

Daniel And The Lions' Den II

Daniel 6

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Sometimes you might see people at the beach or poolside with a strange looking contraption. It looks like a sheet of aluminum, perhaps folded into a couple of panels, which is placed under their chins. Why do people do that? It's because they're interested in getting that "perfect tan," and so they use a device like the one I've described, to catch every ray of sunlight in the pursuit of their objective. Would that people were as interested in "catching every ray" of God's light! What's going to last longer? That summer tan, or eternal life? Our minds should be like those giant parabolic antennas which collect data from outer space, anxious to gather every beam of God's precious truth.

The Bible is God's appointed Sourcebook of truth. Everything we need to know about Him and His ways is contained in this Book. We know of no other authoritative source of this information. It is our Guidebook for salvation.

Last Sabbath we began a study of Daniel six, which contains the well-known story of Daniel and the lions' den. We saw that Daniel was not only spared when Medo-Persia conquered Babylon, but he was immediately put in a very high position of authority in the new regime, much to the displeasure of his colleagues. In fact, the king thought about putting him in charge of the whole empire!

His opponents immediately set out to bring Daniel down, and thought by looking through the records, they would be able to find something with which to accuse him, and hinder the king's

plan. But they couldn't find anything against him! Daniel had broken no laws. So they decided that they would engineer the design of a new law, one they felt sure he would break. In order to get the king to put his seal on it, they cleverly fashioned the new law in flattery, leading him to believe that it would be a good thing to secure the authority of the new kingdom by having a law that prohibited anyone asking anything of another ruler or deity, for a period of 30 days.

Without thinking about all the ramifications of this new law, his head swelling in pride by the language of the new edict, Darius pressed his seal into the wax or clay and gave birth to this new law, which now became unalterable. It couldn't be changed once the king gave his approval, which was important to their plot, because the conspirators knew that Darius would never willingly make a law which would endanger his friend Daniel.

The jealous plotters got into position, and they didn't have to wait very long. Daniel, true to his custom, prayed with his windows open three times that day. The plotters rushed back to the king and informed him of this person who so willfully had disobeyed the king's express command. Sadly, Darius could find no way to save Daniel, and gave the order to lower him into the lions' den, with an expression of hope that his God would save him.

The Bible says, "The righteous are bold as a lion." Proverbs 28:1. Daniel's courageous and unflinching obedience to his God was lion-like. Maybe that's why the lions didn't hurt him when he was lowered into the den; they recognized him as one their own. Actually, it was an angel who protected Daniel. They may have put a stone over the mouth of the den, but God put His hand over the mouths of the lions and saved Daniel.

We saw last week that this situation reminds us of a problem God encountered. Like Darius who loved Daniel, God loved Adam. But there was a law, a law which could not be altered, just like the law of the Medes and Persians. The Lord had said to Adam,

“Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will most certainly die.” Unfortunately, Adam ate of the fruit, and God was faced with the dilemma of putting to death one He loved.

Darius could find no way out of his dilemma, though “he labored to the going down of the sun” trying to come up with one. On the other hand, as we discussed last week, Jesus, the One Who made the Law, the One Who made Adam, without hesitation pledged to take the punishment for Adam’s sin upon Himself. He would “go into the lions’ den” for us, that we might have eternal life.

That was accomplished when Jesus, the Creator God, came to this earth 2,000 years ago and became flesh and lived among us. On Mt. Calvary He died the death that we deserved, that we might have the life that He deserved. So the story of the lions’ den tells us something, although by way of contrast, about Christ’s First Advent.

It also teaches us something about Christ’s Second Advent. The Bible is a Book that has truth for all ages, but has special meaning for those who live at the very end of time. Our brother Paul says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Romans 15:4. He also wrote, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” I Corinthians 10:11.

So while the Bible has had truth for people of all time, there is a special relevance, a special application of its messages to those who live at the very end of earth’s history. God preserved those stories and instructions that have particular meaning for those who live just before the coming of Jesus in the clouds.

- The story of the Flood teaches us about the last days.

- The story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah has meaning for the last days.
- The stories of the fall of Tyre, of Egypt, of Jerusalem and of Babylon are types of the last days according to Revelation.
- In the same way, the story of Daniel and the lions' den has a special meaning for those who live just prior to the end.

Let's examine the parallels. I remind you that a great and powerful angel named Lucifer, though created perfect, by his own choice began a rebellion against his Creator in heaven. He was successful in leading about one third of the angels into believing that his was a better way. His rebellion was against God, His throne, His government and His Law, the great Law of love, of self-less service that was written in the hearts of God's creatures.

Up to this point, only peace and harmony had ruled. But now a new element surfaced; the promotion of self. Lucifer proclaimed that the loyal angels, remaining obedient to Yahweh, were misguided slaves, and that his way represented freedom. Being evicted from heaven, that same line of reasoning was brought into the Garden of Eden, when through a snake Satan invited Eve to disobey God's express command. He suggested that his way of disobedience would result in a higher station and greater freedom. The result was disastrous! Obedience to God is always the best way!

From the very beginning of earth's history then, the issue has been centered on loyalty to Christ, obedience that is born of faith in and love to God and to His Law. Satan's goal has always been to lead people to believe that God's Law is of no relevance and can be disobeyed with impunity. But the Bible teaches us that obedience is the highest form of worship; to "obey is better than sacrifice," and that even if it means putting our lives on the line, it's better to obey God than disobey Him. As our Creator, He has a right to expect our obedience to His just requirements.

This earth has been an experiment demonstrating that Satan's way has brought nothing but sorrow and tears. God has

allowed this laboratory sufficient time to reveal the results, the fruits of sin. But soon He will bring the curtain down on the drama of disobedience. The universe has seen enough to be fully convinced that Lucifer's proposition was lethal. Not only did it cost the lives of Adam and his children, it cost the life of God's dear Son. But before the stage is cleared, Satan will mount his most severe attack against those who dare to follow and obey God. He will see to it that the tide of popular opinion is turned against those who place their allegiance within the confines of God's sacred Law.

This has been illustrated already in the book of Daniel. We saw in chapter three that Nebuchadnezzar made a law that all should bow to his golden image, on pain of death. The king's law was in direct conflict with the Law of God, which states that idolatry is forbidden. When the music sounded, all bowed, except three faithful Hebrews, who dared to stand in the face of trial. For their decision, they were cast into a burning fiery furnace, but they were spared, Jesus Himself saving them. What we see in this story is a teaching tool relating to the last days, when according to the book of Revelation, again laws will be enacted which will hinder the free exercise of religion.

Like what happened long ago on the plain of Dura, the Bible says in Revelation 13:15 that just prior to Jesus' return, a command will go forth, declaring that all who refuse to worship the image of the beast will be killed. Remember that the key word in Revelation 13 and 14 is the word "worship." That word is repeated no less than 8 times in those two chapters. The choice is clearly stated to be between the worship of the "beast and his image" or the worship of the Creator God.

In Daniel three, the story of the three faithful Hebrews and the fiery furnace, a law was made which required the worship of a false deity, on pain of death. In other words, you must do evil. The law of Nebuchadnezzar was a positive command to do evil. On the other hand, in chapter six, the story of Daniel and the lions' den, a law was made which prohibited the worship of the

true God. The intent of the law was to forbid one from doing right. It was a negative command affecting the freedom of conscience. Chapter three: You must do wrong. Chapter six: You can't do what is right.

History will be repeated. Eventually we will see both aspects of this principle; laws that command disobedience to God, and laws that forbid the worship He requires. Already we're seeing that it's becoming more and more difficult to be a Christian in America. Society doesn't want to hear about God's Law. The pulpits of many churches have united in declaring that God's Law is null and void, adding their voice to the expressions of distaste for His Commands. Many preachers cry out, "The Commandments were nailed to the cross." No! Our sins were nailed to the cross! The clear teaching of His Word is that the ceremonies which pointed forward to the death of Jesus came to their end when He died and the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, but the Ten Commandments, God's great Decalogue, remain intact. They haven't changed; they haven't disappeared. If they were, there would be no basis for the existence of sin, for "where there is no law, there is no transgression." Romans 4:15.

But today's world doesn't want to hear that. "We want to do our own thing" is the slogan of today's generation. To declare the plain teachings of God's Word which expose sin has now become a "hate crime" in many localities.

Before Jesus returns, laws affecting conscience will be put into effect. Yes, even in our fair country which prides itself in its support of religious liberty this will happen. Today if you're scheduled to take a test on Saturday, you can request an alternate test date. But the freedoms we enjoy today won't last forever.

These laws might not at first come dressed in the robes of religion, but instead appear to bolster the good of the general community. Remember that the book of Revelation speaks about

restrictions on "buying and selling" unless you have the mark of the beast. This law could have its basis in economics, not religion.

The day will come when for the "good of the community" it will be deemed advantageous that one day a week be set aside as a day on which no work can be done. In the near future the sentiment will be expressed that because things in our country have become so bad, it's time to return to our roots, to get back to God, to get back to the religious foundations upon which our country was erected. Even now, floods and fires, hurricanes and tornadoes are of increasing occurrence. As I write this, a 5.4 earthquake has just struck near Los Angeles, California, at 11:42 a.m.

Catastrophes and calamities will continue to increase, and it will be thought that a national day of rest will be a good thing, and eventually a law embracing that concept, uplifting Sunday as the day of rest, will be signed. Little would the formers of such a law dream that in thus doing, they are accomplishing the work of the arch-enemy Satan, in his desire to attack God's holy Law! Little would they imagine that they are in the shoes of Nebuchadnezzar, erecting an image and commanding all to bow before it!

What is an image? It is a likeness, a copy. It is something that is similar to something else, but not the exact thing itself. Nebuchadnezzar made an "image" that was similar to the one he had seen in his dream we read about in chapter two of Daniel, but it was not exactly the same thing. It differed in its composition, didn't it? It was something he had made, and now commanded all to worship.

Sunday as a day of rest is likewise an image. It is a copy, a likeness of something God made, but it's not exactly the same thing. It is man made. The Church of the Middle Ages takes full responsibility for attempting to change God's law and transfer the sanctity from the day of rest God instituted, the Sabbath, to another day. Most of the Christian world hasn't thought about

this, but God's last warning to the world, given in Revelation 14, is an invitation to return to the explicit teachings of His Word and obedience to His Law.

I was visiting someone in a health care institution not long ago, and invited the nurse to come to our church and worship with us. I told her, "We worship on the seventh day, God's Sabbath." She proceeded to tell me that Sunday was the seventh day. Looking across the room, my eyes fell on a calendar, and I invited her to count the days and see which one was the seventh. It was a matter of some surprise for her to see that the calendar listed Saturday as the seventh, and Sunday as the first day!

What do you call it when a person worships the work of his own hands in place of God? That's called idolatry, isn't it? That's how God looks at Sunday worship. In His eyes, it's every bit as much the worship of idols as was falling before images of wood and stone in Bible times. It's when I take something man made and place it on par with the divine, despite clear warning against doing such, and use it as an object of worship that it becomes idolatry. Sunday as a day of rest is an institution, not an object, but in God's eyes it represents disobedience.

Will you be among the majority if you follow God's ways? Probably not. Will you enjoy the popularity of vast crowds and huge masses if you obey God? Probably not. But the choice will be offered. The challenge will be given, "Who is on the Lord's side?" What's the context of that invitation? What was happening when that question was asked? That call was given when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments on Sinai, while Israel was worshipping an image below! Exodus 32:26. Today God wants to know, "Who is on the Lord's side?" *Allegiance to God is expressed by obedience to His Law.*

We might raise this question: What's wrong with being loyal to Christ? Is there something wrong with obeying our Lord? He is our Creator. He is our Savior. Why would we possibly want to place ourselves against Him and disobey Him! And yet the great

deceiver has led men to believe that God's Law has been done away with and the honoring of the "copy" or image of His day of rest is acceptable. Satan will lead a movement to rid the earth of those who persist in obeying God and keeping His Commandments.

The devil hates the Sabbath! It stands for everything that he is opposed to.

- The Sabbath is God's great memorial of creation. It identifies the Lord as being the One Who spoke and it was done, commanded and it stood fast. Only God can create. Satan can modify and re-arrange, but he can't create! In this age of the fast spreading disease of evolution, the Sabbath stands as God's great memorial of His creative act.
- The Sabbath is God's great lesson of salvation by grace. Some think that keeping the Sabbath is legalistic, and it could be if attempted from the wrong motivation. But true Sabbath-keeping is "rest," not "work"! The Fourth Commandment specifically prohibits work. This is a wonderful reminder that we don't earn salvation; it is a gift from God. By true Sabbath-keeping, we are confessing that we have "stopped working" to earn favor with God, and instead are "resting" in His act of redemption.
- The Sabbath is God's great promise of restoration. Just as He took a world that was "without form and void," and worked on it day by day, so it is with the heart of the believer. Jesus will re-create us into His likeness, by His power and by His Spirit. God loves us too much to leave us in sin; the Gospel includes God's power to restore as well as forgive.

The devil hates each of these truths, and so he has made the Sabbath the object of his hatred, as well as those who practice and proclaim it. Those who champion the Sabbath will be the objects of his persecution, particularly in the last days. "The dragon (the devil) was enraged with the woman (the Church) and

he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

And what about those who dare to disobey the new law of the land, who want to observe the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments? They will be looked down upon as the worst of all society. They will be identified as the "holdouts," the ones preventing the blessing of God from resting on our country. To obey God and keep His Commandments, including the Sabbath, will be to put yourself in jeopardy of losing job, possessions and ultimately life itself. Prophecy clearly teaches this.

And yet, God will not have abandoned His faithful. Loyalty to Christ and His Law will be cherished by some. Just as He spared Noah from the Flood, just as He spared Israel from Pharaoh at the Red Sea, just as He spared Peter in prison, just as He spared the three Hebrews from the furnace and Daniel from the den, He will rescue His own.

What can we learn from this story to help us live for God in this last period of earth's history? First we can see that the God of Daniel is One who knows, cares, is involved and delivers. That **same God is on the throne today!** Yes, we find ourselves in a sick and troubled world. Through His Word we understand that this has come about because of man's choice to disobey God, induced by the enemy Satan, whose fury will be unleashed at the end.

Let God's people take comfort in knowing that the God who delivered Daniel will deliver His people in the last days as well. He who shut the lions' mouths will preserve His obedient children from the roaring lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour.

What can we learn from the life of Daniel to encourage and challenge us? We see that he was **filled with an "excellent Spirit."** You and I need to be filled with His Spirit if we want to

survive the trials of the end. We need to have extra "oil" like the five wise young women in Jesus' parable.

We see that Daniel was a man who was **faithful** even in small things. His accusers could find nothing wrong in his past, so they were forced to make up a new so they could have something to charge him with.

As Christians, we must also "render unto Caesar" as well as to God. Are we as faithful as Daniel in our lives, so that if the microscope of the enemy were focused on our lives, there would be nothing to support an accusation? Is there something in your life that should be made right, so that the enemy has nothing with which to indict you? Do you really want to be faced with wrongs that aren't confessed, sins that aren't forgiven at that time? Satan is a diligent and careful prosecutor, and knows the details of our lives. Now is the time to make things right. Now is the time to plead with God to take sin out of our hearts. Now is the time to repent of our selfish and proud ways, so that the devil doesn't have an easy job in bringing his accusations.

We see that Daniel was a man of devout **prayer**. If ever there were a time when our prayer lives ought to be flourishing, it is now! This is not the time for the candle to flicker. This is not the time to allow distractions to crowd out time with God. Each day, three times a day, Daniel prayed. Should we be less diligent, who live at the end of the age?

Daniel was **obedient** to his God, even when a law was passed against the exercise of his religion. Loyalty to the Lord was his priority. To whom shall we be loyal? "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?" Romans 6:16.

What a sad day it was when Adam and Eve discovered that God meant what He had said, and that disobedience to His express command, in what seemed to them, under the

bewitching deception of Satan, to be a small thing, led to their being removed from the Eden Paradise. Likewise, what a sad day it will be when the world discovers that God means what He says, and that disobedience to His express command in what seems to be a small thing, leads to their forfeiture of the kingdom. Don't be deceived!

Today, I direct your attention to Jesus; the great Giver of life, the One Who came and became the Lamb of God to pay for your sins. He is worthy of your allegiance. He is worthy of your loyalty. He is worthy of your worship and obedience. Give yourself wholly to Him. Pray that He will forgive you and enable you to walk in His ways. Covenant with Him to love, serve and obey Him to the end.