

LION'S DEN

Daniel 6

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

Cyrus the Great conquered the once mighty Babylonian Empire, built by Nebuchadnezzar, in 539 B.C. with hardly any bloodshed. According to historical sources, Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River that ran under the wall of Babylon, so that his army could enter the city through the riverbed. Once inside the city walls he discovered walls on both sides of the river, but the gates from the river to the city were left open, either through carelessness or treason. The rulers of Babylon, Nebonidus and Belshazzar, were not well liked and the city rejoiced over the victory of Cyrus. As a result, the transition to the new government went very smoothly and quickly.

Belshazzar had ignored Daniel during his rule until the last day of his life, but Darius elevated Daniel to a prominent position in the new government of the Medes and Persians. Cyrus was the king of the Medo-Persian Empire and he made Darius, the king over the province of Babylon. Darius, in turn, made Daniel one of the three presidents, who were directly under him, and they ruled over 120 "princes" that governed Babylon on the local level. Daniel was now 81 or 82 years old, but he did excellent work with such a good spirit that Darius planned to promote him to administrate all of Babylon. Although he had been in Babylon for about 65 years, he was still considered a foreigner. His high position as a foreigner aroused much jealousy among the other presidents and the princes so they plotted against his life. They succeeded in getting Daniel cast into the lions' den, but God foiled their evil plan by shutting the lions' mouths. When the king fulfilled the letter of the law, he removed Daniel from the lions' den and in his place he cast these wicked schemers. The lions' mouths were now opened and they had complete mastery over their victims before they ever reached the bottom of the den.

GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF DANIEL FROM THE LIONS' DEN

I. Consignment of Administrators – 6:1-3

A. Selection of Officers – 6:1-2

6:1 – Darius, as the new administrator over the old Babylonian Empire, began his reign by appointing over his realm 120 "princes" (satraps). These allotments were probably established in relationship to population per geographic areas.

6:2 – Darius set three presidents over the 120 satraps. One of these was Daniel (the word "first" in the KJV should be "one"). All three of these men were equal in their responsibilities and probably also ruled areas of equal population densities in overseeing the work of the satraps. The reason for the consignment of these lesser and greater administrators was to protect the king from "damage" (literally, "loss"). In all likelihood, the "loss" refers to financial matters, the main concern being the tribute monies necessary for conducting the business of government (cf. same expression in Ezra 4:13, 22).

B. Superiority of Daniel – 6:3

6:3 – As Daniel carried on with his responsibilities he was constantly distinguishing himself (KJV "preferred") among his peers because of his extraordinary character ("excellent spirit") which most certainly affected his productivity. Due to Daniel's high level of competence, Darius had it in his mind to appoint him as the administrator of the whole realm.

II. Conspiracy of Administrators – 6:4-9

A. Search for Fault – 6:4

6:4 – When the other officials of the realm heard of Darius' intention of promoting Daniel, their jealousy flared up. Their only hope of dissuading the king was to point out a black mark in Daniel's handling of his responsibilities. Very few men in the political world remain unscathed when it becomes politically expedient to eliminate them. A diligent search into their history usually turns up sufficient "dirt" to incriminate them. But this was not so with the godly and consistent life of Daniel. Dig as they might, these conspirators found absolutely no "occasion" for criticism, nor any "fault" (corruption) in Daniel's dealings. Daniel was completely trustworthy ("faithful"). He did not neglect to carry out any responsibility (idea of "error"; cf. Ezra 4:22, "fail") nor did he deal corruptly (with "fault") as he fulfilled his duties.

B. Suggestion of a Plan – 6:5-8

6:5 – Since Daniel's record was impeccable, a new plan of attack was needed. Only one thing remained that could be used to discredit Daniel and that would be his religious convictions. If they could somehow pit his convictions against the law and the king, their mission would be accomplished and their political careers would be enhanced. They knew that Daniel would adhere to the commands of his God even if he disobeyed the law to do so.

6:6-7 – The two presidents and some of the local satraps appeared before the king and presented to him a piece of legislation which all the officials of the government had supposedly framed. This they wished to become an official decree. The legislation stated that any person, who asked "a petition of any God or man for thirty days," except it be asked of the king, should "be cast into the den of lions." It was not unusual for potentates to be deified in those days, and this decree simply said that the king alone would be viewed as the sole representative of deity for thirty days. Thus, all petitions (i.e., formal requests to deities) had to be addressed only to the king. This law presented a circumstance very similar to that found in chapter three. Worship was centered in the king and his kingdom rather than in the true God.

6:8 – The officials again made a plan for the legislation to be officially adopted as an unchangeable law according to Medo-Persian custom (cf. Esther 1:19; 8:8).

C. Signing of the Decree – 6:9

6:9 – Apparently the king was flattered by the legislation which these deceptive officials had framed. Perhaps he thought it would be a good way to draw attention to his newly established leadership and to build a kind of loyalty among his subjects. Whatever the case may have been, the plan of the schemers was smoothly carried out, and Darius signed the decree without considering the possible consequences.

III. Consistency of Daniel – 6:10-11

A. Openness of his Testimony – 6:10

6:10 – Daniel did not let the devices of wicked men or the laws of earthly potentates infringe upon his relationship to God and His Word. We learn six things about his prayer life. One, he was **serious** ("he went into his house"). This allowed him to get alone with God. Two, he was **scriptural** ("and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem"). Old Testament saints were to pray toward Jerusalem where the sacrifices had been offered to God. Three, he was **submissive** ("he kneeled upon his knees"). Four, he was **systematic** ("three times a day") Five, he was **sincere** ("gave thanks before his God"). And six, he was **steadfast** ("as he did aforetime"). But Daniel revealed several other characteristics in his life through this trial.

Courage – "Daniel knew that the writing was signed" and he certainly knew that it was a trap designed by his colleagues to end his influence and even end his life if he did not comply with the king's decree. Yet Daniel had the courage to pray despite the possible consequences.

Boldness – Daniel kept his "windows . . . open." It would have been simple for Daniel to conceal his prayer to God. He could have prayed mentally and no one would ever have been able to convict him on the charge of breaking the king's decree. But Daniel was unashamed and bold in his worship of God.

Reverence – When Daniel prayed “toward Jerusalem,” he did it with reverence for the house of God that had been in Jerusalem. This had been the dwelling place of God on earth. David understood this concept of praying toward God’s dwelling place, even before the establishment of a permanent temple (Ps. 5:7; 28:2). And Solomon supported this practice in his dedicatory prayer of the first temple (1 Kings 8:35, 38, 42, 44 and especially vs. 46-48). Even Jonah in the fish’s belly projected his prayer toward the temple (Jonah 2:4, 7). Daniel conformed his prayer life to the teaching of God’s Word and with reverence for God’s former dwelling place.

Humility – Daniel “kneeled upon his knees.” This concept was mentioned earlier under submission, but here are a few more thoughts on the subject. Various postures for prayer are mentioned in God’s Word, but none of them are mandatory. However, the bending of the knee always indicates submission to the authority of the one being petitioned, and Daniel, in this posture, was humble before his God.

Discipline – Daniel regularly bowed before God in prayer “three times a day.” Prayer was commonly connected with the morning and evening oblations and offerings of incense (Ex. 30:7-8; Luke 1:10; Dan. 9:21; in Acts 3:1, the “ninth hour” was 3:00 PM). Often prayers were also made at midday (Ps. 55:17). With all of his responsibilities and the business of his schedule, Daniel made time for prayer three times daily! This systematic approach to God required discipline.

Faith – Daniel “prayed.” He brought his requests to God, not out of habit, but out of faith that God was interested and able to care for him (cf. 1:17-18; 9:2-27; 10:1-14).

Thankfulness – Daniel did not limit his prayers to requests, but he “gave thanks” and (literally) “praised” God for His greatness and faithfulness. Petition is one of many aspects of prayer, but a prayer of appreciation is greater than a prayer of petition.

Genuineness – Daniel did all of these things consistently “as he did aforetime.” It was a genuine part of his life to pray this way. He was not defying the law of the king. Neither was he coming to God out of desperation because he was experiencing trouble in his life. Daniel was merely doing that which had become a vital pattern of his walk with God. Daniel’s relationship to God was unaltered by his circumstances. He openly and consistently worshipped and served the God of his salvation.

B. Observation by his Enemies – 6:11

6:11 – As could be expected, the jealous officials were there to witness Daniel’s “violation of the law.” It is interesting to notice once again that they fully expected Daniel to keep on worshipping God as he had in the past. This was the whole key to their wicked plot (cf. 2:4-5). The openness of a believer’s testimony demands consistency before the world for they certainly will be watching! That is why many believers fail to openly testify before their peers, because they know that their lives are inconsistent. Daniel did not fail God nor did he fail his enemies!

IV. Conundrum of Darius – 6:12-15

A. Denunciation by the Officials – 6:12-13

6:12 – Most certainly the wicked conspirators were very pleased with themselves and thus found their way back to the king’s court. To confirm the substance of the decree in the king’s mind and to insure his strong commitment to its inalterability, they slyly questioned him concerning its content. Darius unwittingly played right into their hands and not only assured them that they correctly understood the content of the decree, but also once again confirmed its immutability.

6:13 – Having thus baited the king, the conspirators dropped in his lap the charges against Daniel. One of his very own appointees, one whom he thought to elevate to even higher responsibilities had flagrantly violated the decree. Two charges were made: 1) Daniel had disregarded the great king of the realm, and 2) he had disregarded the law as well. The evidence was presented to show that not only once, but three times a day did Daniel so spurn the king and his decree.

B. Dilemma of the King – 6:14

6:14 – Darius immediately understood the situation, yet could not free himself from the predicament. He was “sore displeased” at allowing himself to be led into this predicament and “set his heart” on delivering Daniel. But, try as he might, he could devise no method of circumventing his own decree though he spent the entire day in an attempt to find a loophole in the law. Daniel’s importance and value to the king were clearly evident by his strong concern for Daniel’s deliverance. But all of the king’s cogitation proffered no solution to the well-planned scheme.

C. Demand of the Law – 6:15

6:15 – Once again the king’s administrators came before him as the day was drawing to a close and, having bound the king’s hands by his own decree, they demanded that he carry out the sentence that evening as oriental law required.

V. Control of God – 6:16-23

A. Administration of the Sentence – 6:16-17

6:16 – The command was given and Daniel was brought to the place of execution. There is no indication of hesitancy or fear on his part. In all likelihood, Daniel understood the predicament of the king. The statement of Darius to Daniel was more likely a plea rather than an expression of faith for the king’s later actions expose his anxiety. The translation might better be rendered, “May the God whom you serve continually, deliver you.” Darius certainly had recognized the faithfulness of Daniel to his God. Yet Darius could only weakly hope that somehow Daniel’s God would deliver him.

6:17 – Then the king did a very wise thing. He sealed the stone over the mouth of the den with his own signet and had the accusers do likewise with theirs. This assured the king that no human assassin could dispose of Daniel should the lions not slay him. Also, it assured the accusers, that no agent of the king or friend of Daniel would secretly rescue him from the den. Only God could intervene in saving Daniel from the lions in the den (cf. the sealing of Christ’s tomb).

B. Anxiety of the King – 6:18-20

6:18 – Darius’ lack of faith in God became very evident as he attempted to pass the night. He did not eat for his mind was occupied with the dilemma into which he had gotten himself and Daniel. He refused even the common diversion of “entertainment” (not “instruments of music” as KJV) which usually occupied his evening. All sleep fled from the king so bent was his mind on Daniel and his plight.

6:19-20 – Early the next morning (literally “at dawn”) Darius left the palace and hurried to the place of execution. Before he even reached the lions’ den (literally “as he drew near”), Darius cried out in anguish unto Daniel to ask if his God were able to deliver him from the lions.

C. Attestation of Daniel – 6:21-23

6:21-22 – Daniel immediately addressed the troubled king to assure him that he was alive. But Daniel continued to speak for he wanted Darius to know how he was kept alive. God had sent “His angel.” The “angel” referred to here is probably that same deliverer who appeared in the fiery furnace to save the three Hebrew men (cf. 3:25, 28). He was, no doubt, the “angel of the Lord,” the preincarnate Christ (theophany), and it seems very likely that Daniel had actually seen him there in the den. While the king fretted the night away in his palace, Daniel was enjoying fellowship with God in the midst of hungry lions! It is reminiscent of Psalm 23:5, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

6:23 – The anxiety of the king was relieved and Daniel was taken out of the lions’ den unharmed. One reason for Daniel’s deliverance was his faith in an all-powerful God.

VI. Condemnation of Accusers – 6:24

A. Sentence Against the Accusers – 6:24a

6:24a – Obviously, the king was still upset that he had been deceived by some of his officials. Those that had manipulated the king and formally accused Daniel, the two presidents and some of the 120

“princes” (satraps), were now sentenced by the king to be cast into the lions’ den. In fact, their families also were consigned to that fate, a common practice of the Persians and other heathen nations. Among the Jews, however, God had prohibited such a practice in their law (Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6).

B. Slaughter of the Accusers – 6:24b

6:24b – These wicked men and their families had no God in which to trust. They had lifted up their hands against a servant of God, and God never lets such an act go unpunished. To abuse God’s servants is to abuse God Himself (cf. Mt. 25:41-46; 1I Sam. 26:9).

VII. Command of Darius – 6:25-28

A. Requirement of the Decree – 6:25-26a

6:25-26a – Darius then issued a decree to all those of his realm concerning the God of Daniel. The requirement was that they “tremble and fear before him.” All were to respect this God and recognize His power and authority, never again to defy Him or His servants.

B. Reason for the Decree – 6:26b-27

6:26b-27 – The reason for the decree was made clear. Daniel’s God was a great and powerful God. God’s existence (“living God”), eternity (“steadfast forever”) and sovereignty (“kingdom...and dominion...”) were first extolled. Then His power to deliver (“delivereth and rescueth”) and to manifest Himself (“worketh signs and wonders”) was cited. If men truly realized and pondered the nature and ability of God, they could do nothing other than fear and honor Him.

C. Result of the Decree – 6:28

6:28 – Because of the decree of Darius, Daniel never again had to be troubled with the devices of men against him. God blessed him with greatness for the remainder of his life.