stopped the mouths of lions."

Chapters 1-4 of the book of Daniel took place while the Babylonians were in power. Nebuchadnezzar was the Babylonian king, and Daniel was a young man. Chapter 5 took place while the Babylonians were fading from power, Belshazzar was king, and Daniel was an old man. Chapter 6 occurred when the Medo-Persian kings were in power, and Darius the Mede was king. By then Daniel was a very old man.

Daniel was a man of regular prayer. King Darius had forbidden prayer to any god other than Darius himself. Daniel's co-workers, who were envious of his success, were able to arrange for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The mighty demonstration of Daniel's deliverance from the mouths of the lions was clear evidence that the God of the captive Hebrews is really the God who controls the issues of life.

1. Favored by Darius (Daniel 6:1-3)

The Persians were in control of the entire former Babylonian Empire. Darius the king appointed 120 officers over all the countries he had conquered, and these men helped to administer the work of government. All the officers were placed under three presidents, one of whom was Daniel. The officers were responsible for collecting the revenues that were due the king. Their task was to see that the king would not experience any loss of revenue.

Daniel's work was obviously very satisfactory, and Darius preferred him above all the other officers. So he made arrangements to place all the affairs of the kingdom in Daniel's hands. Daniel was to become a kind of prime minister, or as we would call him, a Secretary of State (Daniel 6:3).

2. Framed by His Enemies (Daniel 6:4-9)

Daniel's blameless performance stirred the jealousy of the other princes and administrators. When a person does a good job in the work-place, there is sometimes jealousy on the part of people who are not as committed. When a talented person is advanced, occasionally other less devoted people become envious, and jealousy rears its ugly head.

Daniel lived an open, clean, godly life, above reproach. His co-workers could find no error or fault in Daniel (Daniel 6:4). There was no deadly spiritual decline in Daniel's life as he grew older. When some persons come toward the final years of life, the devil makes one last attempt to snatch them away from God. But even in his old age, Daniel did not give in to the enemy. From first to last, he was seen as the same faithful, courageous, steady servant of God—enduring faithfully to the end. Daniel had stood firmly for the Lord in his youth, and now he was faithful to God even in his old age.

The office where Daniel worked was likely a terrible place. Lust, greed, self-seeking, idolatry, and cruelty were all around him. It was about like an office or a factory in our own society. Verse 5 indicates that the

princes checked Daniel's *personal life*, and his *professional life*—and they came to the conclusion that the only way to trap Daniel was to find some complaint in connection with his *religious life*. Daniel's co-workers knew the intensity of his convictions, and they knew that at specific times every day, he went into his chamber to pray.

So the fellow-workers got their heads together and drew up a statute which they were sure would lead to Daniel's downfall. The officers, without disclosing their purpose, went to the king, and proposed that he should sign a decree prohibiting any petition to any god or man for 30 days (Daniel 6:7). The penalty for violation was to be cast into the den of lions.

Persians regarded their kings as divine. They had other gods, of course, so Darius was one among many gods. But now, for thirty days, he was to be the only god!

Consider for a few minutes the absurdity of this decree. No person in the kingdom was allowed to make any request from anybody except the king for 30 days. It was illegal to ask somebody for a drink, or to pass the bread during a meal.

You've heard of young girls chosen to be "queen for a day." In Daniel 6, we read about a man who was appointed "god for a month" (that is, for thirty days)—and the king was flattered! He was taken off guard by the very suddenness of their approach, so that the matter appeared to be reasonable to Darius. He signed the decree, and according to Persian custom, once it had been signed, it could never be revoked (Esther 8:8). Thus, the matter became the law of the land.

Most laws are designed to be kept, but this law (in the minds of the officers) was designed to be broken! They secretly hoped that Daniel would break the law.

3. Faithful to God (Daniel 6:10-15)

When Daniel learned what had happened, he simply kept on with his upright practice of prayer as he had done before the charge was issued.

There are several alternatives that Daniel could have taken. He could have discontinued his prayers for 30 days. After all, he could have said, "I'll pray in my heart; God searches the heart anyway; He knows that I am praying." Daniel could have gone into hiding while he was praying. Or, he could have made a bold public show of his praying! Daniel didn't do any of those things. He simply followed his usual custom of praying three times a day with his face turned toward Jerusalem, as Jews were told to do.

Daniel had lived in Babylon now for seventy years, and he had not returned to his homeland. Yet every day, he knelt in his bedroom with the window open toward Jerusalem three times a day. He never forgot his homeland or the days of his youth, nor the anguish of separation from his godly parents. We notice several lessons from the phrase in verse 10, with "his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem."

- Daniel did not go home and open the windows to make a show of what he was doing (that would be fanaticism).
- He did not go home and close the windows to hide his actions (that would be cowardice).
- He just left the windows the way they were before.

Daniel was not a fanatic, nor a coward, but was the same steady man of God that he had always been!

The text (in Daniel 6:10) continues by saying that he “gave thanks.” For what did he give thanks? Did he thank God for the persecution that was being heaped upon him, or for the hungry lions that he might soon face? One thing is sure; Daniel thanked God for His salvation, for His love, for His grace, His power, and His promises. The text says that he was delivered from the lions “because he believed in his God” (Daniel 6:23b).

Daniel’s good life is quite evident in the Bible account, and here we learn the inner secret. He was a man of regular prayer! In verses 11-13 we learn that when Daniel went home to pray, his enemies came flocking around his house, and when they saw that he was praying, they lost no time taking the news to the king. Daniel’s enemies rushed into the king’s presence, crowded into his courtroom, and reminded the king of the decree he had signed. They accused Daniel before him, and their conspiracy seemed to be working!

When the king heard their appeal to activate the decree he had just signed, he at once recognized the mistake he had made, and he was highly displeased. In the Babylonian Empire, the king was absolute, and he slew whom he would and kept alive those he chose to pardon. But in the Persian Empire, even the rulers were subject to the laws they had made.

When Darius saw how his nobles had deceived him, he moved quickly and tried to discover some way by which to deliver Daniel. He “labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him” (Daniel 6:14), hoping to find some technicality in the law by which he might keep Daniel from being thrown into the den of lions.

4. Thrown to the Lions (Daniel 6:16-18)

Darius may have consulted with his lawyers, but when he couldn’t find any loophole in the law, he finally consented to allow Daniel to be cast to the lions. Darius seemed to sense in his soul something of the power of Daniel’s God. When they put Daniel into the den, he said, “Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee” (Daniel 6:16b).

When the guards had closed and sealed the opening to the pit, Daniel slid way down to the floor of the den. Some of the lions undoubtedly came bounding out of their caverns, only to be stayed by the powerful hand of God. I think I can see those beasts as they yawned and simply lay down on the floor.

Daniel had been cast into the den of lions and the opening was closed off and sealed (Daniel 6:17). Thus Daniel’s friends could not attempt to rescue him, and neither could they throw meat to the lions, hoping to satisfy the animals and spare Daniel.

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. No musicians were brought before him, and sleep went from him. He had a bad night. He tossed and rolled, and just couldn’t sleep (Daniel 6:18). Daniel had likely told Darius about the Lord, and certainly he had given testimony by his godly living. Darius had seen enough of Daniel’s daily activity to realize that his way of life was reputable.

In light of verse 18 (and verse 22), who do you think rested better that night—the king in his palace, or the prophet in the den who was surrounded by lions? Daniel was at peace with God and the king. He knew he was innocent of any wrongdoing. On the other hand, the mind of Darius was troubled. It is always better to *suffer* an injustice than it is to *commit* an injustice!

5. Freed by the King (Daniel 6:19-28)

At the break of dawn, the troubled king arose and hurried to the pit. He was hoping for the best but feared the worst! Just as the flames had not been able to bring even the smell of fire upon Daniel's three friends (in Daniel 3), so the lions were not permitted to touch the prophet Daniel (in Daniel 6). The last clause of verse 22 explains that Daniel was spared because he was innocent before God—and before the king.

However, Darius himself didn't have any real faith in Daniel's deliverance because the next morning he came to the pit, fearing that there would be nothing but silence. He called to Daniel with a voice of anguish, and said (Daniel 6:20), "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Then Daniel called from the bottom of the pit, and said, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me" (Daniel 6:22).

Daniel's disobedience of the king's new law, when he kept on praying at his home three times a day, was not because of any contempt for the king, but because of his high regard for the King of kings! Daniel knew that God sometimes allows what He hates in order to accomplish what He loves. He knew that what God allowed was for his good.

Darius was exceedingly glad that Daniel had been spared and at once commanded that he should be drawn up out of the den (Daniel 6:23). Then those men who had accused Daniel (along with their wives and children) were cast into the den of lions instead, and they were destroyed by the lions before they even reached the bottom of the den! This may prove several things, but one thing for sure: the lions were hungry. Daniel was saved, not because the lions were not hungry, but because God miraculously delivered him!

The final verses of Daniel 6 tell about the new decree which Darius issued—a sweeping proclamation that all men should "tremble and fear" before Daniel's God (Daniel 6:26). Darius did not repudiate his Persian gods, but his proclamation was a remarkable statement about the reality of Daniel's God.

"Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom, men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."
(Daniel 6:25-28)

It is not difficult to discover a number of timely lessons from this familiar chapter.

a) The events of the chapter foreshadow an even greater deliverance—the final deliverance of Israel from her enemies and her persecutors. The deliverance will occur at the time of the glorious return of Christ to earth in the second phase of His coming. Both Zechariah 14:1-9 and Revelation 19:11-21 declare that Israel will experience a great deliverance in the end-times, and the enemies of Israel will be judged and destroyed just like Daniel's enemies and persecutors were judged and destroyed.

b) The character of Daniel leaps out at us as we read this chapter. We see his integrity, his consistency down through the years, and his disciplined way of life. Keeping a demanding prayer-schedule like

Daniel kept requires great discipline of life. He was a busy man; he had heavy responsibilities; surely the temptation to neglect his prayer schedule was strong. But Daniel kept daily fellowship with God at the top of his list of priorities.

c) God's people today are not exempt from "the lions" of adversity. Such adversities include illness, business reverses, slander, children that disappoint us, etc. The key to victory in the midst of adversity is ongoing faith in the true and living God. For example, Christian parents whose child is snatched away by sudden death often grieve for a long time. But they do not become frantic, for they are comforted by the assurance that they will someday rejoin their child in Heaven.

Even though Daniel was at this time a very old man, yet God wanted to accomplish good things in and through his character. God used the favor of King Darius to further His divine purposes. Daniel prayed earnestly for the restoration of Israel (Daniel 9:1-3), and another king of Persia, Cyrus, gave an edict for the restoration of the Jews to Israel (Ezra 1:1-3).

Believers in Jesus Christ have inner resources that give purpose to their lives, so they can keep on going even in times of adversity! We should remember that God often allows hard places in our lives because He wants to accomplish good things in our character.

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."
(1 Peter 1:6-7)

-Harold S. Martin

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