

## Daniel 6 The Lions' Den

The man thrown to Babylonian lions in Daniel 6 was no longer a teenage captive from Judah but now a senior court official who had served faithfully under a series of kings. His had been a long and illustrious career. Valued for his administrative skill, his knowledge and integrity, repeatedly promoted and regarded as foremost among the wise men of his day, he was still being consulted under the new administration of the Medes and Persians. Far from being allowed to retire, the latest ruler Darius wanted Daniel to have more authority and responsibility than ever.

Of course this made others envious and some conspired to bring Daniel down. Things were changing under the 'progressive' rule of Cyrus and Darius. While Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar had been basically dictators, autocratic in style, the Medes and Persians were a little more democratic and put great emphasis on the practise of *law*. So these conspirators got the king to sign some flattering legislation. They probably sold it to Darius as a unifying exercise but all they really wanted was to get Daniel.

These people were blinded by jealous spite because there was no doubt Daniel had been good for the royal court and the country. He had served his adopted country outstandingly, Babylon had benefitted from the presence and influence of this godly man. And here's a thought - our workplaces, schools, universities, sports clubs and community activities should prosper under God's blessing from the prayers, the excellent service and gracious behaviour of His servants.

Something else we should note here and it is that merely having laws doesn't make us good people. The Medes and Persians had laws but they didn't prevent these men from plotting wickedness and exploiting the legal system to carry it out! The powers of evil will use any means, Babylonian or Persian, autocratic or democratic, openly chaotic or seemingly ordered to try and oppose God, suppress His truth and standards and oppress His people.

Just last week the BBC reported a story from Oxfordshire England where a couple have been granted a judicial review to challenge a Church of England Primary School for holding a Christian Assembly even though their child is allowed to opt out. They are protesting that the Bible is being presented as factual and the school is not being 'inclusive'. The case comes to the British High Court in November.

There is no doubt it is becoming ever more challenging to be a practising Christian in secular Britain and Ireland! The same Humanist Society that is backing this agenda to remove religious content from education is campaigning

for LGBT material to be taught to five- year olds with no opt out! Teachers who protest may find their jobs under threat. What will happen to doctors in Ireland who refuse to perform or refer for abortions? And how long before clergy appear in court for refusing to perform same sex weddings? Time will tell how tolerant this new ‘diversity’ really is!

Legislation reflects the prevailing culture. For a safe society we need more than just laws, we need many, many more people with hearts and minds that have reverence for God and His Word. This is why our churches need to be earnestly praying and accurately sharing the Gospel of our Lord and Master Jesus.

Daniel stands out in Scripture as a remarkable character. Someone with admirable gifts, yet personally humble, unfailingly courteous and respectful in all his dealings with people and when necessary like here, courageous. He conscientiously dissented from this perverse ruling. When the law was twisted to promote wrong and prohibit right, he kept on quietly trusting in God and doing good. He would carry on being an exemplary public servant but he would not pray to the king or stop praying to the Lord his God. Even should it get him killed!

Daniel’s courage on this occasion stemmed from a lifelong habit of prayer and devotion. ‘Faithful’ might be the word that best describes him, faithful to a daily practice of humbly kneeling before the Lord His Judge and Saviour, the Ruler of Heaven and Earth in Whose hand his life and future lay. Three times daily at least Daniel turned towards the ruined city of Jerusalem where as a child he first learned faith, thanked God for His grace and asked again for His help.

And when the day of trial arrived he was ready. Ready to die if necessary, ready to glorify God, whatever His will would be. Jesus promised His disciples that we would find ourselves similarly prepared with the help of the Holy Spirit in times of need, but we cannot expect to act with much confidence if in fact we neglect to know our Lord daily through praying and reading the Bible!

Well, we know the outcome of this story. The lions got no supper that night! Daniel was miraculously delivered and thoroughly vindicated. Once more the name and truth of Almighty God was made known widely in this secular society, ensuring that Daniel and his writings would be carefully preserved and his legacy respected for generations to come. Around 500 years later ‘wise men’ from this area would come to Jerusalem seeking God’s new born King, such was the lasting influence of this man of God.

Already in this book of Daniel we have seen hints and foreshadowings of the Lord Jesus Who wouldn't be born for another five and a bit centuries. The 'rock' in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in ch2 which becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth. The mysterious fourth figure in the fiery furnace ch3 who 'looks like a son of the gods'. The human hand that writes on Belshazzar's wall in ch5. There will be more in the remaining chapters but let's not miss the parallels here in ch6 between Daniel in the lions' den and the Lord Jesus.

Both men were resented and slandered, falsely accused and condemned to be executed. Both were effectively buried with a stone sealed over the door. Both emerged early in the morning alive and well and victorious by the power of God. Daniel was seen to 'rise' up out of what should have been certain death in the den. This is one of numerous Old Testament pictures that prefigure Christ. This is inspired Scripture. Centuries before it happens God is revealing the central event in world history, how He will work His sovereign purposes on Earth through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Let's be assured: God will preserve a witness to truth and He will build His eternal kingdom despite the desperate and cruel attempts of human beings and devils to thwart it.

His angels restrain ravenous lions! His power raises the dead! Him we can trust to bring about His good and gracious will.

Only let us, like Daniel, seek to be faithful to Him in all things.

Amen