

The Lion's Den

This session goes from the heat of fire, to the cold dampness of the lions den.

Have you ever asked "Why is the prophetic book of Daniel so full of stories?"

Well, since you asked.....

First of all, stories catch our imagination.

Can you think of any story lines that have driven any conversations in this country?

We can remember them, they have emotion, and we can often relate to them. When you face a situation, you may find a story coming to mind that gives you comfort or direction.

God uses stories to carry his messages to his people. In Daniel the stories are as important to the Book as are the prophecies.

The prophecies tell us what is going to happen. The stories tell us how people as individuals are protected and guided through what the prophecies foretell. Without the stories, we would feel as we were missing something: the human element.

This chapter is the last of the primarily story portions of the book of Daniel. We will have more brief stories, but these are the main ones.

Now you will recall that in Daniel the order of the chapters is chronological. But we have been following not the chronological order but the thematic order.

But we need to recognize that the order of the first 6 chapters in itself carries a story.

In Chapter 1, the remnant who were taken to Babylon are tested over faithfulness to the laws of God. The test seems simple. Abstain from that which God says is not good for you. The faithful are promoted to the palace of the king.

But they were not promoted just as a reward, in God's sight, but as a way of having God's agents in the palace of a pagan king. And God had great plans for that king.

In Chapter 2, The wise of God's people survive a threat of death, and prove themselves superior to those who do not worship God. They turn to God in prayer. They get an answer. They are elevated to positions of rulership.

The test here is whether they will turn to God for their wisdom.

In Chapter 3 the test is more severe. They are required to DO something that they know is wrong. God is the object of their worship regardless of what king or crowd demands. They experience deliverance in a great time of trouble, and as a result they are promoted.

In Chapter 4, a God-defying king is warned and debased. With repentance came restoration and more glory. Here is the promise of God that He will bless even heathen who honor him. The test here is whether God will be listened to or not.

In Chapter 5, a heathen king blasphemes God, and passes the point of no return. He is judged by the Almighty and is found wanting. He loses his kingdom, his life, and eternal life in one night. But the choices along the way led to a predictable conclusion.

However, the servant of God survived the fall of Babylon, and was promoted to a position of authority.

Like for king Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar's the test here is whether or not you honor God.

Now here, in Chapter 6, the hardest test comes when Daniel is an old man. He has lived an exemplary life, and can only be faulted for his faithfulness to God. Jealous princes plot his demise, they end up experiencing what they planned for God's prophet.

In the first 6 chapters of Daniel, we find youth tested, kings tested, and old men tested. When we look at these stories, we must realize that the influence of Babylon is constantly around us and we must be constantly avoid the Babylon-izing influences that are around us regardless of age, position, or nationality.

As we move from chapter 1 to this chapter the tests get harder. And we will discuss that as we go on.

Let's go to the story.

Daniel 6:1

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, which should be over the whole kingdom;

The events of Daniel 5 and 6 took place within a relatively short period of time, and included the fall of Babylon and the events surrounding the setting up of the Persian government in Babylon.

Chapter 5 looks at the events from within Babylon as it fall. Chapter 6 quickly follows as the Persians are setting up their administration.

The Persians were fairly benevolent rulers, preferring to let the locals rule themselves as long as they promised not to threaten the government. Another demonstration of this was allowing peoples who had been captured by Babylon to return home. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah document that it was under Persian rule that people were allowed to return home.

The Babylonian kings did not fare so well. Belshazzar was killed, and when Nabonidus was captured, he was exiled. The 3rd century BC Babylonian writer Berossus detailed that Cyrus the Great granted Nabonidus, the last King of Babylon,

Carmania an area east of Iran, as a vassal kingdom after the Achaemenid conquest of Babylonia in 539 BC.

Many have wondered exactly who Darius the Mede really was. Truth is no one knows exactly, other than Darius was probably a name assumed by the king when he came to power. This was a common practice in those times. The Egyptian kings had a whole set of 5 names when they came to the throne.

We also have cases of that with the Biblical kings, who sometimes had more than one name.

From Daniel's standpoint, what Darius **does** is much more important than who he is. It is important that Daniel was not originally singled out for persecution. The Persians had immediately involved him in their governmental reorganization.

In that reorganization, Daniel was made one of 3 who oversaw the other 120 lower-level officials. And Darius was making Daniel pre-eminent among the 3.

This was a cause for jealousy. This foreigner having more power in their government than they did!!

So they began plotting. They knew that they could not accuse Daniel of embezzlement, graft, bribery, or malfeasance. He was just too honest.

And that was his weaknesses. Daniel prayed to Jehovah 3 times a day as faithful as could be. So the devious minds of the jealous princes came up with a plot that could not fail.

They would go to the king and ask him to make a law that anyone who prayed to any god besides the king would be thrown into the den of lions.

Daniel 6:6-9 (KJV)

⁶ Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

⁷ All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

⁸ Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

⁹ Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

Now they were not exactly honest in that they told the king. All of the governors, etc, had not been consulted. Because Daniel had not been consulted.

However, there may have been something that helped give this some credibility on the face.

Back when the Persians were threatening Babylon, Nabonidus needed all the help he could get. He wanted help not only from his troops, but from the gods.

So he had all the gods from all the major cities in Babylonia brought to Babylon. His thinking was that all the gods together would have to protect the city. The gods would have to be on his side.

When the Persians took over they didn't just have political problems, they also had religious problems. With all of the gods in the city of Babylon, the people were having difficulty worshipping in their home temples. The Persians began to set things in order by returning the gods to their respective temples.

This also plays out later when the Israelites return to Jerusalem.

This whole process took months.

In light of this, we can see why a decree such as the administrators wanted to pass could have a plausible purpose.

During normal times this probably could not have happened, but the officials who proposed this were not interested in any worshipping the king. Their target was Daniel, and they did not care too much who had to suffer for that to happen.

Daniel probably prayed at the times when the morning and evening sacrifices would have happened, had the temple remained, and at midday.

The officials knew that Daniel was faithful. They were confident in his faithfulness. Daniel's habits of faith were long established. He did not wait for an emergency to turn to God. He walked with him every day.

Daniel had faith in Jehovah, and his enemies had faith in him!!

Daniel and his friends prayed when they were young men. They established patterns of prayer and faithfulness which lasted all of their lives.

Because of this on two different occasions, an angel was sent to him and addressed him as "greatly beloved." Just because Daniel was growing old, did not mean that God had forgotten. Quite the opposite, God's regard for Daniel grew greater and greater as the trials increased.

The officials probably caught Daniel praying on the first or second day, though I assume they probably got him on the first in their eagerness to bring down the faithful prophet.

They knew that they had him, because the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed once enacted.

Daniel 6:14 (KJV)

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard *these* words, was sore 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.

Now Daniel is brought before the king. Darius has an "Oh no!" moment. He sees through the pathetic plot immediately and tries to find a way out. He probably had his lawyers try to find some way to save Daniel. But when sundown came, there was nothing he could do. He was caught in his the web of his own making.

Daniel 6:16-17 (KJV)

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

¹⁷ And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Daniel would have to go to the lions.

The king sealed it with his seal and the seals of the treacherous lords.

I have thought about the seal. For the king that may have worked in another way. Having seen how intent these officials were to get rid of Daniel, he might have wanted to make sure that if the lions did not get Daniel, that the officials could not.

We have a pretty good idea where the lions were kept in Babylon. You have probably heard of the fabulous hanging gardens of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar married a Persian lady, and she began to pine for the mountains of her homeland. To make her happy, Nebuchadnezzar built a huge edifice covered with vegetation, and supplied with an ingenious system of moving water up to the top, where it flowed back down watering the trees and other plants that covered the man made mountain.

These gardens were probably in the northwestern corner of the palace next to the river. It would make sense to have a zoo next to the gardens, where the flowing water could take care of the animals, too.

We do know more about the animals. Ancient clay tablets record from the city of Ur, south of Babylon detail the supplies for feeding the lions, just like the feeding of the bureaucrats.

So not only did they have lion in a zoo in the time of Daniel, they also had them almost 1500 years earlier!!

After Daniel was placed in the den of lions, the king went back to his palace. He must have had a swarm of emotions clouding his head. Anger at the officials. Anger at himself for being so gullible. Hope that Daniel's God would rescue him. He probably did not sleep at all.

Daniel 6:18

¹⁸ 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.

Kind of makes you wonder what he did all night normally.

Also makes me wonder what Daniel did all night. After NOT being eaten by the lions, I can imagine Daniel offering prayers of thanksgiving, and then using one of the lions for a pillow, getting a good night's rest.

Daniel 6:19-22 (KJV)

¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

²¹ Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

²² My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Daniel is taken from the lions den. He had no injuries because he believe in his God.

Darius was ecstatic. But his fury was still there.

I can see him giving Daniel a big bear hug. Then he turns to his body guard, and tells them that those who plotted Daniel's demise should have the same treatment they wished upon the prophet.

Some of those officials were probably standing there. Now *they* have reason to fear. The king orders that their families be brought. Then they are thrown to the lions.

Least anyone say the lions did not touch Daniel because they were not hungry, the lions had destroyed them all immediately. And it wasn't pretty.

Daniel 6:19-22 (KJV)

¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

²¹ Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

²² My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Daniel's faithfulness led to another king praising Jehovah-God.

Our two chapters have similar pictures.

In both, Hebrews are being persecuted by a foreign king.

First Nebuchadnezzar, then Darius.

Both kings used Hebrews in their civil service.

In both cases the Hebrews were faithful to their God.

Because of their faithfulness, Daniel's 3 friends were thrown into a fiery furnace.

Because of his dedication to God, Daniel was thrown into a lions den.

In both cases Jehovah intervenes to the point where the kings had to declare that the God of the Hebrews was greater than any other God. And this was proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

In both cases, God's faithful were put on trial and delivered out of that trial through divine intervention.

Our gospel text for this session is:

Mark 13:9 (KJV)

⁹Ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.

What is the lesson for us?

Let's move to our small groups.