

Daniel And The Lions' Den I

Daniel 6

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church
July 26, 2008

**This Sermon is available in audio format on our Audio Sermons Page for listening or download*

The Bible is a Book about our choice to accept God's salvation. Man placed himself under the penalty of sin by disobedience, but God graciously provided a means of redemption through Jesus Christ. But He forces no one. We must choose. Therefore, the Bible is a Book that deals with life *or* death, deliverance *or* destruction, depending on our choice.

The Flood is a story about deliverance *or* destruction; deliverance for those who believed and entered the ark, destruction for those who didn't. The Exodus from Egypt is a story about deliverance for those who believed and applied the blood, destruction for those who didn't. We've seen the deliverance/destruction motif highlighted in the story of the fiery furnace; deliverance to the faithful Hebrews, destruction for those who threw them in the fire. We've seen deliverance in the salvation of Nebuchadnezzar, but destruction put in the spotlight with Belshazzar's fateful end. Daniel six is likewise about deliverance and destruction.

Remember that in the book of Daniel, the prophecies tell us what will be, but the stories tell us what we should be. Today our study comes from Daniel 6, the famous story of Daniel and the lions' den. There are a lot of people who've never come near a Bible, but they've heard of Daniel and the lions' den. We'll look at this story from three perspectives: we'll look at it in its original setting and then notice two applications, this week comparing it to Christ's first coming, next week to Christ's second coming.

The historical context is that Babylon has just fallen. Cyrus the Persian general just conquered the kingdom by diverting the Euphrates River and gaining entrance to the capital in the year 539 B.C., and the scepter turned in favor of the dual kingdom of the Medes and Persians, which today we call Iran.

“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps (administrators), to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss.” Daniel 6:1, 2.

This is a most fascinating thing, that Daniel, the chief of the magi, a host highly positioned adviser in Babylon, would be selected to serve in another high ranking level of responsibility in the new regime. It was more radical than John McCain asking Bill Clinton to be his vice-president! Most often when a take-over occurred, the leader and all his associates were summarily eliminated, but here, Daniel is not only spared, but immediately placed in high office. Try to find another situation in history in which a prime minister of one kingdom was given the same position in the government which defeated the nation he had served.

It says that there was a reason for Daniel’s promotion. “Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent Spirit was in him.” Daniel 6:3. If you’re one who likes to mark your Bible, you may want to take a pen and capitalize the word “Spirit” in that verse, because that’s the real reason for Daniel’s success. An excellent “Spirit” was in him.

Some people have the understanding that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is exclusively confined to the New Testament, but the Old Testament has much to say about the Holy Spirit. David realized the role of the Spirit when he wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy

Spirit from me." Psalm 51:10, 11. Speaking of the nation of Israel, Isaiah testified, "They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them." Isaiah 63:10. The New Testament teachings about the Holy Spirit are built on the solid foundation of the revelations given in the Old Testament.

Daniel was filled with the Holy Spirit, and overflowing with the Spirit's gifts, such as administration, ministry and prophecy, as well as the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience and goodness. You and I can have that same excellent Spirit in us too, and He will lead us in the paths of righteousness.

By this time Daniel was advanced in years. Probably a teen when taken captive in 606 B.C., it's now about 70 years later and he's no doubt well in his 80's or more. Because at this time Darius thought to elevate him even above all the governors and administrators, envy and jealousy inspire his colleagues to hatch a trap against him. Make no mistake about it; while righteousness receives its own honor and recognition, the devil is always ready to put a pothole in the road of success.

So the other administrators got together to discuss how they might bring Daniel down a notch or two. That shouldn't be too much of a problem; he's a public servant, and you know their reputation. They started looking. The problem was that they could find nothing wrong in Daniel's life to hold against him. Imagine, a politician, a man who's spent his entire life in public office, with no skeletons in the closet, no scandals hiding behind secret compartments. They went over his record with a fine-toothed comb, but came up empty.

It shouldn't really surprise us, though, since Daniel was daily guided by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was put on trial, His opponents found they had nothing with which to accuse Him. Even the false witnesses they hired to testify against Him couldn't agree. What an ideal to pursue! Would that our life's record would be as exemplary! The devil's favorite pastime is to "accuse the

brethren," but we shouldn't make it easy for him! Christian leaders, and all Christians for that matter, are called to have a "good testimony with those who are outside," that is, the community at large. I Timothy 3:7. We bring reproach on the name of Jesus when we disobey the laws of our land, as long as they don't conflict with His will. I heard of a pastor who was stopped for speeding, and the officer questioned how the pastor could be a credible spokesman for the Law of God when he felt free to disobey traffic laws.

"So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, 'We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'" Daniel 6:4, 5.

The wheels turned and they concocted a plan. This plan was designed in pride, drafted by envy, oiled by deception and propelled by flattery. Here's what they would do. "So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: 'King Darius, live forever! All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.'" Daniel 6:6-8.

Notice two things: first, the blatant lie they stooped to tell by saying this enjoyed the universal endorsement of *all* the advisors. For three chapters in a row now we've seen a rather loose usage of the word "all."

- In chapter four, "all" the wise men of Babylon *weren't* called in initially to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree that was to be chopped down.

- In chapter five, “all” the wise men of Babylon *weren’t* called in initially to interpret the flaming letters on the palace wall during Belshazzar’s feast.
- And now in chapter six, “all” the administrators *weren’t* in favor of the decree prohibiting the worship of any other deity except Darius.

Notice also that an important feature of Persian law, crucial for their plot to work, was that once signed, *it could not be revoked*. Persian law, once settled, “altered not.” Because of the deception behind this new edict, the administrators were banking on that feature being applied literally. Inflated by their adulation, and without thinking about all the ramifications of this new law, Darius pressed his seal into the soft clay.

What happened if you dared to violate this law? You would face the fury of the lions’ den. While Middle Eastern lions might not have been quite as large as their African cousins, they were not at all short of ferocity and danger. Back then it was considered fashionable for the king to go on lion hunts, and there are pictures preserved on palace murals, now on display in the British Museum and other places, of these royal safaris.



Of course, you wouldn’t want to have your king placed in real peril, so what actually happened is that some hunters would go out and do the authentic lion hunting and place them in cages

with strong bars, on top of which, in his own little protective cage, was a man whose job it was to lift the gate which would release the animal at the proper time.

Then the king, from his chariot, armed with spear, arrow and sword, surrounded by skilled hunters, should the king's life become endangered, would "hunt" lions, and there would be grand feasts and celebrations touting the great bravery and accomplishments of the king. A new lion-skin rug would adorn the palace floor or royal bed chamber. It seems in this case, though the Persians kept a pride of lions alive, for what reason we're not sure, except they provided a real threat to wrong doers.

Though they had tried to keep their endeavors away from Daniel, the object of their hatred, I don't doubt that somewhere along the line word of their devising leaked out. It says that when Daniel *knew the decree had been signed*, he "went home," which leads you to believe that he was probably in the palace environs when this was all happening, and that he might well have been aware of it before it became law.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days." Daniel 6:10.

What a great verse! It's one of the strangest but most inspiring verses in the Bible. He made absolutely no attempt to conceal his prayer life at this time, which certainly would put him in jeopardy. "Daniel! Doesn't it say somewhere it's a good idea to pray in your closet? Maybe this would be a good time to pray in secret or at least close the window, or pull the drapes when you pray. Daniel! Why not do your praying at night for a season?"

Oh no, not Daniel. I like to think of his courage as "righteous boldness." His trust in God was so strong, cultivated over a life-time friendship and trust that he threw caution aside and said,

"I'm going to continue my friendship with God on just the same terms as before. You may have signed a law that says I'm not supposed to pray to my Lord, but our friendship is so strong and my pattern of talking with Him is so long-lived that I'm not going to change my way of doing things now. You may have passed a law in secret, but I'm to disregard it openly!" And not just once a day, but three times! Quite a man, that Daniel!

Why did he pray toward Jerusalem? Daniel knew the Scriptures, and he remembered that centuries before, when Solomon's temple was dedicated, that the king prayed that should it be that the nation would ever stray from God, and they be overcome by the enemy and taken captive, and this new temple that had just been completed be destroyed, that if they would pray toward Jerusalem that God would hear, and God would heal. I Kings 8:46-50.

Notice also Daniel's posture in prayer. He bowed upon his knees. Yes, God hears us when we dart a prayer toward heaven when we're driving, working or otherwise engaged in life's activities, but whenever possible it is appropriate to kneel before Him. "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." Psalm 95:6, 7.

But the real shocker is to look at Daniel's prayer itself. What would be your prayer if you were in that situation? What would be my prayer? Would it be wrong to pray for deliverance, some miracle to rescue you? No, but look at Daniel's prayer. What was the main content of his prayer? It says he "gave thanks." His colleagues hated him to the point of making him the target of a new law with "special circumstances" written into it, but Daniel's heart is overflowing with gratitude! He doesn't even mention the plot or the den! Such is the result of a life time of spiritual growth and trust.

The text says that it was his "custom since early days." That phrase whispers a mother's faithful training in childhood. What a

testimony to parental guidance! Joseph's early religious training paid huge dividends later during his life in Egypt. Moses' instruction at the feet of Jochabed for the first twelve years of his life guided his feet in the paths of righteousness for the rest of his life. Parents—it is your duty and privilege to train your children in the ways of the Lord. Teach them to love Jesus; teach them to pray to Him for guidance.

From the prophet's earliest years, prayer had been Daniel's lifeline. The Lord had been with him in his youth in troubled Jerusalem, in his captivity on the road to a foreign land, in the court of Babylon, and now in Persia. Where would he turn in the moment of this trial? To his God!

Daniel raised his eyes to heaven "as was his custom." His was no foxhole religion. He didn't just pray in an emergency. It was a daily habit and pattern, woven into the fabric of his life. It would not be set aside now, despite this threat on his life. How about us? Is prayer a regular component of your day? Do you reach out for spiritual vitality each day, several times a day, whether the road is smooth or rough? Don't wait for a crisis to turn to the Lord! He is your Friend!

As you can imagine, it didn't take long for the conspirators to have their results. I'm sure their spies were hiding in strategic places to catch their "criminal," and Daniel did not disappoint them. They rushed back to the king, trying to hide their excitement, putting on their best "nonchalant" demeanor and quietly asking, "Live forever, O king. Excuse me, but if memory serves, didn't you sign a law recently which prohibited everyone from praying to any god or deity except yourself?"

"Yes, that's true."

Then they sprung the trigger of the trap which they had so craftily baited. "You know that Daniel, he has no respect for you. He has insulted you with his transparent disregard for your throne and leadership. He prays three times a day to his God!"

Suddenly, at that moment, it was as if the scales fell from Darius' eyes, just as they did when Ananias prayed for Saul in Damascus. Now his blind naiveté was cured. Now the fog of his gullibility cleared. Now he could see completely what their design had been. "And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him." Daniel 6:14.

Darius was one of the more generous and humane rulers of antiquity. It was his policy to send captives back to their homelands who had been displaced by Babylon's efforts. He was one of the few kings back then who had a heart. We know that because it says it right there, that he "set his heart" on Daniel to deliver him. Every loop-hole was explored. Every escape route was examined. The attorney general scoured the records to find some pertinent precedent to allow the king to release Daniel, but to no effect. The trap had been sprung. The victim was secured tightly in its jaws. There was no way out. The law altered not.

And the conspirators were there to remind the king that he was not going to get away with sweeping this under a Persian rug. Action was demanded. The integrity of the whole jurisprudence system was involved. What would happen to the confidence of the subjects of the kingdom with respect to the inviolate nature of Persian law if an exception, even for a good cause, were entertained, just one time?

With sadness in his heart, Darius was forced to carry out the intent of the law, but with an expression of hope that Daniel's God would deliver him. "So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Your God, Whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.' Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring *and* with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed." Daniel 6:16, 17.

Notice the word "and" in verse 17. I'm sure that while the king's signet made effective contact with the seal, the conspirators pressed theirs indelibly into the seal, adding their willing witness to the event.

That night, three things didn't make it into the palace chambers according to verse 18; no food, no music and no sleep. Have you ever been upset, to the point that food is not appetizing, you take a pass on that favorite cd and you can't go to sleep? That was Darius that night.

It's time to think for a moment about what this story tells us about Jesus' first coming to this earth. I heard about a Bible whose every page featured a silhouette of Jesus, so that whether you were reading in Jeremiah or John, Leviticus or Luke, you would be reminded that this is "His story." It's all about Him; His love, His sacrifice. You can find the story of the cross throughout the Bible. The shadow of Calvary hovers over the lions' den.

Notice these points of comparison. Darius had a problem. Someone he loved had broken a law, a law which required death, a law which could not be rescinded. God had a problem too. Someone He loved, Adam, and all Adam's children, had broken a law which demanded death. The explicit warning of Yahweh had been "in the day you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will most certainly die." This law was likewise irrevocable. We might think that if God's Law could have been set aside and Adam excused, it would have been easier. But that was not possible. Disobedience demanded the life of the perpetrator.

Of course, there are differences. Adam's disobedience was inexcusable, and the law he broke was righteous. Daniel's disobedience was lawful, and the edict he broke was evil. God's law given to Adam was conceived in love; Darius's law in envy and hatred.

But let's suppose for just a moment that you could get into a time-traveling capsule, and somehow spin the dial like you set your oven timer, back to the year 539 B.C. or thereabouts, and arrive in Persia just as the king is on his way, with the conspirators and Daniel to the lions' den. Breathless from your journey, you rush up to him. "Darius, Darius," you shout. I've got it! I know the answer! Don't put Daniel in the den! I know how you can save his life *and* preserve the integrity of your law at the same time!"

With this news, you are hurriedly escorted directly to the king who is most anxious to hear what you have to say. He wants to save Daniel, and preserve His law. You whisper in his ear your proposal, but he recoils in shock and disbelief. "Do you see this crown?" he asks. "This means I'm the king. Do you see this scepter? It means I'm the ruler. See this signet ring? I make the laws. Let's not get crazy about this. Yes, Daniel is a fine fellow, and doesn't really deserve what he's about to get, and yes, signing that law was not one of my shining moments, but listen to what you're saying! You're proposing that to save Daniel I take his place and take his punishment? That's preposterous!"

Darius was a good king, a generous and humane one. And he loved Daniel. But not in a million years would he ever have thought of *that* as a solution to his problem, and if he had thought of it, he wouldn't have done it. But that's exactly what Jesus did. And don't forget this: at that time, Darius was the most powerful potentate on this planet, but his crown pales to insignificance when compared to the majesty of King Jesus.

And yet, Jesus, the One Who speaks and worlds appear, did not hesitate to set aside His robe and crown and willingly enter the "den" for us. There was no angel to hold back the devil's fury. He threw everything he had at him. Psalm 22 has long been regarded as reflecting the thoughts of Jesus on the cross.

- It's the Psalm that begins, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

- Another verse says, "All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn." (verse 7)
- "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him" (verse 8), words of mockery spoken at Calvary.
- "They pierced My hands and feet." (v. 16)
- "They divide My garments." (v. 18)

But look at verse 21, in the context of our story today. "Save Me from the lion's mouth." But He wasn't saved. He died. There was no halting of the knife, as in the story of Abraham and Isaac at Moriah. Jesus went all the way, from heaven to the lion's den, for you and me. He took our place, the punishment that we deserved, so that His life could be ours. Darius was a good king, but no Bible I've ever read says that he volunteered to take Daniel's place in the den. Jesus did. God solved the problem by paying the penalty Himself. In this way He could maintain the integrity of His holy Law, which is as eternal as Himself, and yet save the sinner. He could be "*just* and the *Justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:26. In other words, He could maintain the eternal and inviolate nature of His Law and still declare sinners not guilty.

If God's law could have been set aside, Jesus needn't have died! The Scriptures clearly teach that His Law is as sacred and eternal as Himself. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." Matthew 5:17, 18. If God's Law had been destroyed, sin would not exist, "for where there is no law, there is no transgression." Romans 4:15. And if there is no transgression, then we are not sinners, and have no need of a Savior!

Jesus didn't come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it, to live it out in perfect obedience, that He might apply that obedience to our account through the terms of the Gospel, and then by His Spirit enable us to walk according to the precepts of His divine Law. Today He says to each one of us, "I died for your

sins. I paid the price for your transgressions. I went into the den in your place. Look to Me as your Savior. Let Me live in you. Let Me give you the strength to live righteously. I am coming soon, to take you where no sin abides, only peace and joy. Let My way of thinking and living become yours." Let the response of your heart be, "Yes, Lord. So be it unto me."

Last week the Lord put these thoughts into my mind. To hear a vocal rendition, either click on the link below or "copy" and then "paste" it into your browser. If you or someone you know would like to sing it, the track is provided also.

<http://www.box.net/shared/u9qr7bjoc8> (vocal) Down From His Glory

<http://www.box.net/shared/zhdv8x0oow> (track)

Down From His Glory

Down from His glory He came
Down to this world below
Down to this earth to reclaim
The kingdom that Adam had sold

Down from His glory, down from His throne
Down from a palace our sins to atone
Down to a journey of sorrow and shame
Down from His glory He came, down from His glory He came

Down from His glory He came
Down to a world of sin
Down to the blind and the lame
Down to bring peace within

Down from His glory, down from His throne
Down from a palace our sins to atone
Down to a journey of sorrow and shame
Down from His glory He came, down from His glory He came

Copyright 2008 by John T. Anderson