



Study Notes

The Lions' Den

Daniel 6:1-28

Context: This scene is very familiar to many people. Daniel's faith in God is put to the test again. He is called to be faithful in the face of heavy opposition from the world.

Structure: We see the world jealous of God's servant. We see the world try to destroy God's servant. God's servant must be faithful. God will deliver His servant. God will honor His servant.

Main Idea: The Father has called His servants to be faithful in the face of opposition from the world. He will deliver His servants and will bless His servants!

Biblical Theology: The father has always called His servants to be faithful to Him.

Application: Are we faithful to God in the face of opposition?

Introduction: Along with the story of the fiery furnace, the lions' den is not only one of the best loved stories in Daniel, but the Bible as a whole. As such, the story in **ch.6** shares many similarities with the one in **ch.3**. The protagonist(s) are presented with a situation to which they will not conform, though it means certain death. They are given the punishment, but through divine intervention, they are saved. The happy endings in these stories are part of what makes them so popular, but as with the lesson on the fiery furnace, the moral of the story isn't that God will always deliver His people in this way. Rather, it is that He always expects them to be faithful to Him regardless of the impending circumstance.

Intro Question 1. How would you define integrity? What does someone with integrity look like?

The Plot vs.1-9

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; 2 and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. 5 Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." 6 Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! 7 All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

vs.1-2 *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss.*

It was already discussed in the previous lesson about the lack of any other historical evidence concerning Darius the Mede, but from this account, it doesn't look like he was merely the mayor of Babylon, but had authority over the whole empire. As part of the restructuring of the government, the new ruler would certainly want to put his own people in charge. However, Daniel, who would have been around eighty years old at this point, is given one of the highest offices in the government.

As far as why this was done, the Sunday school answer would certainly be that God's favor was still on him, and He caused Darius to see Daniel's qualities.¹ How this worked out in realistic terms is up for debate. Perhaps Darius heard about Daniel's administrative and prophetic abilities. This, coupled with the fact that he wasn't a Chaldean, may have convinced Darius that Daniel had no real loyalty to the previous administration which had taken him from his homeland decades before.

¹ As noted in the second lesson, Daniel's promotion at the eleventh hour to third highest in the Babylonian Empire by Belshazzar would have been a good reason to execute him on the spot. That he was spared at all is once again evidence of God's sovereign protection.

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v.3 *Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.*

Whatever reason Darius had to promote the octogenarian, Daniel lived up to his reputation and is noted here as being better at his job than all of the other administrators. Though God's favor is not the term used, the excellent spirit is a reference to Daniel's character, if not indirectly to God's Spirit. Either of these qualities would have had their roots in God, and would be evidence that Daniel continued his faithful devotion to God, and remained highly favored by Him. As a result of this, Daniel was on track to essentially be second in command of the empire.

vs.4-5 *Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."*

Jealousy is a common reaction to the success of others, and this is no exception. In addition to that is likely the fact that since Daniel wasn't a Mede or Persian, he was seen as an outsider by the other officials, which is hinted at in **v.13**. What made Daniel even more unique is that his character was so pure that his conspirators couldn't find any corruption or dirt on him.²

The only thing that the other officials could think of was to essentially use Daniel's strength against him. A man like that in the position that he was in would have been very well known along with his devotion to God. If they could somehow get him in a position to choose between God and the state, then they knew what he would do, and would have him cornered.

2. Where do you see people jealous of God's people?

² As noted in a previous lesson, Daniel is one of the few major characters in Scripture that is not recorded as having sinned. Again, this is not to say that he was perfect, but his character was such that even people at the highest levels of government, who would have had multiple connections and access to all kinds of information, could not find any corruption in the way that he carried out his office. (This is amazing to me for anyone, but especially for a person in a highly ranked political office...) There is also a parallel here between Daniel and Christ, who were both set up and accused according to their righteousness rather than their corruption.

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vs.6-7 *Then these high of icials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! All the high of icials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.*

As noted in **v.1**, the crowd of people appearing before the king would have been at least 120, and what they proposed on the surface would serve a couple of purposes. At the most obvious level, since this was early in the Persian takeover, forcing the population to pray to Darius would serve to promote him as ruler. Since Persian kings were not considered divine, this may have been an attempt to have the population see Darius as a priest or mediator for the new religious system of the Persians, which this would also help to promote.

On a deeper level, this would have been a big ego boost to Darius, and would serve as a way for him to look more favorably on all³ of his officials for having suggested this idea to him. Of course, the main, but unstated purpose of this would be to place Daniel in a position where he would have to choose between his devotion to the state or his devotion to God.⁴

vs.8-9 *Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.*

Having made the proposal, the ministers implore the king to sign it into law, which he does. The wording of these verses could be interpreted to mean that the officials had already written the law out, ready for the king to sign (which would have been a smart move on their part), or that it was composed there.

The most interesting facet of the officials’ statement is the fact that once the king makes a decree, it is irrevocable, even by the king himself. With regard to historical context, this was a Mesopotamian tradition which was put down hundreds of years prior by Hammurabi. While the kings were not thought of as being divine, they were certainly considered to be inspired by the gods such that any decision they made could not be wrong.

³ The “all” in **v.7** is a little misleading since there is no doubt that Daniel would not have been included. Here, “all” means all but Daniel.

⁴ As indicated in **v.14**, Darius had a very high opinion about Daniel, and it is clear that if he realized what was really going on, at the very least he wouldn’t have signed the document, and perhaps might have gone ahead and punished the officials at this point for trying to set him up.

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3. Have you been in a similar situation as this where people tried to discredit you? What was the result?

Reflection: How has the world tried to destroy you?

The Trap vs.10-15

10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. 12 Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” 13 Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” 14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. 15 Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

v.10 *When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.*

Verse 10 says a lot, and gives much insight into the character of Daniel. First, it states that Daniel realized the choice that he was making because he knew that the law was in place. Like his friends many years ago, Daniel would have to decide to follow the laws of the state or the laws of God, and it shouldn't be surprising that the first thing he did in response to this plot was to go to God in prayer. However, he could have avoided any trouble if he had just had his prayer time in private, which wouldn't necessarily be wrong. This sounds like a good point for you to reflect on...

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4. Why do you think that Daniel prayed with his windows open?

vs.11-13 *Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."*

The officials may or may not have known what Daniel would have done, but his daily prayer routine was likely known to many of them, and the fact that they went to see what he would do indicates at least the hope that he would openly defy Darius' order. (Since they accused him of continuing to pray three times per day, their stakeout apparently lasted for a while). After they witnessed Daniel defying the order, the officials went as a group to make their accusation to the king, by first having him confirm in his own words that the order was irrevocable before telling him that his favorite minister was found breaking it.

vs.14-15 *Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed."*

Darius' recorded reaction is displeasure at what the ministers had told him, and given the fact that he tried his best to save Daniel through what would apparently be other legal means, his displeasure is not with Daniel, but with the officials.⁵ Since he punishes them in the end, I find it easy to conclude that Darius, at this point, has figured out that the purpose of the edict was to get rid of Daniel.

⁵ It is not without some irony that Darius, who had been promoted to a semi-divine state by the edict, was powerless to do anything to save Daniel. Some scholars think that his attempts to deliver Daniel included going ahead and feeding the lions, and/or giving Daniel some kind of protection and armor, if so, then apparently the law didn't allow for that.

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Though not specifically stated, the time period of till sundown may be a case where the law had to be executed that day. Whether that is true or not, the officials make a point of coming back to remind the king that there is no way for him to change what has been established because they knew that he was working for any way he could to get Daniel out of this. According to the Hammurabi tradition, doing so would be tantamount to the king being removed, replaced, and likely killed himself in the process.

Reflection: How have you been called to be faithful?

The Lions' Den vs.16-24

16 Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" 17 And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. 18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. 19 Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" 21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. 24 And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

v.16 *Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!"*

With no other recourse at his disposal, Darius is forced to follow the unintended consequence of his own edict and execute Daniel in the manner it prescribed. However, his statement to Daniel indicates a couple of things. For one, it again shows how much Darius thought of the older man,

and though he could not save him, wished that the God he worshiped might do so. For another, this shows that Darius was not a worshiper of God himself. (I guess the edict showed that as well).

5. What do you think that Daniel was feeling at this point?

v.17 *And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.*

Though depicted differently in art and film, the opening to the den was likely a hole in the ground where people were dropped rather than being on the side (which prevented the lions from getting out). The sealing of the stone⁶ was probably with some type of mortar and the indentation of the signet rings seems like something that the officials would want to put in place so that they could ensure that the king would not try to save Daniel after they went home.

v.18 *Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him*

Here again, we see the level of concern that Darius had over Daniel. He could not sleep, and was so upset that he would not eat. The reference to diversions is obscure, whether it be women, music, food, or some other sort of entertainment, but it is not hard to imagine a concerned steward offering Darius any of these things to make him happy. In any case, he was too upset about what was happening to Daniel to be distracted by anything he had access to.

vs.19-20 *Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"*

I have previously noted some parallels between this story and that of Christ, and the running to the sealed den first thing in the morning is yet another. It has been made very clear that Darius was concerned about Daniel and his fate, and the fact that he went as soon as he could in the morning is yet another.

⁶ The sealing of the tomb with a stone is another parallel to the experience of Christ. 8

Unlike Christ's story, the stone is apparently still in place, but assumedly is removed so that Darius could see what happened to his faithful servant. The story also notes the anguish in the king's voice as he calls to Daniel, hoping but perhaps not expecting that he is still alive. Darius also calls Daniel a servant of the living God, which I think is probably a reflection of the term that Daniel has used in front of Darius, rather than a personal confession at this point.

vs.21-22 *Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."*

Daniel greets Darius with the appropriate "live forever" salute (which itself is not without some irony) and relates to him that he has been miraculously saved. Not only were the lions pacified, but like the men in the furnace there was someone else that was present with him in the den. Daniel calls this an angel, and it may well have been, but like the "son of the gods" in the furnace, some have concluded that this too was the preincarnate Christ (usually understood as the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament), which Daniel may just not have recognised.

Whether angel or Jesus, Daniel draws the conclusion for the king that because he has been saved and God's messenger had appeared, that this is His vindication of him that he had done no wrong not only before God, but hadn't done wrong by Darius as well. In another bit of irony, you may recall that the meaning of Daniel's name is "God is my judge." In that sense, He has lived out Daniel's name by overturning the king's judgment on his actions.

v.23 *Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*

Given the anguish that Darius had been through, his exceeding gladness at Daniel being alive would not be unexpected. After a ladder or rope was let down for Daniel, he was inspected, and like the men in the furnace, Daniel is found to be untouched by the teeth or claws of the big cats. Though the statement is made that Daniel's salvation was due to his trust in God, again, I think it is worth mentioning that such is not always the fate of God's faithful servants. Many devout followers of God in Scripture and throughout history have been martyred in horrible ways, and the point here isn't that there is some secret formula for assured divine intervention, but rather to remain faithful to God no matter what may come.⁷

⁷ The early church father Polycarp was arrested when he was eighty-six years old and offered the

v.24 *And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.*

For some reason, this part of the story gets left out of the childrens' Sunday school lessons, but it does illustrate a couple of good points. First, it shows that the lions were prevented by God from attacking Daniel, since they quickly made short work of what would have likely amounted to several hundred people here. Though punishing the wives and children⁸ for the crimes of the husbands and fathers was part of the Persian justice system, the fact that the lions were not prevented from devouring them further illustrates God's vindication of Daniel as being innocent of the crime of which he was accused.

6. Why do you think God saved Daniel?

Reflection: How has God delivered you?

The Aftermath vs.25-28

25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. 26 I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. 27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions." 28 So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

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

The story of the Lions' Den ends in a similar way to that of the Fiery Furnace and Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation, with Darius issuing a proclamation. After the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation in ch.3 threatened the lives of anyone who would profane the name of God, while Darius actually carried that part out. But at this point, he addresses the "world" (read Persian Empire) with a salutation of peace, much like Nebuchadnezzar in **ch.4**.

⁸ That no wives or children were thrown in the den with Daniel is evidence that he did not have any family.

vs.26-27 *I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."*

Perhaps Darius had Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation from **ch.4**, because they are very similar. All of the points that he makes about God could not have come from just this experience of Daniel being thrown in the den, and may reflect some of Daniel's teaching after the fact. To that end, the question that comes up is, does this represent Darius as a true believer in God? As with Nebuchadnezzar, it is up to the opinion of the reader. In Nebuchadnezzar's case, there was at least more information about the process of his coming to his realization through his dreams and tribulations. However, I think as far as this story goes, Darius is presented favorably as one who has come to the understanding that the God of Daniel is the one true God, which shows the effect that a life lived in righteousness can have on even the most powerful people on earth.

v.28 *So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

The historical, court stories of Daniel conclude here with the remainder of his life being summed up as one of prosperity. The notation of Darius and Cyrus has been understood by some scholars to be the author's way of relating the two men as one and the same. In that way, the text would have to be translated as "*during the reign of Darius, even the reign of Cyrus...*" which would not be the explicit way it is recorded, but more of an assumed additional insertion.

Reflection: How have you seen the world honor God's servants?

“Is thy God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” Let me put this question in one or two lights, and thus draw our reflections to a close. Leaning over, like that Persian king, I look down into a greater den of lions than he ever descried. It is dark, the stench is foul, and ’midst the dim shadows I discern struggling forms and figures, tormentors, whose faces are hidden..., torturing men..., and yonder..., on hundreds of stakes, martyrs have been burned to the death. In the far distance, ...a long procession of men who were scourged, who were stoned, who were beheaded, who were sawn asunder, saintly men were they, of whom the world was not worthy. Leaning over the mouth of this great lion’s den, I ask the persecuted saints of all ages— Has your God been able to deliver you? And with a cheerful shout, loud as the voice of thunder, they cry, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

I look down upon another lions’ den. It is still dark, but not so dreary... There, sons and daughters of sorrow are tossed on beds of sickness. Thus they have lain for months, perhaps for years, all hope of health extinguished, all prospect of pleasure passed..., calamities of every kind have befallen them. God has permitted the great lions of affliction to come howling round, and to tear away all their comforts and their joys, till they are left without any of that cheerful fellowship... which seasons mortal life with sweet relish. Some of you are robust in health, your head never throbs, your heart never aches, you are hardly conscious that you have any nerves. Small account do you take of the secret, silent, saintly heroism of sufferers, whose pilgrimage on earth is blighted with pain.... I appeal to these tried and afflicted children of God. Tell me, ye Daniels, has your God been able to deliver you out of the mouths of the lions? And I hear each one say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

...Shall I strain my parable too far if I turn my eye upon another lions’ den? It lies in a deep valley. The night hangs heavy. The beasts of prey are diseases that skill and shrewdness, time and talent, have striven in vain to tame. Like lions, strangely dissimilar in outward fashion, but strongly resembling them in instinct, they pounce on their victims and seal their doom. We call this place “the valley of the shadow of death.” I think I am gazing now on the forms of shivering men and women as they are dragged down by the lions. One after another, my familiar friends descend into the grave, and I ask them, in the hour of their departure, “Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” Calm is their countenance, and clear their voice, as each one chants his solo, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” So, at length, this lions’ den loses all its terror.