

An Ancient Death Decree



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 6.*

Memory Text: “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him” (*Daniel 6:22, NKJV*).

Daniel in the lions’ den: If it’s not the first story learned by children who have grown up in a Bible-oriented home, then it’s certainly one of the first.

At the same time, the issues it raises aren’t so simple. After all, history records many examples of Christians who, standing firm like Daniel (“Dare to Be a Daniel,” as a song goes), didn’t fare so well when tossed into the lions’ den. As we all know, even today, in a world where Christians still die for their faith, the endings aren’t so happy, at least the endings we see now.

Sure, this chapter raises a lot of questions. But that’s the nature of truth: The more we learn, the more we realize what we need to know. This week, let’s learn a little more and come away with a realization of how little we really know.

The Week at a Glance: What have we learned so far about the character of Daniel? What are the pitfalls of jealousy? What reasons would Daniel have had if he had chosen to pray in secret as opposed to doing what he had always done? What did the king learn about God after Daniel had been spared death? Why is forced obedience meaningless in the sight of God?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 6.*

Daniel, the Characteristics of a Faithful Servant (*Dan. 6:1-4*).

“Ye shall know them by their fruits” (*Matt. 7:16*).

When Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, God’s hand was over Daniel, and he was not killed as were Belshazzar and his nobles. When the new king, Darius, put together his new government, he appointed Daniel as one of the three governors over the whole realm. He had obviously heard of Daniel’s exceptional wisdom and ability, and to have such a qualified local administrator could only help the Persians in ruling the conquered nation.

Daniel exemplified in his life the type of people God had in mind when Ellen White wrote: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—*Education*, p. 57.

What were some of the qualities that made Daniel stand out as a leader of men? *Dan. 6:3, 4*.

Look up the following verses taken from previous chapters in Daniel. Write out what we can extract from the texts about Daniel’s character.

Dan. 1:8

Dan. 2:20-23

Dan. 2:49

Dan. 5:11, 12

Dan. 5:17

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Daniel 6:22.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand how God protects His people, even when empires rise and fall.
2. To encourage stronger faithfulness to God amid trials.
3. To comprehend how our faithfulness to God can affect and influence the lives of others, even politicians.

Lesson Outline:

I. Daniel, God's Faithful Servant (*Dan. 6:1-4*).

- A. Darius conquers Babylon, spares Daniel's life, and appoints him to be one of his three governors.
- B. Darius obviously recognizes Daniel's exceptional wisdom, ability, and character.

II. The Plot Against Daniel (*Dan. 6:5-10*).

- A. The governors and satraps of the realm seethe with jealousy toward Daniel.
- B. They are unable to find fault with Daniel's character or work to discredit him with the king.
- C. They invent a conflict between his work and his religion by convincing the king to outlaw prayer.
- D. Despite the decree forbidding prayer, Daniel visibly prays to God three times a day.

III. In the Lions'Den (*Dan. 6:17-28*).

- A. King Darius realizes he has been duped by his advisors into betraying Daniel.
- B. Darius hopes God will save Daniel.
- C. Darius is exceedingly glad when God delivers Daniel from the lions.
- D. Darius orders the princes and their families to be cast into the lions'den for their evil plot.

Summary: "God did not prevent Daniel's enemies from casting him into the lions'den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 543, 544.

COMMENTARY

I. Faithfulness in Trial.

Most of us are familiar with the list in Hebrews 11:4-34 of individuals who triumphed by faith. However, Hebrews 11:35-40 mentions those who had faith but who still did not triumph in any sense

The Plot Against Daniel (*Dan. 6:5-9*).

Read Daniel 6:4, 5. Does this mean Daniel was sinless? If not, why not? How do you interpret what was meant about his character?

Though the text itself doesn't say why they wanted to do Daniel in, more than likely they were jealous of this Jew, this foreigner, who was in a top place in the kingdom. Indeed, if you read verse 2, Daniel clearly was one of the most powerful and influential people in the court; second, it would seem, to the king himself. It's not hard to imagine someone coveting that slot. We see here another manifestation of the first sin, Lucifer's in heaven, when he coveted a position that was not his.

What part of Daniel's life did the governors and satraps select as the area of their attack, and why? *Dan. 6:5*.

Having failed to find anything in Daniel's character or professional activities that they could have used to discredit him before Darius, the governors and satraps turned to his religion. Because there was no apparent conflict between his religious life and the performance of his duties, they had to invent one.

Their claim before Darius that all the governors, administrators, satraps, counselors, and advisors had consulted together was greatly exaggerated. The majority of them probably were scattered across the kingdom and did not even know what was going on. But their flattery achieved its purpose. The bait was thrown out, and the king took it.

The decree stated no one could petition "any god or man for thirty days" (*vs. 7, NKJV*). Because the issue concerned worship, the reference to "man" most likely refers to the Babylonian priests who were the mediators between the people and their gods. In other words, during this period of thirty days, only the king was to be the priest for the people. This would be a humbling experience for the local priests and a test of loyalty to the new Persian government. "The suggested mode of compelling every subject in the former Babylonian domain to acknowledge the authority of Persia seemed a statesmanlike measure that would contribute to the unification of the Middle and Near East."—Frank E. Gaebelien, gen. ed., "Daniel"—"Minor Prophets," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), vol. 7, p. 79.

Who hasn't experienced the bonds that jealousy can wrap around us? Think about times when you've been trapped by this sin. Over what were you jealous? Why? (Doesn't it all seem so trite and trivial now?) How does death to self, at the Cross, provide the only escape?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the world would recognize: “Others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword” (*Heb. 11:36, 37, NASB*). Yet, these individuals are no less triumphant than any of the others mentioned before them. They already had their reward, and that was God Himself: “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (*vss. 39, 40, NASB*).

All these people had one thing in common: their earthly lives and fortunes meant little or nothing to them apart from God. Daniel, for example, would not sacrifice his worship of God for the sake of a long life, despite the fact he could have met the usual fate of people who were locked in with hungry lions.

While this may be difficult for us to relate to in an era where material concerns are so fundamental, we may one day have to leave everything we own behind. Daily ask for God’s help to see the world and its collection of “stuff” in proper perspective. As you draw closer to Jesus and develop His Christlike character (*Gal. 5:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 13*), all that you own becomes less and less meaningful.

II. Useful Quotes About Faith and Faithfulness.

“The measure of our faith is the intensity with which we are seeking a homeland. Our destiny is to embody the tension between what God wants and things as they are, and to keep that tension ‘so taut that it sings.’ When we have accepted ourselves and our world as it is, our faith is dead.”—*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 11 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 728.

“If I trust God, and believe in him, I shall submit myself to his will; even when it becomes very painful to me I shall say, ‘It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.’ But if I do not believe that he is God, and that he is aiming at my good, then I shall resent his chastisements, and shall kick against his will.”—Charles H. Spurgeon, *Twelve Sermons on Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 105.

“Paradoxically, the most perplexing, Job-like times may help ‘fertilize’ faith and nurture intimacy with God. The deepest faith, which I have called fidelity, sprouts at a point of contradiction, like a blade of grass between stones. Human beings grow by striving, working, stretching; and in a sense, human nature needs problems more than solutions.”—Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), p. 247.

“Because of their understanding of the faithfulness and preservation of God, believers can offer resistance in time of temptation. Admonished and consoled, they can then immediately submit

The Matter of Prayer (*Dan. 6:10-18*).

To close the shutters of his window and to pray to God in the solitude of his room would have been an easy way out for Daniel. After all, from the Sermon on the Mount we know that Jesus said: “ ‘When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place’ ” (*Matt. 6:6, NKJV*). Maybe it would have been the easy way out, but would it have been wrong? Why make trouble when you don’t need to?

Write down any reasons why Daniel should have closed the door and not given his enemies any opportunity to do him harm. What biblical evidence can you find for your reasons?

Write down any reasons why Daniel should have done what he had always done, despite the trap he was knowingly stepping into? What biblical evidence can you find for your reasons?

After Sunday legislation was passed in California, A. T. Jones urged Adventists to defy the laws openly; that is, to do whatever work they would normally do. In contrast, Ellen White specifically told Adventists not to defy those laws: “To defy the Sunday laws will but strengthen in their persecution the religious zealots who are seeking to enforce them. Give them no occasion to call you lawbreakers. . . . One does not receive the mark of the beast because he shows that he realizes the wisdom of keeping the peace by refraining from work that gives offense, doing at the same time a work of the highest importance.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 232. In fact, in another place she wrote, in the context of Sunday laws, that instead of openly violating the law, Seventh-day Adventists should hold additional worship services on Sunday, as well as on the true Sabbath. (See page 233.) Why do you think she took this position, as opposed to A. T. Jones’s?

Whatever the reasons, Daniel chose to take the more difficult route. Suppose, however, that instead of being delivered from the lions, he had been eaten up. Would Daniel still have done the right thing? Justify your answer.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

themselves to the further admonition, ‘Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry’ (1 Cor. 10:14). So they are again admonished to . . . seek the only Lord, who is faithful, and whose unchangeableness makes the miracle in their lives endure.”—G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1958), p. 196.

“Exposure to rebuffs and opposition leads the follower of Christ to greater watchfulness and more earnest prayer to the mighty Helper. Severe trial endured by the grace of God develops patience, vigilance, fortitude, and a deep and abiding trust in God. It is the triumph of the Christian faith that it enables its follower to suffer

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Daniel 6, Matthew 6:5-8, 7:16-20, Revelation 14:6-12.*

- 1 We tend to think of Daniel primarily in terms of his faithfulness to God. But Daniel was also regarded highly by the people he served. His religious convictions made him honest and trustworthy in his professional responsibilities. Think of other Bible characters who demonstrated a relationship between personal spirituality and personal integrity. Who in your church or workplace are outstanding examples of these traits?
- 2 The issues of the great controversy boil down to worship, loyalty, and obedience. These themes reoccur throughout Scripture. The Bible’s heroes are those who were faithful in situations both ordinary and extraordinary. In view of the prophecies about future persecution, what can we be doing today to prepare? What Bible promises can we claim?
- 3 Daniel, like all of us, was a creature of habit. His enemies knew they could count on him to pray each day at a certain time and place. What do your habits communicate to your friends and neighbors? What do your habits reveal about your faith?
- 4 By all accounts Daniel was a godly man. (He is one of the few characters about whom the Bible records nothing negative.) However, that did not keep him out of the lions’ den. (Neither did it keep his friends out of the fiery furnace.) While Daniel’s faithfulness caused him some anxious hours, he had the blessing of enjoying God’s presence as he passed the night with wild, hungry animals. What challenges have brought God’s special presence to your life? Would you do it again—even if it involved heartbreak or tragedy? Why, or why not?

Daniel in the Lions' Den (*Dan. 6:19-23*).

The den of lions was probably an underground pit with perpendicular walls and an opening at the top. The condemned were lowered or thrown into it from above. In this particular case, a large stone was rolled over the opening and sealed with the king's signet ring and that of his nobles. The seal was a guarantee to Daniel's enemies that no attempt would be made to save him but also to the king that Daniel would not be harmed in any way if, as the king hoped, the God of Daniel should preserve him from the lions.

What does Darius's question next morning at the lions' den reveal about his acquaintance with Daniel's faith? *Dan. 6:20*. Read between the lines. What do those words teach us about the kind of witness that Daniel was for the Lord?

What's fascinating in Daniel's reply is his statement that God spared him because of his "innocency." What could Daniel mean by that? Certainly someone as closely connected to the Lord as Daniel had to understand his sinfulness. Indeed, it's hard to imagine anyone who has ever had any kind of genuine experience with God not being made acutely aware of his or her own moral shortcomings and sinfulness.

Review **Romans 3:9-20**. What does that tell us about human nature?

Instead, and in marked contrast to Belshazzar (*see Dan. 5:6*), Daniel seemed to be operating out of a clear conscience; he knew that he was living in harmony with the Lord and that he had done nothing wrong that would have justified his being thrown into the pit with a bunch of ravenous carnivores. In other words, Daniel wasn't secretly stealing money from the king's treasury or secretly planning a revolt, something that could have made this punishment justifiable. In that sense, his conscience was clear, and that enabled him, no doubt, to have some sense of peace. Although Daniel probably did not know the end from the beginning, his clear conscience must have given him some courage in this situation.

Whatever you're doing wrong, sooner or later, it's going to come to light (*Matt. 10:26*)—you can be sure of it. Write a prayer, asking God to give you not only the will to discard this sin but the power to, as well. Repent and turn away before it comes back to haunt you, because you can be sure that it will.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

and be strong; to submit, and thus to conquer; to be killed all the day long, and yet to live; to bear the cross, and thus to win the crown of glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 468.

III. What the Bible Says About Faith and Faithfulness.

“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (*James 5:10, NIV*).

Witnessing

Ask a child if he or she wants to visit the zoo, and then be prepared to stand well out of the way as he or she makes for the car at close to supersonic speed! Children love the zoo; they can't wait to visit the elephants, giraffes, bears, seals, etc. They become perfect little mimics in the monkey house. They glue their noses to the glass in the panda pavilion. When they take that first step into the reptile house, they make not a sound. You feel their little fingers creep into yours. You save the best for last—the visit to the big-cat house and yard, where the svelte panthers slink, the incredibly fast cheetahs lurk, and the majestic lions prowl. How the children's eyes light up. They are so eager to pet the huge cats; yet, instinct tells them they must not try.

Human instinct regarding the ferocity of lions has been honed down through the centuries. History does not spare details as it chronicles humanity's use of lions as instruments of mutilation and death. Only humanity would take one of God's living creatures and use it in such an evil way. Only God could use the same creature to demonstrate His total involvement and control in our lives.

God also uses the lion to draw our attention to the glories of heaven. Where here on earth this creature has lived its life as an aggressive hunter, in heaven it is portrayed as a gentle creature, so gentle, in fact, that it will be seen lying down with a lamb. Imagine how children (and adults!) will react when they come upon this twosome on one of their daily walks through peaceful pastures. The lamb, small and fragile in appearance, approaches the lion without reservation. The lamb kneels, snuggling tight against the shaggy side of the lounging feline. Gradually, the lamb lowers its tiny head until it rests on the massive paw of the mighty lion. The lion leans down and gently nuzzles the lamb's woolly head. The two lie side by side, in perfect harmony and at peace with the other.

Doesn't this scenario make you long for heaven? Aren't you excited about sharing with others this intimate picture of God's home that He is preparing for His children? During the week ahead, encourage one another to desire to join Him there.

Darius Honors God (*Dan. 6:24-28*).

Darius was “exceedingly glad” when he discovered that Daniel had survived the lions’ den. At the same time, he vented his anger on the men who had deceived him. However harsh and unjust the punishment might have seemed (after all, the men’s wives and children were thrown into the pit with them), it was a common custom of despots back then to kill whole families, along with the condemned men. From a purely practical standpoint, it should have given people pause before violating the laws; on another level, it’s a crude example of how our sins and wrongdoing can impact others.

Read carefully **Daniel 6:25-27**. What are the things about Daniel’s God that the king acknowledges? Is he correct? Compare what the king says with these following texts: **Psalm 59:1, 2; Acts 2:22; Galatians 1:4; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 2:4; 10:31; James 1:17**. How accurate of a portrayal of God did the king give?

The king clearly had somewhat of an accurate understanding of the character and power of God, especially after such a manifestation of the Lord’s power and character. At the same time, though, it was still a limited understanding. This is seen best, perhaps, in the decree that he issued.

Read **Daniel 6:26**. What about the king’s decree exposes his lack of understanding about God?

In a sense, the Lord wants us to “tremble and fear” before Him, but only because of who He is, holy and pure, and who we are, unholy and impure, in comparison. This is something, however, that never can be decreed or instituted by any person or government or even a church. A relationship with the Lord needs to be based on our own personal encounter with Him, with His love, His mercy, His power in contrast to our sinfulness, our helplessness, and our great need of redemption. Out of that alone we worship Him, a point lost on the king.

A man was studying the Bible with his young daughter. After he told her how much he wanted her to love the Lord, she asked, “Daddy, would you force me to love God if you could?” What would you answer, and why?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance” (*Rom. 5:1, 3, NIV*).

“A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished” (*Prov. 28:20, NASB*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The story is told of a father who knelt at the side of his daughter’s sickbed. The child was gravely ill, and there was nothing more any earthly physician could do. The father had been praying incessantly, pleading with the Master Physician to provide a miracle of healing. As the night wore on, there was no improvement in the child’s condition; yet, the father continued his intercessory prayer on her behalf. As morning neared, with still no improvement, the father, in desperation, called out to God: “Father, I beg You to heal this precious child of mine. Nevertheless, I know that Your will must be done, so I leave her with You. Return her to me, if possible. If not, give me the strength to bear her loss.” Soon after his prayer, his daughter slipped quietly away. The father told this story to others as an example of how God leads His children. He answers our prayers in a way that, while often hard to bear or to understand this side of heaven, is always best for us.

Thought Questions:

① We are cautioned to be wary of Satan’s attempts to introduce jealousy, resentment, and envy into our relationships with others. Why is that so? What do you think is found in humanity’s inherent nature to make it difficult to practice humility?

② Our lesson mentions that Daniel was a sound businessman. Even his enemies could find no fault in his business dealings. As Christians, our everyday business practices should reflect our relationship with God. Our methods should be exemplary, including our financial relationship with the church regarding our tithes and offerings. Are you comfortable with your present position? In what ways can you help others?

Application Question:

The collapse of financial giants such as Enron, WorldCom, and others indicates that true leadership is often lacking in society. What do you consider to be six key characteristics of a true leader? Consult with class members and develop a list. Use this list as a yardstick for examining your own behavior.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 539–548.

“Daniel, the prime minister of the greatest of earthly kingdoms, was at the same time a prophet of God, receiving the light of heavenly inspiration. A man of like passions as ourselves, the pen of inspiration describes him as without fault. His business transactions, when subjected to the closest scrutiny of his enemies, were found to be without one flaw. He was an example of what every businessman may become when his heart is converted and consecrated, and when his motives are right in the sight of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 254.

“From the story of Daniel’s deliverance we may learn that in seasons of trial and gloom God’s children should be just what they were when their prospects were bright with hope and their surroundings all that they could desire. Daniel in the lions’ den was the same Daniel who stood before the king as chief among the ministers of state and as a prophet of the Most High. A man whose heart is stayed upon God will be the same in the hour of his greatest trial as he is in prosperity, when the light and favor of God and of man beam upon him. Faith reaches to the unseen, and grasps eternal realities.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 545.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What parallels can be drawn between Christ’s life and Daniel’s life? What are the differences?**
- 2 What is the relationship between a person’s devotional life and the ability to meet tests of faith? Is it simply a matter of how much time one spends in study and prayer?**
- 3 Read over the last line in the second Ellen G. White quote above. What is she talking about? Rephrase in your own words what she said. How can you make this idea practical in your life?**

Summary: From Daniel’s experience in the lions’ den, we learn that those who will inherit the kingdom of God are not necessarily the strongest physically or the brightest intellectually. Rather, they will be those who have fully surrendered to the Lord and committed their lives to Him, regardless of the consequences.