

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 _____

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. Gaebelein, 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?

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.

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.

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 verses: 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?

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.

Modern-day Waldenses

J. H. Zachary

During the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, young believers called Waldenses suffered religious persecution and were forced to flee to the safety of mountain homes. But they did not stay there; they left their mountain homes to scatter religious literature across Europe. When they found interested persons, they pulled hidden portions of scripture from their garments to share with the families they met.

Today the Waldensian history is repeating itself in Southeast Asia, where the church is sending out young people to share the gospel in unentered areas within their territory. Trained as literature evangelists and equipped with the skills of personal evangelism, the youth go out two by two to visit communities that have for years resisted the gospel. They earn their living selling literature, and the church provides for their housing.

Sam and a friend volunteered to serve for a year in this program and were assigned to a village that had once had a small Adventist congregation. Their task was to reopen the Adventist church that had been closed for months. They found the churchyard overgrown with weeds and bushes and spent several days clearing the yard so the church would be visible.

They began visiting villagers, but they were met with hostility. They could not find the backslidden members, and others did not welcome them. Discouraged, they prayed for God to open a way for them.

It was the rice harvest season, and every able-bodied family member was working in the rice paddies. Sam and his companion volunteered to help with the harvest. At first, families hesitated to let them help, but with sickles in hand, the boys began to cut the rice. They joined in the fellowship of working and eating together. They continued working until the fields were harvested. Grateful families gave them generous gifts of rice.

After the harvest when the boys returned to selling literature and contacting former members, the people of the community welcomed them into their homes and bought their health books. In time former members joined the young men for Bible studies, and small groups formed. Before their year was over, the boys were worshipping with a group of 25 Sabbath keepers.

Sam rejoiced to see God at work in his life. He has signed up again for his fifth year of service as a Waldensian volunteer.



J. H. Zachary (left) is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

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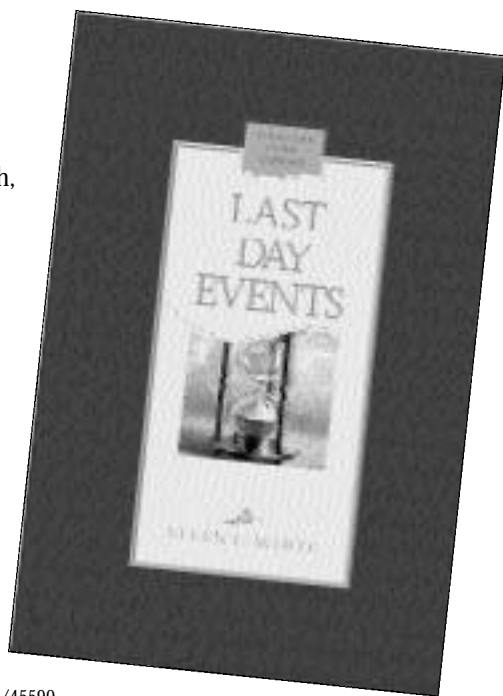
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