

From *the* Lions' Den to *the* Angel's Den



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 6, 1 Sam. 18:6–9, Matt. 6:6, Acts 5:27–32, Mark 6:14–29, Heb. 11:35–38.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Daniel 6:4, NKJV*).

After the Medo-Persians take over Babylon, Darius the Mede recognizes the wisdom of Daniel and invites him to be part of the new government. The aging prophet so excels at his public duties that the new king appoints him a chief administrator of the whole Medo-Persian government.

However, as the chapter unfolds, Daniel faces the result of what could rightly be called the first sin—that of jealousy. Yet, before the story ends, we can see that Daniel is faithful, not only to his secular duties under the Medo-Persians, but most important to his God. And we can be sure that, to a great degree, his faithfulness to God directly impacts his faithfulness in these other areas, as well.

Daniel's experience with persecution serves as a paradigm for God's people in the time of the end. The story does not imply that God's people will be spared from trials and suffering. What it does guarantee is that, in the conflict with evil, good will ultimately win out, and God ultimately will vindicate His people.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 15.

Jealous Souls

Even in heaven, a perfect environment, Lucifer feels jealous of Christ. “Lucifer was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. Yet when all the angels bowed to Jesus to acknowledge His supremacy and high authority and rightful rule, he bowed with them; but his heart was filled with envy and hatred.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 14. Jealousy is such a dangerous feeling to harbor that in the Ten Commandments themselves, alongside the forbiddance of murder and theft, there is the command against covetousness (*see Exod. 20:17*).

Read Daniel 6:1–5, along with Genesis 37:11 and 1 Samuel 18:6–9. What role does jealousy play in all these stories?

Daniel’s administrative abilities impress the king but provoke the jealousy of other officers. Thus, they conspired to get rid of him by accusing him of corruption. But as much as they search, they find no fault in Daniel’s administration. “They could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him” (*Dan. 6:4, NKJV*). The Aramaic word translated as “faithful” also can be translated as “trustworthy.”

Daniel is blameless; there is nothing the officers can do to raise an accusation against him. However, they also perceive how faithful Daniel is to his God and how obedient he is to his God’s law. So, they soon realize that in order to frame Daniel, they will have to produce a situation in which Daniel will be faced with the dilemma of obeying either God’s law or the law of the empire. From what the officers have learned about Daniel, they are absolutely convinced that under the right conditions he will side with his God’s law over the empire’s. What a testimony to Daniel’s faithfulness!

What kind of struggles with jealousy have you had to deal with, and how have you dealt with them? Why is jealousy such a deadly and crippling spiritual fault?

The Plot Against Daniel

Read Daniel 6:6–9. What is the thinking behind this decree? How does it play on the king’s vanity?

Darius may appear silly in promulgating a decree that he soon wishes to repeal. He falls into the trap laid by the officers, who are smart enough to play with the political circumstances of the recently established kingdom. Darius has decentralized the government and established 120 satraps in order to make the administration more efficient. However, such action entails some risks in the long run. An influential governor can easily foster a rebellion and split the kingdom. Thus, a law forcing everyone to petition only to the king for 30 days seems a good strategy to foster allegiance to the king and, thus, prevent any kind of sedition. But the officers mislead the king by claiming that such a proposal has the support of “all” the governors, administrators, satraps, counselors, and advisors—an obvious inaccuracy, since Daniel is not included. In addition, the prospect of being treated as a god may have been appealing to the king.

There is no evidence that Persian kings ever claimed divine status. Nevertheless, the decree may have been intended to make the king the sole representative of the gods for 30 days; that is, prayers to the gods have to be offered through him. Unfortunately, the king does not investigate the motivations behind the proposal. Thus, he fails to perceive that the law that would allegedly prevent conspiracy was itself a conspiracy to hurt Daniel.

Two aspects of this law deserve attention. First, the penalty for transgression is to be cast into the lions’ den. Since this kind of punishment is not attested elsewhere, it may have been an ad hoc suggestion of Daniel’s enemies. Ancient Near Eastern monarchs placed lions in cages in order to release them on certain occasions for hunting. So, there was no shortage of lions to maul whoever dared to violate the king’s decree. Second, the decree cannot be changed. The unchangeable nature of the “law of the Persians and Medes” also is mentioned in Esther 1:19 and 8:8. Diodorus Siculus, an ancient Greek historian, mentions an occasion when Darius III (not to be confused with the Darius mentioned in Daniel) changed his mind but could no longer repeal a death sentence he had passed on an innocent man.

Daniel's Prayer

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (*Matt. 6:6, NKJV*).

Read Daniel 6:10. Why doesn't Daniel simply pray quietly without anyone seeing him?

Daniel is an experienced statesman, but, above all, he is God's servant. As such, he is the only member of the government who can understand what lies behind the king's decree. For Darius the decree amounts to an opportunity to strengthen the unity of the kingdom, but for the conspirators it is a strategy to get rid of Daniel.

Of course, the real causes and motives behind the plot lie in the cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil. At this time (539 B.C.) Daniel already has received the visions recorded in Daniel 7 (553 B.C.) and 8 (551 B.C.). So, he can understand the royal decree, not as a matter of mere human politics but as an instance of this cosmic war. The vision of the Son of man delivering the kingdom to the people of the Most High and the comforting assistance of the angel interpreter (*Daniel 7*) may have brought him the courage to face the crisis head-on. He also may have reflected on the experience of his companions, who have been brave enough to challenge the decree of Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel 3*).

Thus, he does not change his devotional habits but continues his customary practice of praying three times a day toward Jerusalem. In spite of the prohibition to make petition to any man or god but the king, Daniel takes no precaution to hide or disguise his prayer life during those critical 30 days also. He is an absolute minority since he is the only one, among dozens of governors and other officers, on a collision course with the royal decree. Through his open prayer life, though, he demonstrates that the allegiance he owes to God comes before his allegiance to the king and his irrevocable decree.

Read Acts 5:27–32. Though the admonition here is clear, why must we, when acting in defiance of human law, always be sure that what we are doing is truly God's will? (After all, think of people who died rather than betray a belief or belief system that we believe is wrong!)

In the Lions' Den

Read Daniel 6:11–23. What does the king say to Daniel that reveals just how powerful a faithful witness Daniel is to God?

The conspirators soon spot Daniel praying—that is, doing exactly what the decree has forbidden. And as they bring the accusation before the king, they refer to Daniel in a demeaning way: “that Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah” (*Dan. 6:13, NKJV*). In their eyes, one of the chief officers of the empire, the king’s favorite, is no more than “a captive.” In addition, they pit Daniel against the king by saying that Daniel “does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed” (*NKJV*). Now the king realizes he has been entrapped by signing the decree. The text says that “he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him” (*Dan. 6:14, NKJV*). But there is nothing he can do to save the prophet from the prescribed punishment. The irrevocable law of the Medes and Persians must be applied to the letter. Thus the king, however reluctantly, issues the command to throw Daniel to the lions. But in doing so, Darius expresses some glimmering hope, which sounds like a prayer: “‘Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you’ ” (*Dan. 6:16, NKJV*).

The biblical text does not say what Daniel does among the lions, but one can assume he is praying. And God honors Daniel’s faith by sending His angel to protect him. In the morning, Daniel remains unharmed and ready to resume his activities in the government. Commenting on this episode, Ellen G. White says: “God did not prevent Daniel’s enemies from casting him into the lions’ den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 543, 544.

Though this story has a happy ending (at least for Daniel), what about those accounts, even those in the Bible (see, for instance, Mark 6:14–29), that don’t end in deliverance here? How are we to understand them?

Vindication

Read Daniel 6:24–28. What testimony does the king give about God?

An important point of the narrative is the fact that Darius praises God and recognizes God’s sovereignty. This is a culmination, even a climax, of the praises or expressions of recognition offered to God in the previous chapters (*Dan. 2:20–23; 3:28, 29; Dan. 4:1–3, 34–37*). Like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius responds to Daniel’s deliverance by praising God. But he does more, too: he reverses his previous decree and commands everyone to “fear before the God of Daniel” (*Dan. 6:26*).

Yes, Daniel is miraculously saved, his faithfulness rewarded, evil punished, and God’s honor and power vindicated. But what we see here is a mini-example of what will happen on a universal scale: God’s people delivered, evil punished, and the Lord vindicated before the cosmos.

Read Daniel 6:24. What might we find rather troublesome about this verse—and why?

There is, however, one disturbing problem, and that is the wives and the children who, as far as we know, are innocent, and yet who suffer the same fate as the guilty ones. How can we explain what seems to be a mishandling of justice?

First, we should note that the action is decided and implemented by the king according to Persian law, which includes the family in the punishment of the culprit. According to an ancient principle, the entire family bears responsibility for the offense of a family member. This doesn’t mean it’s right; it means only that this story fits with what we know about Persian law.

Second, we must note that the biblical narrative reports the event but does not endorse the action of the king. In fact, the Bible clearly forbids that children be put to death because of the sins of the parents (*Deut. 24:16*).

In the face of injustices such as this and so many others, what comfort can you get from such texts as 1 Corinthians 4:5? What does it say, and why is the point it makes so important?

Further Thought: Daniel's deliverance has been recorded in Hebrews 11. What can be called "The Hall of Fame of Faith" says that prophets, among other accomplishments, "stopped the mouths of lions" (*Heb. 11:33*). This is wonderful, but we should keep in mind that the heroes of faith are not only those who escaped death as Daniel does but also those who suffer and die courageously, as Hebrews 11 also notes. God calls some to witness by living and others by dying. Thus, the narrative of Daniel's deliverance does not imply that deliverance is granted to everyone, as we learn from the multitude of men and women who have been martyrs because of their faith in Jesus. However, the miraculous deliverance of Daniel does show that God rules, and He will eventually deliver all His children from the power of sin and death. This will become clear in the next chapters of Daniel.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Frenchman Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote that "the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God" (*Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* [New York: Washington Square Press, 1956], p. 724). How does this help us understand, at least on one level, why the king falls for the trap? Why must we all, in whatever our station in life, be careful of this same dangerous inclination, no matter how subtly it might come? What are other ways we might want to be "like God"?
- 2 What kind of witness do we present to others in regard to our faithfulness to God and to His law? Would people who know you think that you would stand for your faith, even if it cost you your job—or even your life?
- 3 What do you see in Daniel that makes him a person that God can use effectively for His purposes? With the Lord's help, how can you develop more of the same characteristics?
- 4 In what ways could Daniel have been justified in deciding, in light of the decree, to have changed the way he prayed? Or would that have been a dangerous compromise? If so, why?