

Truth for Today

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For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. David Pulman

21st Century challenges from Daniel: Trusting God – Daniel 6

This morning we come to the sixth and last talk in this series on 21st century challenges from Daniel. Today's talk is on chapter 6, the "Daniel in the den of lions" chapter. Scriptures will be read from the New King James Version, unless otherwise stated. A Sunday School chorus, from years gone by, goes as follows,

*Daniel was a man of prayer,
Daily he prayed three times,
Till one day they had him cast
In the den of lions.*

*Even then, in the den,
Fear could not alarm him,
God had shut the lions' mouths,
So they would not harm him.*

From chapter 1 we have traced the activities of Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, from their early days, as Judean captives, in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar to their rise in prominence in the Babylonian empire and Daniel's continuing prominent role in the Medo-Persian Empire.

Chapter 5 concludes with the overthrow of the Babylonian empire by Darius the Mede who becomes the head of a new dynasty. We will divide chapter 6 into the following sections as we look at the detail.

1. Darius organises the new kingdom (verses 1-3)
2. Jealousy and conspiracy against Daniel (verses 4-9)
3. Daniel continues with his habit of prayer (verses 10-11)
4. The trap is sprung (verses 12-17)
5. The amazing power of God (verses 18-23)
6. Wrongs are corrected (verse 24)
7. Darius establishes an amazing decree (verses 25-27)
8. Conclusion (verse 28)

There are three main themes that run through the chapter: trials, persecution and apostasy. We will trace these through the above sections, as they become relevant.

1. Darius organises the new kingdom

Let us read together the first three verses of the chapter, "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 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. 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 was a very well organised person as is seen from the opening words of this chapter. He establishes an organisation to oversee the affairs of the kingdom by appointing 120 satraps (princes). This may imply that the vast kingdom was divided into 120 states. The princes were probably similar to the head of a local council in our country ensuring the laws and demands of the new head of state were implemented, taxes collected and so on. As Solomon states in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "There is nothing new under the sun."

In addition to the 120 satraps, three presidents were established over them and Daniel was appointed chief of the three. In this, we see that Daniel had become almost as great as the king in authority. Does Daniel exhibit an air of superiority? No, we find recorded that he has an excellent spirit in him. Daniel was appreciated by the king for his competency and the king was now thinking of giving Daniel even more authority.

2. Jealousy and conspiracy against Daniel

Let us read verses 4-9, “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. 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.’ So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: ‘King Darius, live forever! All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counsellors 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. 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.’ Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.”

It is not uncommon for jealousy to arise in the work place. Some listeners today may have experienced such problems. It was to be no different for Daniel and much worse than many of us today will have encountered.

Let us notice first the commendation that comes from these disgruntled people. First, they tried to find problems with his work but they could not. Daniel was honest and faithful to Darius. Daniel was a person who was different to the people of this world; he did his job well. Would our work colleagues come to the same conclusion about you and me if they examined our work life? It is imperative that as Christians we, too, are honest and faithful in our work. We serve the Lord through our work. If we are unfaithful, it reflects badly on our Saviour as well as ourselves!

The next conclusion they came to was that if fault could not be found as to Daniel’s work then possibly a way might be found in his religious life, in the law of his God. Daniel was a person who was completely faithful to God.

Therefore, the princes devise a plan to involve the king and trap Daniel. They needed the king as no one else was great enough to move against Daniel. Their plan was simple, to make Darius, for one whole month, the supreme being in the universe. All petitions must be made to Darius, not to any other person or god. This plan appealed to the vanity of Darius and he signs a decree establishing the proposal as an unalterable law, even by himself.

Daniel was being persecuted and the trap had been set. But there is more to this scheme than trapping Daniel and the king. It is the error of apostasy, placing a mere man as greater than God. This was Satan’s message to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – you shall be as gods! Satan is constantly attacking God, seeking to de-throne God so that Satan might become supreme. This is Satan’s rebellion.

3. Daniel continues with his habit of prayer

Let us read verses 10-11, “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. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”

In verse 10, we read that Daniel was completely aware of the evil scheme but it did not alter his purpose to be faithful to God. He did not alter his habit of praying, that is petitioning, God three times each day. The window was open and all could see that Daniel continued in prayer. It would have been so easy for Daniel to shut his window and pray without anyone seeing. That would have been an act of unfaithfulness to God. Why should he alter his behaviour, was God not able to keep him safe? How would we react in a similar situation? Would we alter our Christian life style to protect ourselves but in so doing deny God? Remember Peter when he denied the Lord Jesus three times. It is not easy to be faithful, especially where there is likely to be persecution.

Daniel is observed making his petitions to God!

4. The trap is sprung

Let us read verses 12-17, “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.’ 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.’ And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 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.’ 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.’ 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.”

Daniel's jealous enemies report to the king how they found Daniel praying. They remind the king of the new law so recently signed. The king at once realises that not only has he been trapped (partly through his own pride) but that Daniel was now facing the death sentence. For a while, the king seeks to find a way around the situation and deliver his right hand man. But, in the end, the law is the law and the king had to follow it. Daniel was therefore cast into the den of lions.

Daniel had a good testimony and he served God continually. Another chorus from Sunday School days goes as follows,

*Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose firm,
Dare to make it known.*

This little chorus captures the character of the man Daniel. He purposed to serve God in all that he did. Is this true of Christians today? Or do we limit our Christianity to a few hours per week and the rest of the time live to please ourselves? Daniel did not mind being the only person standing firm in the faith for his God. We are urged to be the same today, 1 Corinthians 16:13, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”

It is evident that Daniel's day to day consistency was noticed by the king. The king is able to say to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” As we live our faith, it affects others. Darius might not have been fully convinced of God's ability as we shall observe later. Daniel's testimony was compelling for those who were willing with open minds to consider, even if not fully believing unlike Daniel's colleagues, who were consumed with jealousy and prepared to commit murder.

It is interesting to note that the stone covering the entrance to the den is sealed with the king's signet and those of his persecutors. No one is allowed to break the seal. The tomb of the Lord Jesus was also covered by a stone and sealed but on that occasion the seal was broken to display the empty tomb. Daniel's incarceration was to prove the power of God by restraining the lions and preserving His servant.

5. The amazing power of God

Let us read verses 18-23, “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. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 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?’ Then Daniel said to the king, ‘O king, live forever! 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.’ 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.”

Verse 18 shows how the whole event has affected the king. All night he is unable to sleep. Very early the following morning he hurries to the den. Now we discover that the king was not entirely confident that God would deliver Daniel with the expression “Is thy God able?” What happens next is amazing. Daniel shouts out of the den, “O king, live forever ...” Convincingly God has demonstrated His power over natural events and prevented the lions harming Daniel. Daniel is released and found to have no hurt whatsoever, not even a scratch from what are very hungry lions, as we will discover.

Now we might not have the same kind of persecution or deliverance in such a dramatic way from the troubles that we endure. What is true is that God faithfully only allows what we are able to bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

6. Wrongs are corrected

Verse 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.”

The king, having satisfied the requirements of his thirty day law, is now able to deal with Daniel's enemies. Those who had stooped to planning the murder of Daniel are now given the sentence that had been given to Daniel. We are not given an explanation as to why their families are included in the sentence, but we assume that they were involved in the scheme. We know that God is not unjust, as we find in Genesis 18:25.

7. Darius establishes an amazing decree

Verses 25-27 state, "Then King Darius wrote: 'To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. 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. 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.'"

From these verses we see that although Darius gave this wonderful announcement and decree, it was still the "God of Daniel". It would appear that Darius had not come to know God for himself. If we are to receive blessing then we need to go a step further than Darius and make God our God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of salvation on the cross of Calvary.

If God had worked such a great miracle in preserving Daniel then we have an even greater miracle of power when God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, see Acts 5:30. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is presented to us in the Gospel, is the only person who can guarantee anyone a place in heaven. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." However, like Daniel, Christians are persecuted for their faith in Christ. But Christians know that their eternal security in Christ can never be taken away, no matter how severe the persecution.

8. Conclusion

The last verse of our chapter states, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

God was in control of the whole situation through which Daniel passed even when he was cast to the lions. Our last verse shows clearly that God had more work for Daniel to do. That work is covered in chapters 7 to 12. These chapters are not part of the current series but they are well worth reading to gain an understanding of events some of which are now history and some which are still future.

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