

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel 6:1-28

27-14

We're looking at Daniel chapter 6 tonight. What a wonderful and exciting adventure it is to go through this chapter. I'm often torn as I approach these narrative chapters about the possibility of splitting them down and covering them over a period of time, and yet the story is so wonderful as a whole that I find myself pressed to deal with all of it, and so we sort of run our way through these great narrative sections of the book of Daniel. This is the last of those. This sixth chapter ends the historical narrative portion, and from seven on, we get into some deep and exciting prophetic truth. We'll be touching on that beginning next Lord's day.

We're looking at Daniel chapter 6, the famous chapter in which we find Daniel in and out of the lions' den. Just as an introduction, let me make a couple of comments relative to what we'll learn in the text. Nations are born, they live, they die. They rise and they fall with great regularity. In fact, as you study history, you are more and more impressed with the fact that nations rapidly pass from off the scene. We look back to the Empires of the Hittites, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and finally the Babylonians, where we find Daniel first taking the role of prime minister. They were followed by the Persians, and the Medes, and the Greeks, and the Romans. All of them came and all of them went.

On our own continents, in the Western Hemisphere, we find tales told of the great Mayan, the great Inca, the great Aztec civilizations, but little or no trace remains except for some archaeological artifacts. They have come and they have gone.

In more modern times, some of you have lived through the greatness of the days of England. You remember the greatness of France. You remember when Italy was a major power in the world and threatened even to dominate Europe under the leadership of Mussolini. We remember Germany. Hitler, who with his Aryan philosophy, thought he could conquer the world. We have seen the rise of Japan as a military power. China seems to have had its day. Russia seems to be having its day now. And America may be on the wane.

Nations rise, nations fall. They come and go. But the Bible tells us in Acts 17 that the times of the nations are bounded by the sovereignty of God. And what happens to the nations is all in the predetermined plan of God for history. Now what is especially thrilling is that the coming and the going of nations has very little to do with the ongoing of the people of God.

There couldn't be imagined a more cataclysmic event than just happened in chapter 5 of Daniel. Babylon has fallen. At the height of its glory, supposedly, the head of gold, the greatest Empire that humanity had ever known, the Medes and the Persians entered the city and without firing a shot, as if were, the whole Empire fell. But what is amazing about it is that it had little or no impact on what God did with His people, for Daniel rides through the ebb and the flow of nations.

And as we come to chapter 6, we enter the second in the great four empire scene in the image of Daniel chapter 2, the Medo-Persian Empire, the breast and the arms of silver. And as we look at that Empire, we don't see Daniel in absentia, but we see Daniel right at the heart of the matter. He was a prime minister of Babylon, and he will equally be the prime minister of Medo-Persia.

And it excites me to think about that. Because I see today, across America and even around the world, a preoccupation among many Christian peoples with the preservation of certain nations, even our own. And in a strange way, they are tempting to equalize America with the church, or America with the plan of God, and that just isn't the way it is. Nations come and go and God's work goes on. And no nation is really significant when set against the backdrop of eternity and God's plan.

For example, in Isaiah 40:15 it says, "Behold the nations are like a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." A very interesting statement. Nations are like one drop that spills out of a bucket. The only word I can think of is "inconsequential." They are like the dust on the balance, which is not a factor in the weighing at all. When God sets about to weigh out the history of humanity, the nations are not the issue. And when God pours out the floods of the flow of His redemptive plan, one drop is inconsequential. The nations are drops. They are dust.

Backing up in Isaiah 40:7-8, he compares the nations to grass that withers and dies and fades away. We think back to Nimrod, and Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus, and Artaxerxes, and Alexander, and the Caesars, the Pharaohs, Napoleon, Churchill, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao, Khrushchev, and into our modern time, and the leaders and the nations come and go and God's work goes on.

In Daniel 4:17, you'll remember that great word. "This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will."

God rules in history. And nations may come and nations may go, even our own. But God's redemptive plan as unfolded through His people will go on according to schedule. The people of God go through the rise and the fall of nations. They transcend. That's a great hope for us. And we see that in Daniel. Babylon is fallen. The head of gold is crushed. The times of the Gentiles is moved into phase two, but Daniel is right where God wants him, and God is unencumbered by the decisions of men.

When you think about the fact that Babylon has fallen, it's really amazing. Nebuchadnezzar, of course, had a habit of putting his name on every brick that he put into the buildings of Babylon. In fact, one writer says that we have literally found uncounted thousands of bricks with Nebuchadnezzar's name on them - trying to build a lasting empire. One brick, which is now in the British Museum, has the image and the name of Nebuchadnezzar and a dog's footprint over both of them.

So it is with the world, but God's people and God's plan transcends all that. So we see Daniel surviving, and in chapter 6, we find him in the midst of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Now, I want some key words to take us through this text. We're going to begin at the beginning of chapter 6. It's a narrative text. We don't need to spend a lot of time on each section. We want to get

to the climax and then draw some practical implications. But we're going to use some key words just to help us keep our place as we go.

The first one is promotion, promotion. And that deals with verses 1-3. "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom - " this is the Medo-Persian kingdom " - an hundred and twenty princes, who should be over the whole kingdom; And over these, three presidents, - " and by the way, that's the only place in the Bible that word, "president," is ever used in the Hebrew - or the Aramaic, rather - and it appears to be a word that means "chief."

He set over these hundred and twenty satraps, or territorial leaders, three chiefs to whom they reported. "Of whom Daniel was first: in order that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."

Now, there we find the promotion. Notice, first of all, that we meet Darius. Now, Darius is a very elusive person because we have no extra-biblical data in existence to tell us anything about Darius. We just really don't know who he is. We find nobody at that particular point in history who is named Darius. There doesn't seem to be a place in the genealogical record of the kings of that time for a man named Darius.

Now, some scholars feel that Darius is another name for a king by the name of Gubaru, Gubaru, who was not really a king, but was really someone appointed under Cyrus as kind of a ruler of the territory of Babylon. Cyrus, being the great monarch of the whole Empire of Medo-Persia, appointed this Gubaru as the one to rule in Babylon. And some say that this word Darius is just another name for Gubaru.

But an explanation that I prefer is that Darius is just another name for Cyrus, just another name for Cyrus. I feel that that's perhaps the best explanation of all. Why? Because the word Darius is a title. It is a title. It's kind of like Pharaoh, or king, or Caesar. It's a title.

We find the word Darius, for example, used on inscriptions in archeology for at least five different Persian rulers. They're all called "Darius." So it seems best to see this as a title, as a title of honor, a title of significance. And so, we could assume, then, that it is just a title given to Cyrus. And if you look at 6:28, you might get some little help on that.

It says, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius - " and, of course, in the Aramaic it could read " - even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." And there are some commentators who favor that rendering, rather than " - and the reign of Cyrus - " making them parallel, using " - even in the reign of Cyrus."

Now, if you back up into chapter 6, you find that Darius sets over the kingdom 120 princes, and it seems to me that if he were doing that he would have to be bigger than some localized ruler in Babylon. And if he was going to establish three chiefs over the whole kingdom, he'd have to be somebody pretty important. I believe he is seen then as the Medo-Persian monarch Cyrus, just by another official title. The very fact that he had to set up 120 princes would indicate that he had to have a broader dimension of rule than just Babylon itself, just the city-state of Babylon.

So, we meet, then, this man Cyrus, perhaps best seen behind the name Darius. He is a capable man. He is an intelligent man. He is an effective man in terms of organization and structure. He's a powerful man. He's a man without commitment to God, that is the God of Israel, but to his own gods, and yet he is man who does indicate some great interest in the God of Daniel, and that increases as we get through this 6th chapter.

Now, notice that it says that when he appointed the 120 and the three presidents, verse 2 says, "Daniel was first." It is possible to see the word first as just the word "one," Daniel was one. Or, we could see it as the word first, and meaning that he was the first one chosen, or he was the first in rank. It really doesn't matter. What does matter is in verse 3 that "Daniel was preferred above everybody else."

And the word "preferred" in the Aramaic is a participle which means "he was distinguishing himself constantly over the others." He was, without question, the finest statesman in the entire Medo-Persian Empire, as he had been the finest statesman in the Babylonian Empire, as he perhaps is the finest statesman who ever walked on the face of the earth.

You'll notice that in verse 3 it says that, " - in him was an excellent spirit." That's really talking about his attitude. And, of course, attitude pervades everything we do. This is a commendable thing, a right attitude. But Daniel had more than that going for him. He had experience. I mean, he had lived through the last regime as the prime minister. He had wisdom, wisdom like nobody else had.

He had a sense of history. He had apparently dramatic leadership ability, if what he was able to do in the lives of the three young men earlier in the book is any indication of the model that he set. He had administrative ability and was given responsibility on a wide and far-reaching basis. And beyond all of that, he had the ability to interpret dreams and visions, and give everybody an idea of what was coming in the future, and that's invaluable to a monarch. What a man.

God put him right where He wanted him. God allowed Darius to recognize the capability of Daniel, and to put him in a very strategic place, a place of influence.

You know, what's interesting is in the first year of Cyrus, or the first year of Darius, he gave a decree that the Jews could go back to Judah. The decree of Cyrus, the 70 years of Babylonian captivity was up, and Cyrus gave that decree that he go back - rather that the Jews go back. And I really believe that Daniel was the one who was the great influence on him to that extent.

I think it was because of the power of the life of Daniel, because of the wisdom of the man, because of the influence of the man, that even in the first year of Cyrus' rule, around 538 or 537 B.C., he made the decree to let the people go. And that occurred before the lions' den incident, in the very first year of Cyrus.

So, we see again Daniel. But this time, rather than looking at him as a young man, as we have been in the past, we see him as a very old man. In fact, mark this, in chapter 6, Daniel is pushing hard at 90 years of age - 90 years of age - and he's still God's man. He's still God's choice. And he was still the choice of the king to be the prime minister. You know, the power of a virtuous life extends into old age.

Dr. Criswell at Dallas First Baptist tells of Robert G. Lee who was a great preacher in the south. And Robert G. Lee, on his 84th birthday, which was in 1970, November 11, was asked this question, "Are you going to keep on preaching, Dr. Lee?" This is what he replied. "When there are so many unsaved people around, when there are sorrowing hearts to be comforted, when so many young people are throwing away their life in folly's court and carnal pleasure's mart; when there are so many evils against which protest must be made; when so many old people are lonely on the sunset trail; when in 1910, at my ordination, I was married to preaching until death do us part; why should I not in the 85th year of my life keep on preaching?"

Dr. Lee added some fortifying statistics, by the way, that ought to bless and encourage any of you who are pushing 90 or 80. This is what he said. "Newman Darlan, a scholar of accepted standing, made an analysis of the lives and achievements of 400 foremost characters of history. The analysis showed that nearly 80% of the world's greatest figures closed active lives between 58 and 80. Twenty-five percent continued beyond 70, twenty-two and a half percent beyond 80, and six percent beyond 90. Consider what has been done by men beyond 80.

"When 83, Gladstone, for the fourth time, became Prime Minister of Great Britain. Michelangelo, at 89, executed his Last Judgment, perhaps the most famous single picture in the world. John Wesley preached with almost undiminished eloquence at 88, closing at that remarkable age, the most remarkable career of his time, having traveled a quarter of a million miles in an age that knew neither electricity nor steam, and he had delivered, someone estimated, 4,000 sermons, and written volumes and volumes of books.

"Edison was inventing at 90. Wright, at 90, was considered a creative architect. Shaw was writing plays at 90. Grandma Moses was painting at 80. J.C. Penny, the great Christian, was working strenuously at his desk at 95."

And we say, "Oh, I'm 55. I've got to get out." And we forfeit the richness of age, the richness of age. Daniel was pushing 90 and he was God's man. And God put him right where He wanted him and the politics of Medo-Persia had little to do to withstand it.

Second word - the first is promotion; the second is plot, verses 4-9. Whenever a man is lifted up by the Lord to a place of prominence, he falls into certain difficulty. There's always a price to pay. There's no exaltation, and there's no success, and there's no prominence that's not paid for by a certain amount of slavery. The man who succeeds is a man who works, the man who slaves, who labors. He is chained.

If he is a musician, he is fastened to his piano. If he is an artist, he is fastened to his canvas. If he is a preacher, he is fastened to his books and his prayers. If he is an author, it is his manuscript. If he is a poet, it is his lyric. If he is a physician, it is his patients and his books. If he is a theologian, it is his study. Anybody and everybody who excels is a prisoner. And so, there's a price to pay. He slaves at his assignment. He pours his life into it.

But, there's another price to pay for being in a position of blessing by God. And that is the fact that whenever you get into that position, you will find yourself dogged and hounded and followed by envy. It's just the way it is. We find it in Philippians chapter 1, don't we, where Paul was a prisoner, and some were adding affliction to his bonds by saying evil things about his ministry. They wanted to

make him feel worse than he did being a prisoner. They were preaching Christ contentiously as a negative ministry against Paul.

It's amazing how when God lifts up somebody, other people's hearts burn in rage, and jealousy, and bitterness, even when that individual has done them no injury and absolutely no harm. How could anybody hate Daniel? How could anybody despise such a man? I'll ask you a tougher question. How could anybody crucify Jesus Christ? But they did.

In London, a contemporary with young Charles Spurgeon was an older preacher who had been in the city for a generation. He'd spent years laboring faithfully in his ministry. And along came Charles Haddon Spurgeon, this fiery, winsome, young, dynamic individual, who arrived at London when he was about 20 years of age. And rather immediately - I mean, not even in a year or two or three, but immediately when he hit the scene - he had such an impact that people just flooded to hear Spurgeon preach. He was like a star that appeared in the sky, just flashing.

And the older minister said that when the throngs began to crowd around the young man, envy and jealousy began to enter my heart and it ate me up, it ate me up. There he was, a famous preacher in London, but the throngs were listening to Spurgeon. And the older pastor said he got on his knees, and cried out before God, and he told the Lord all about it. And then he said the Lord began to put in his heart praise, and intercession, and pleading for the young man, Spurgeon. He said, quote, "The day came, after I prayed and took it to God, when upon every victory Spurgeon won, I felt as though I had done it myself." God gave him victory.

But, it doesn't always happen. Let's see the opposite of that as we look at verse 4. "Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." Daniel had no Watergates. He had no skeletons in his closet. There was no way to indict this man.

Now, when a man is 90 years old, and he gets all of the people in political office around him digging around to try to find something and they come up zero, that's an honorable man. Great integrity, great honesty, great purity, great nobility. They found no fault, shechath, which means "to corrupt." There's no corruption, no error, shalu, which means "to neglect." In other words, the corruption is the sin of commission, and the error is the sin of omission. They couldn't find anything he did that he shouldn't have done, and anything that he didn't do that he should have done. What a virtuous man. They couldn't find anything.

Verse 5. "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Now, people, I wish we had time to just preach on that verse. When they can't find anything against you but the fact that you are absolutely sold out to your God, then you are fulfilling the fact of the New Testament principle of suffering for righteousness sake. The only thing they said we'll ever get him on is that he is totally committed to his God. What a commendation. They couldn't find anything else. If there was anything, they would have found it, and they couldn't.

Verse 6. "Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever." Typical amenities. Every time you'd come in there, you've got to say that.

Daniel even says that in the lions' den. That's pushing the point a little bit, but anyway, verse 7. "All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together - " Now, that's just pure intimidation because it's a lot of hogwash. There was a group of them that made a plot. Not all of them agreed, but just stacking up all of those individuals, just intimidated, and they all consulted, they said " - to establish a royal statute, and make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions."

You've heard of queen for a day? This is king for 30 days. We want you to be God for thirty days. Now, when you can be elected to be God, you've got bad theology. And when you're only God for 30 days, it's even worse theology. Here they come in, "We have consulted all the governors, and the princes, and the presidents, and the counsellors, and the captains, and everybody has agreed we ought to make a law. You're so wonderful, you are worthy of 30 days of being God. And we're just going - we're going to give you that privilege. And we just want to make a rule here, that whoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for 30 days, unless it's you, shall be cast into the den of lions."

It's interesting here that if you look back at verse 6, there's a verb there, "assembled together." It's a very interesting verb in the Aramaic. It means they "came hastily and tumultuously." It's kind of like a rabble. I mean, they were kind of a tumultuous group. They were stirring and milling as they came in. A very strong verb, and it does indicate a large group of them who had pulled off this plot. But not everybody agreed, because Daniel was the leader and he didn't agree. I'm sure he wasn't even consulted.

So, they all come in and pull off their lie. When they said, "all the presidents," that's not true. There was one of them who didn't agree, who didn't even know, perhaps. We want to make a statute and a firm decree. And by the way, the double use of that, a royal statute and a firm decree, shows you how binding and strong they wanted it to be, that nobody but nobody can worship or make a petition of anybody but you for 30 days.

By the way, in those days, of course, their religion had established deities that were like men. Their deities were as fallible as men were. In other words, they made their image of God from their own image. And so, their gods were fallible. And so, to say that a man could be a God to us is absolutely ludicrous, because God is holy, and righteous, and perfect, and has none of the imperfections of humanity.

But for them, it wasn't a problem. In fact, if we study history carefully, we'll find that the Egyptians believed that the Pharaohs were gods, that the Romans believed that the Caesars were gods. The Ptolemies were believed to be gods. There are indications that the Seleucids claimed the role of deity. Even the Herods, you'll remember in Acts 12, took the place of gods. So that it was not uncommon for monarchs to do this.

Well, Darius was flattered. I mean, when you get the whole body politic coming in and wanting to do that for you, boy, that's pretty tough to resist. And so, he wasn't thinking. He was swept away in the emotion of the whole deal. Verse 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 it not."

Now, we don't know a whole lot about the law of the Medes and Persians except we do know that

once you made the law, you couldn't violate it. That was built into their system. And most studies indicate that the reason they did that was to prevent whimsical laws, that once a law was made, it was binding. And so, they were rather careful about those laws.

But when these guys came along and hit this king at the point of his vulnerability, his ego, he responded. Verse 9. "He signed the writing and the decree." Now there was a law. You make a petition of any god but this god, and you go to the lions' den.

So, we see the promotion and the plot. There's a third word, perseverance, verse 10, perseverance. Now the word got back to Daniel, and I want you to know what he did. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did previously." I like that.

"Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God." You know, what I see here is perseverance. They made a law, and Daniel went back to his room and did what he did everyday. The pattern established originally by David apparently in Psalm 55: "Morning, noon and night, fell on his knees to pray." And, of course, in those days, there was very frequently on the top of a house a kind of a little upper room.

We see them even in the New Testament time. A place of retreat, and they didn't have glass windows. What they did was put a lattice work over the windows, and they would let them be open and the warmth of the area of Babylon, which is a very hot place, and the breeze could blow through and cool them.

And so he would go up there and through the lattice work he would be visible, and he would face toward Jerusalem because that's where the longing of his heart was, the people of God, and the city of God, which symbolized God to him. And he would pray, no doubt, for the peace of Jerusalem, the restoration of the city, and whatever else was in his heart, the confession of sin, and anything else, and he did it just the way he always did it. Perseverance.

In other words, men may make their laws, but when the laws intersect and violate the rules that God lays down, we don't worry about those laws. And we come to that point in Acts, don't we, where Peter says we ought to obey God rather than men.

Now, you say, "Well, couldn't have Daniel been a little discreet? Couldn't he just close the window and pray the same way?" Yes. "Couldn't he have just cooled it for 30 days and talked to the Lord standing up and walking around, and it wouldn't have been as visible?" Yes. But any compromise at all would have been read as self-serving and it wasn't in his character to do that.

When they burned Polycarp, for example, at the stake in Smyrna in A.D. 155, he had been a Christian for 86 years. Before they lit the fire, they called on Polycarp and they said, "Deny the Lord and save your life." In quiet assurance and with steady voice, this is what he said. "Eighty-six years have I served Him. He's never done me any harm. Why should I forsake Him now?" And Polycarp, that disciple of John, with praises on his lips and a quiet commitment to the Lord, looked down at the flames and accepted them as God's will.

I think about Simon Peter. Simon Peter was in prison. The next day he was supposed to be executed, and an angel came to deliver him, and had to wake him up cause he was sound asleep. Amazing. It's like that song, "He never sleeps, He never slumbers." I remember the guy who was on the bottom of a ship and he was fearful, and finally he read that, and looked up to the Lord and said, "As long as You're going to stay awake, there's no sense both of us losing sleep. I think I'll get some."

And so, perseverance. What a truly virtuous and godly man. And then there's another key word that takes us through the text and that's the word prosecution, verse 12. And now the plot thickens. "Then they came near, and spoke before the king concerning the king's decree." They had spied out Daniel. They saw what he did.

I'm sure that they went in the morning, and they saw that deal right away, maybe they saw it at the noontime. That's probably more likely. They came in and got the decree going in the morning. They went there to Daniel's place at noon to watch him do it. They just saw the one time, and they ran back to the king.

And they spoke concerning the decree. "Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any god or man within thirty days, except of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" Now they put the monkey on the king's back. "The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."

That's right. "Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, who is of the children of the captivity of Judah - " and they forever are throwing that at Daniel. That foreigner. That prisoner. That captive. Not even of the right stock " - He regardeth not thee, O king - " Was that true? That wasn't true, was it? Daniel was a loyal and faithful servant as long it never caused him to violate his principles. He regarded the king in the way a king should be regarded, as our Lord said, He "rendered to Caesar what was Caesar's." And he says, "He doesn't regard the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Now, I know they didn't hang around a whole day to see it all three times. They just saw one, and that was the assumption that he was doing, and it was a correct assumption. And so, they confront the king. He started out as king for a month, god for a month, and wound up as a fool in one day. What a fool. What a stupid thing to do, unthinking. And you know who he was angry at? He's a wise man, himself. He was angry at himself.

Verse 14. "Then the king, when he heard these words, was very much displeased with himself." You know, at least the guy had the honesty to put the blame where it belonged. It was his own ego that entrapped him. The allurements are always going to be there, but we don't fall to them unless our own ego gets involved. And I like this. "He set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him."

Let's assume the thing was signed in the morning. They hustled out to see what Daniel would do at noon. Daniel was there praying. They ran back and told the king, and now he had all after noon because execution, according to their custom, was to come before nightfall. And so, he had all afternoon. And he exhausted every legal means possible. He went every way. That's the implication of verse 14. "He set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he labored till the going down of the sun."

Now I don't know what he did, but maybe he tried to find a loophole in the law, or maybe he tried to find something in past Medo-Persian law that could undo this thing. But technically, there was no way out. And you know what I love about this? Daniel never says a word. Daniel never takes up his own cause. Daniel never defends himself. Like Christ, he is dumb before his shearers and opens not his mouth.

You see, he had such confidence in God through all these years that he would just commit himself to God. There was no defense, right? There was no - what could he say except - "That's right. I was praying and I'll just keep on praying." There was nothing to say.

So, the promotion, the plot, the perseverance, the prosecution. And another key word comes in verse 16, and that's the word "penalty." Verse 15 says, "Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and the Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed." You are stuck with it. "Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions."

Now these are real lions, folks, real lions. Lions that were purposely starved to be used as executioners. And I don't know how many there were in there, but there wasn't just a couple. I've seen pictures where there's two or three lions. No, I don't know how many, but there must have been an awful lot of lions, because when you get to the end of the chapter and everything starts coming down on the heads of the people who made the plot, they throw all of them in there, and they throw all their families in together, and they get eaten up before they hit the ground. A lot of lions in there.

One commentator said, "Well, there were only a few, and Daniel found a corner and hid." No, no, no. It was a big place, right? "And he found a corner and he hid in the straw or whatever." No. Lots of lions. And they were lions like you think of lions.

And so, "A stone was brought, and laid on the mouth of the den." It's most likely a cave in the side of a hill, and on the lower place where the entrance was, they would have a stone to cover it. And then on the top of the hill, there was a hole with a grate over it. The reason we believe that is the word "den" is literally the word *gôb* in Aramaic, which is related to the Hebrew word *gûwb* which means "pit." And so, it was a pit. That's basically the idea. *Gûwb* in Hebrew means "to dig."

And so here you have a sort of an underground pit with a side entrance, where they could sort of through that natural cave entrance bring the lions in and out, or do whatever they needed to do to feed them, and then this top entrance where the whole deal could be viewed as the people who were to be executed were executed.

And by the way, there has been some interesting study done in terms of archeology. They've discovered some of these lions' pits that were used by monarchs as places of execution. Keil, the very famous commentator on the Old Testament, describes one. It says, "It consisted of a large square cavern under the earth, having a partition wall in the middle of it, which is furnished with a door, which the keeper can open and close from above.

"By throwing in the food, he entices the lions from one chamber into the other, and then having shut the door, they enter the vacant space for the purpose of cleaning it. The cavern is open above, its

mouth being surrounded by a wall of a yard and a half high, over which one can look down into the den." Now this might be what it was like, a great big area in a hillside.

Now you'll notice that it says in verse 16, "The king spoke and said to Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will - " what? " - deliver thee." Now where did he get that idea? Listen, you know enough about Daniel if you've been with us in this study to know that if Daniel had been hanging around for a year, at least by now, and perhaps two, that Darius had heard message, after message, after message about God. And you will also know that the history of what Daniel had seen God do in the past would be known to him, and that's perhaps one of the reasons he appointed him to the place he did.

It would seem apparent to me that Daniel would be one who would make manifest what he believed. He had already been involved in miracles. He had already been involved in giving advice about the release of the Jews to go home. And so I'm sure the message was very clear about the power of Daniel's God who had delivered him. I'm sure this man knew well the story of Azariah, Mishael, and the other - I can't think of his other Hebrew name - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Babylonian; but they had been delivered from the fiery furnace. And so he knew that this God could do it and this is great because this shows that Daniel's evangelistic effort is having some result.

So, "the stone was brought, it was sealed with the signet of the king, and the signet of his lords; - " neither one could break that seal " - the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel."

Now all of this leads to another key word, preservation. Verse 18. "Then the king went to his palace." You know, the Holy Spirit is so subtle about things. You'd think that you'd want to go right to the lions' den, right? I mean, if I was watching a film, for example, and the film came to the climax where they took Daniel and they threw him into the lions' den, and then they cut to the king's palace, I'd go, "Oh, you know? I don't want to see the king's palace. Take me back to the lions' den. I want to see what's going on in the lions' den." Cut to the palace. Never says anything about the lions' den, nothing.

"And the king passed the night fasting." Who cares, right? What happened in the lions' den? "The king passed the night fasting, and neither were instruments of music," one text says. Actually the Aramaic word is "diversions." It could be music, women, dancers, whatever they used to divert the king. But he didn't want any of that: No music, no dancers, no food, no nothing. "His sleep went from him." And he just paced around.

"And he arose very early, and went in haste." By the way, the "very early in the morning" means literally "at the brightness of the dawning." As soon as the sun was visible, he was gone. "And he went in haste - " and most commentators feel he was probably around 62 or 63 years old, so he was hustling for his age. Hustled down to the den of lions, at the crack of dawn to try to see what's going on. Now this indicates that he had some faith, doesn't it, in the God of Daniel.

Verse 20. "And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice - " a sad sorrowing voice, a voice of anguish, a voice of anxiety, " - and he cried unto Daniel - " you know, hoping for the best, but perhaps believing the worst. "Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God."

Now where do you think he learned that? Where do you think he learned that statement, "Servant of

the living God”? I’ll tell you where he learned it, from Daniel. Daniel had given him many lessons. “Servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?” Frankly, it’s a little late for that question? Is He? Now we’re at the crux of the matter, aren’t we? Was God able?

Well, verse 21. “Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever.” Got to have those amenities in there when you talk to a king, just can’t say, “I’m fine,” you have to say, “O king, live forever.” Then verse 22, “My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions mouths.” And by the way, that’s got to be extended to mean that He sort of took care of their paws too, because they could have ripped him to shreds.

God sent an angel. Now, angels are powerful. One angel took care of 185,000 Assyrians and slew them all by himself. So one angel would be plenty. “My God sent His angel, and he shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocence was found in me.” That’s not proud. That’s true. And if it’s true, it’s not pride, see? “And also, O king, before you I’ve done no hurt, either.” Just to get the record straight.

Isn’t it interesting, he defends himself only after he has given God the opportunity to put him through the test? He will put his life in God’s hands in a lions’ den. It’s as if he was saying, “Now, God, I don’t understand why I’m going to that lions’ den, but maybe You have a reason. Maybe You know something in my life that isn’t right and this is part of it.” And only after God delivered him could he say, “I haven’t done anything. I’m innocent.” How do you know you’re innocent? Because God had a perfect chance to chasten me and didn’t do it. He waits for God to evaluate that.

Well, verse 23 says, “Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and he commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den.” Now that’s again an indication that it was a pit, probably dropped some ropes, and that nearly 90-year-old guy grabbed on to the ropes, and up he came. “He was taken out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.”

Daniel’s writing the 6th chapter and Daniel is saying it was a vindication of his great faith in God. He believed God and God honored his faith. Now you want to know something? It doesn’t always happen that way, does it? Isaiah believed God, too, but he got sawn in half. Paul believed God, too, and he laid his head on a block, and an axe head flashed in the sun, and severed it from his body. Peter believed in God, and he got crucified upside down.

Believing in God doesn’t mean that the lions aren’t going to eat you. There have been martyrs throughout all the history of God’s dealing with men that have believed God and they’ve died. The issue is that we accept God’s will. If it is to live, it is to live. If it is to die, it is to die. But in either case, we’re never defeated.

In fact, if Daniel had been eaten by lions, he would have been in the presence of God, right? Which would have been better than looking up at Darius and saying, “O king, live forever.” He couldn’t lose. We never lose. If he had been torn to shreds, that angel that came would have carried him into the presence of the Lord in Abraham’s bosom.

Now all of this is followed by another key word, the word “punishment.” Verse 24. “And the king

commanded, and they brought the men that had accused Daniel, - " the portion of the satraps, the princes, the presidents that had accused him " - and they cast them in the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they came to the bottom of the den." Amazing. There must have been a tremendous amount of lions.

And people say, "Well, you know, Daniel didn't get eaten because the lions weren't hungry." They were hungry. They were hungry enough to eat this huge group of people. Some have even suggested that Daniel didn't get eaten because the lions were old. And they were like Clarence, you know, the cross-eyed lion. It's amazing what liberal commentators try to do to the Bible.

But the point of this text here is to show you they weren't old and toothless. They weren't filled up. They were hungry. And they were so ferocious they shredded those people before they ever hit the ground. God did a miracle. A horrifying scene, the picture of retribution and vengeance of God.

By the way, it's a very interesting glimpse of pagan law. The law of the Medes and the Persians said, "On account of the guilt of one, all his kindred must perish." That was the law of the Medes and Persians. And so they did.

We see the promotion, the plot, perseverance, prosecution, penalty, preservation, punishment. Two more key words, proclamation. Verse 25. "Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages - " you remember that little trilogy is used many times in the book of Daniel, which just encompasses all the people in the realm " - and he wrote all that dwell in the earth; - " at least the earth as he perceived it " - peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel." Isn't that great?

One man, and he literally affects the entire empire. Now the whole Medo-Persian Empire is fallen under the decree to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. It doesn't take a lot of people. It just takes the right kind. "For He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end." He sounds like the Psalmist, and he's a pagan king.

Boy, God has put on some convincing demonstrations in this book, hasn't He? Nations come and go, and whether they be Babylonian or Medo-Persian, when God puts His men in the right place, His message gets through.

"He delivereth - " verse 27 " - and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Let me ask you a simple question. Who gets the glory in the chapter? Daniel? Not Daniel. Not Daniel for a minute. Daniel was just there, that's all. God got the glory. I believe that if you see one thread through the book of Daniel, it is not the exaltation of Daniel, it is the majesty of God, who stands against the nations of the world and upholds His sovereignty.

Finally, the prosperity. "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." He prospered. Now I want you to listen to me. As I close, I want to sum up very rapidly, in just a couple of minutes, listen.

As we look at this chapter, what do we see about Daniel? Do you remember when we studied chapter 1 and 2? We took all of the characteristics of the virtue of Daniel as a young man and we cataloged them and we studied them, and we saw what makes a virtuous, godly man. Well, here we are, 20 - well, no, 60, 70 years later. What do we see in him again? What are the elements of character that we could translate to ourselves? What makes a man able to affect a nation? What makes a man or a woman have an impact that is as far reaching as an Empire? What is it in Daniel?

Let me suggest some things. I'm going to run them down, just listen to them, think them through. First of all, this man transcended history. He was great, and he was useful to God because he transcended history. He got his feet out of the muck of human issues. He sought the kingdom of God.

Secondly, he lived a consistent life from start to finish. He was virtuous when he was young, and so he was virtuous when he was old. And I really believe that there is no way to measure with a human measure the power of a virtuous life of that many years. The tragedy is that most of us find our virtue coming and going through those years. Not Daniel.

What are the lessons we learn about a man of God? He transcends history. He lives a consistent life from youth to old age, and this makes for great usefulness in his old age. Thirdly, he utterly fulfills his calling. In other words, he lives in the absolute center of God's will. His only desire is that God's will be fulfilled.

Fourth, he has a right attitude. They kept saying about him he has an excellent spirit. He has an excellent spirit.

Fifth, he will be envied and he will be hated by the world around him, but he will never be bittered by it.

Sixth, he is condemned, but if he is condemned, he is condemned for his righteousness, for there's no other flaw. He is as an elder of the church should be - what? - blameless.

Seventh, he is known for his virtue and integrity even by his enemies.

Eighth, he is a faithful citizen. He is subject to human laws until they would cause him to violate the laws of God.

Nine, he is willing to face any consequence within the framework of God's will and leave the outcome to God.

Ten, he will serve faithfully no matter what it costs him personally.

Eleven, he never defends himself. He leaves that to God.

Twelve, he strengthens the faith of others giving them hope in God. Didn't you see this in the king? I mean, the king was even believing because of the great faith of Daniel.

Thirteen, he is delivered from all harm, and he is preserved for every purpose within the will of God.

Fourteen, he is a vehicle for God's glory. I wish we could just preach on that. We as Christians are to be, above all things, a vehicle for God's glory.

Fifteen, he will be avenged by God. He will be avenged by God. His enemies will be dealt with by God. He doesn't have to deal with them himself.

And finally, he is exalted by those around him as well as by the One above him.

Principles manifest in this chapter that show the virtuous life of a man of God. I hope this has been practical for you, that God will apply this to your heart as He will to mine. Let's pray.

Thank You, our Lord, for the tremendous thrill of seeing your power manifest. We feel like we could reach out and touch Daniel. We feel like we could look right in that pit and see those lions. It's so vivid to us. And we know You're the same God, unchanging from that very hour, who meets us at the point of our greatest need. You're the God who wants to use us to transcend the ebb and flow of history. You're the God who has called us to live the life that Daniel lived in this day, from youth to old age.

O God, may it be that You'll raise up even in this congregation and around the world, men and women of honesty, integrity, and virtue, whose lives are given over to You totally, who suffer but know no bitterness because they've committed themselves to the keeping of the faithful creator.

Lord, make us this kind of person. Make me this kind of person by Your great grace. Shape me so that my life is consistent, that I may know the blessedness of a useful old age should Jesus tarry and You grant that to me. I pray the same for all these beloved ones gathered here, in Christ's name. Amen.

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