

## Daniel in the Lion's Den • Daniel 6

Names in the news today include Iran, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. In the sixth century B.C. this area was known as Media. After centuries of being beaten down and occupied by neighboring nations, the Medes came to prominence under the leadership of a man named Darius who conquered the city of Babylon. The Medes connected with the Persians to form the great Medo-Persian Empire.

Daniel's life spanned this time period and he saw it all. He was born in Israel but was deported to Babylon. As a young man he learned the language and rose to prominence in the administration of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor. Nebuchadnezzar eventually died and the Babylonian empire declined.

Amazingly, Daniel came into a place of leadership within the Medo-Persian Empire. Usually you would expect new kings and empires to eliminate old administrations and those loyal to their predecessors. The fact that Daniel stayed on when so much changed is an indication that he was an exceptional employee. We see this reflected in Daniel 6:1-3:

*It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.*

Satraps were like governors over states or provinces that were called satrapies. The nation was divided into 120 provinces with 120 governors. They reported to three presidents of Medo-Persia. The three presidents reported to the king. It is interesting to hear how the historian gives the job description of these government officials. They were all accountable "so that the king might not suffer loss." Their job wasn't to serve the people. Their

job was to protect the king and his interests, to make sure that the Medo-Persian king always had his interests protected.

One man stood out from all the others for his exceptional qualities and distinguished leadership, and that was Daniel. By this time he was in his 80s. He was a foreigner. His native tongue was Hebrew and he was a Jew. He seemed an unlikely candidate for such prominence, power and success. He just happened to be very good at what he did.

Daniel was forced into a job he didn't seek and was such an excellent employee that he repeatedly made God look good. He teaches us a valuable lesson about the way we work. Even if we don't like the job, let us seize the opportunity to work with excellence and integrity and make God look good.

Excellent work sometimes breeds envious co-workers. That's what happened in the government of the Medes and Persians. When they heard that Daniel was going to be appointed COO of the empire they conspired to get rid of him. In Daniel 6:4-5 we read:

*At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."*

Because his political enemies disliked him they looked for some opportunity to get rid of him. Daniel was a man who had spent his entire adult life in public service.

One thing that was true then—

and is true now—is that those who are engaged in public service have a public record for every decision they have made, every place they have gone and everything they have done. One of the challenges of those who have long held public office is that when they run for a higher office their voting record is then reviewed and any slight suspicion can be brought to public attention.

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Daniel had spent at least sixty years in public life. They could check the records of two empires to find out all that he had done, everywhere he had gone and every amount of money he had spent. But when they examined it, they couldn't find a single bit of evidence to charge him with any crime.

Astonishing! Imagine if everything you did was checked out by someone who was your enemy and wanted to destroy you . . . and they couldn't find anything that you have done wrong! Often we think of those who are in public life as having too much to compromise. But the truth is that public service is a noble profession and Daniel is an illustration of the best of the best. He was someone who not only served the people but he was faithful to God in the process.

The other government leaders knew him well. They had studied him. They were familiar with his religious faith. They knew that the source of his success and strength was his relationship to God.

But they also knew that his strength was his weakness. So they conspired to use his faith in order to attack him and take him down. Daniel 6:6-9 goes on to say:

*So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty day, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. So King Darius put the decree in writing.*

It was a very clever plot. It played to the king's ego and pride. They talked to King Darius as if he were a god. They virtually worshiped him. They said, "We'd like to honor you and have everyone in the empire do it, too. The way to do it is that no one may pray to anybody else—human or divine—except you. But we'll only do it for a month. Just 30 days. We'll put a moratorium on all other prayers to all other persons."

But it was a trick. The genius of this plan was a particular aspect of the Medo-Persian law that said that no law of the Medes and Persians could ever be changed. So, if the king made a mistake he couldn't even change his own mistake. Once a law was ratified it could never again be changed by anyone.

All of this flattered the king. So the law was written and he signed it . . . and the trap was set!

Daniel was a good man who was doing the right thing—and he got in trouble for it! But he was not alone. We sometimes think that if we do everything right and behave the way we should we will be trouble free. But that is simply not the case. The reality is that we live in a world where good and honest people are often unfairly accused by those who are jealous or filled with hatred, fear or ambition.

Daniel knew, as soon as the law was signed, that he faced a real threat and a tough choice. On the one hand, he could quit praying to the God he loved and who had been faithful to him throughout his life, thereby saving his own skin in the process. On the other hand, he could decide not to pray and thereby dishonor God.

Daniel decided to pray. He would pray even if it meant that it cost him his life. God was most important to him. When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed giving thanks to his god, just as he had done before.

If Daniel had not previously been in the habit of praying he never would have done what he did during those days. However, he prayed as he had always prayed—same place; same times; same position. Daniel had a time to pray and a place to pray but, most of all, he had a God he believed in to whom he could pray. Of course, he could have decided to remain loyal to God and just pray privately. He didn't need to fling open the doors of his upstairs apartment. He didn't need to leave the drapes open so people could see what he was doing as he had in the past. But Daniel decided to remain loyal to God and not change his ways regardless of what the threat or the consequences may be.

What followed next is found in Daniel 6:11-13:

*Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?"*

*The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."*

*Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to*

*you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.”*

So they turned him in. They betrayed him. These were people who had worked together with him and knew him best. Here was the most competent and trustworthy politician who was the best boss they were ever going to get in their lives . . . and they tricked him and betrayed him. Again, doing what is right is no guarantee that we are exempt from the sin and the injustices of others.

As it turns out, Daniel was not the only one that was tricked and betrayed. Darius, the king, loved Daniel. He was grateful for the leadership Daniel gave. He was caught by surprise, as well. If anything, he was more manipulated and betrayed than Daniel because he had been tricked by the people who were supposed to be most loyal to him. But, under the law of the land, he was powerless. Not even he had the authority to stop the carrying out of the execution. So Daniel 6 continues:

*When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made very effort until sundown to save him.*

*Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, “Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”*

*So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”*

*A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.*

What an amazing contrast in the characters of this story. The government officials were upset and agitated and they were conspiring. The king was so distraught that he couldn’t eat or sleep; he was in misery, filled with anxiety and concern. By contrast, Daniel was the one who was cool and calm. Daniel was not upset. Even though he had the most to lose in this particular situa-

tion he took it all in his stride. He was apparently unafraid because he had learned in more than 80 years of life that God can be trusted. He could trust God in his most difficult hour.

I hope you don’t do this, but I tend to wonder too much about all the different ways to die. So, in my mind I have died by gunshot and in a plane crash and of every disease I have ever heard of. But, I have never seriously thought about death by a lion although it has to be right up there in the top 100 worst ways to die. It has to be a miserable, painful death as you fight back all the while knowing that there is no way you could ever possibly win. Add to that the fact that Daniel was in his eighties.

We somehow assume that if we are faithful to God, if we do what is right, that will make life easier. But, Daniel demonstrates the opposite. He suffered more because he did what was right. So, what was the ultimate outcome? We find it in Daniel 6:19-24:

*At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished*

*voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”*

*Daniel answered, “O king, live forever!” My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have*

*not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.”*

*The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*

*At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.*

Why didn’t God stop Daniel from going into the place of such great danger? God doesn’t always (or often) protect us from danger. Instead of protecting us from danger God protects us through the danger. He is there with us taking care of us. God goes with us to the places

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of danger and threat and fear. He is there with us in the midst of the difficulty to take care of us.

What happened here is a miracle. God closed the mouths and drew in the claws of the lions. He sent an angel to change the lions so they would not hurt Daniel. You may think this seems far-fetched and impossible. But as one writer observes, this is not something that was against nature, rather it was God acting against evil. God created the heavens and the earth and he can do anything. He stopped evil from winning in the battle against Daniel.

What happened next is extremely uncomfortable to us in our modern time and place. The punishment that was metered out was not just on those who had conspired to accomplish this but also to the men's wives and children. They all died a terrible death by lions. How can this possibly be? The ancient historian Herodotus tells us that this was the law of the Medes and the Persians. The Bible is not endorsing anything that happened but simply reporting what pagan people did. By executing the families with the guilty they hoped to make the punishment that much more of a deterrent to crime.

The king was so pleased about what had happened that he ordered that Daniel be pulled out of the lions' den and then he issued a decree that was to be communicated across all 120 provinces of the Medo-Persian Empire. When I read this proclamation that Darius signed I think, "The king didn't write this; Daniel wrote it!" But King Darius clearly did sign it. Beginning at verse 25 we read:

*Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land:*

*"May you prosper greatly!*

*"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.*

*"For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."*

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

This does not mean that Darius, the emperor, became a believer. It does not mean that he converted to Daniel's God. It doesn't mean that just because an edict was passed throughout the empire that the whole em-

pire converted, because they didn't. But, God was honored. God did get the credit for what happened. And, an entire nation had an opportunity to believe simply because of the behavior of one person who was faithful to God.

It seems to me that our nation is at one of those times when our attention has been switched from ourselves to God. People are praying more and are thinking in ways that seemed unlikely and uncommon prior to September 11, 2001. So, are large numbers of Americans becoming Christians because of what happened? Perhaps not. However, the words of the ancient Medo-Persian decree signed by King Darius can and should be our declaration of faith and belief and trust in God. Let me recast just a few of the words for us today:

*"For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth." He will rescue America from the power of the terrorists.*

It is a great declaration for today as well for Daniel's day.

Let's be like Daniel. Let's be like Daniel by faithfully praying no matter what the threat, calm no matter who the enemy, totally trusting in God no matter what the danger.

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Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
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