

THE GOD WHO DELIVERS

Theme: God blesses those who stay faithful to Him in a hostile environment--even when it costs them greatly to do so.

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This is one of the most well-known and best-loved chapters in Daniel. It teaches us the great rewards of faithfulness to God while in the midst of a pagan and unbelieving world. It reminds us that God will prevail; and that we will eventually reap in well-doing if we do not faint (Galatians 6.9).

I. DANIEL IS ELEVATED IN POSITION (vv. 1-3).

Darius (a name not found in ancient writings apart from Daniel) is probably Gobryas (see *The Pulpit Commentary*); but whoever he was, he was most certainly the Darius mentioned at the end of Daniel 5. "Darius" was probably an honorific name meaning "holder of the scepter". He was a general who served under Cyrus. He was evidently a wise leader; and he organized his province under several 'satrapies'; appointing 120 satraps (provincial rulers) over his kingdom and placing them under the supervision of three 'governors'. Daniel was made one of these three governors. Darius may have appointed him to this position because of the fine character he saw in Daniel (who was now in his eighties); and this may have also been influenced by the remarkable manner in which God used Daniel in the events that led to the fall of Babylon and the exchange of the kingdom to Media-Persia (see Chapter 5). The fact that he is called "first" (King James Version) may have indicated what is said of him in verse 4; or it may only indicate that he was one of the three.

Daniel's outstanding character caught the attention of the king. He was preferred above the other governors and princes because "an excellent spirit was in him"; and as a result, the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Again, this underscores the remarkable character of Daniel; that he (a foreigner) would have been in the highest possible positions of authority in two successive world kingdoms.

II. DANIEL'S OPPONENTS GROW JEALOUS (vv. 4-5).

Daniel's success provoked the jealousy of the other governors and princes. But one of the proofs of Daniel's outstanding character was that they could not find any 'dirt' on him that they could use against him. This reminds us that, as the people of God who are at work in this world, our lives are being constantly watched and scrutinized.

The opponents to Daniel knew that the only way they could bring him down would be by the fact that he would be faithful to God. (Wouldn't it be great if the only fault that could be found in politicians and leaders today was that they were men of character who could be counted on to remain faithful to God? For that matter, wouldn't it be great if that could be said about us?)

III. THE KING IS MANIPULATED BY PRIDE (vv. 6-9).

The presidents, governors and princes, counselors, and captains consulted together to not only capitalize on Daniel's faithfulness, but also on the king's pride. They crafted a proposal that the king pass a law "that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days"--except of Darius--"shall be cast into the den of lions". It was a stupid law; but one that would flatter the king. What's more, it may have had the appearance of being strategic--that is, as a way of consolidating the king's authority over a realm only recently acquired. Once put into writing, this law would be established as an unchangeable law "according to the law of the Medes and Persians" (see Esther 1:19). Thus, no matter what, if Daniel

remained faithful to God and conducted himself as he always had, he would be cast into the den of lions. Apparently, the king was persuaded to write this decree into law; and written into law (v. 10), it was made public. It's so often in the heart of sinful man to use law to accomplish evil.

IV. DANIEL REMAINS FAITHFUL IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION (v. 10).

It was a testimony to Daniel's character that they knew this plan would work--and that he would indeed remain faithful to daily pray to God. (Can even evil people count on you and me to be that faithful to God?) True to their expectations, Daniel faithfully opened up his window--facing toward Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 8:29, 30, 46-48; Psalm 5:7; Jonah 2:4)--and, as was his custom, prayed and gave thanks to God three times a day. This was not meant as an act on Daniel's part to publically flaunt his disobedience to the king's foolish decree. Rather it was consistent with his daily habit. If he had done otherwise, he would have been false to God and to himself. And note how we're told that Daniel did this even while knowing that the writing of the decree was signed and made public. It's important to note that he did nothing to bring this conflict with the law about. But it came about nevertheless by the sovereign permission of God; and Daniel chose in the circumstance to obey God rather than men--even though his obedience to God would cost him his life. May we be more and more like Daniel in our culture!

V. THE KING SUBMITS TO A REGRETFUL DECREE (vv. 11-17).

The opponents to Daniel--having seen the success of their plan--wasted no time in reporting his actions to the king. As a result, the king realized too late that he had been manipulated into executing his most prized servant because of the jealousy of his other officers. He set himself to try to find a way to deliver Daniel--perhaps consulting his legal experts. But the other officials reminded him that the law of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed. And so, the king acquiesced and commanded that Daniel be cast into the den of lions; the stone covering the den shut and the king's own seal placed over the stone.

Note, though, how something of Daniel's character and influence must have impacted the king. He blessed Daniel with the hope that his God--whom the king testified Daniel served continually--would reward his faithfulness and deliver him.

VI. THE LORD PROTECTS HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT (vv. 18-22).

After Daniel was sealed into the den, the king spent a restless night. But as soon as morning came, he went in haste to the opening of the den of lions. He cried out to Daniel and asked if God had, indeed, delivered him. And to his joy, he heard Daniel bless the king and testify that an angel from God had closed the mouth of the lions. Note the reasons Daniel gives for his deliverance. First, he testified that he was innocent before God. That was the testimony of Daniel's long life; and it was the cause of his second testimony--that he had done no harm to the king. Daniel's daily investment in godly character paid-off in times of trial.

VII. THE RESULTS OF DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS (vv. 23-28).

As quickly as he could, the king had Daniel pulled out of the den (v.23). The decree had been that Daniel be cast into the den; but there was no stipulation that he be left there. No harm was upon him. The accusers, however, were made to suffer the fate they intended for Daniel (v. 24). It seems as if this should not have come as a surprise to them, seeing how they had dared to manipulate the king. The fact that their whole families were thrown in with them was most likely a part of a principle of Median law. The lions didn't leave Daniel alone simply because they weren't hungry; because the accusers and their families didn't even hit the ground before the lions were upon them. The reason this unpleasant part of the story is told is to underscore the fact that God had His hand on Daniel.

As a result of all this, the God of Israel is recognized and honored in a pagan empire (vv. 25-27). The king issued a decree that every dominion in his kingdom was to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; testifying that (a) He is a living God, as opposed to the gods the people had worshiped; (b) His kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed, as opposed to the kingdoms of men; and (c) He proves

Himself by signs and wonders in heaven and earth, as He had just done in the case of Daniel. Daniel was then made to prosper under the king (v. 28). He continued to serve; whereas those who opposed him did not. Since we're told nothing further of the life of Daniel, we can assume that he continued to serve in a position of authority until the end of his natural life.