

"Faith in Times of Trouble"

Lesson Text: Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16, 19–23, 26–27

Background Scripture: Daniel 6:1–28 **Devotional Reading:** Matthew 8:18–27

Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16, 19–23, 26–27 (NIV)

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" ²¹ Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty." ²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. ²⁷ He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

TODAY'S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** Summarize Daniel's personal conviction of faith in God in the midst of injustice.
- **Biblical Principle:** Compare and contrast Daniel's faith-expression with those of his three colleagues in last week's lesson.
- **Daily Application:** Commit to bearing faithful witness to God in facing a personal "lions' den."

INTRODUCTION

Authentic Prayer

Would you feel comfortable "correcting" someone who was praying in a way that seemed wrong? My guess is that a majority of Christians would instantly respond No! Prayer is personal between God and the person praying! Who am I to criticize or correct the prayer of another? Alongside that reaction, however, we can place Scripture passages that do direct the form, content, and motives of our prayers. See, for example, Matthew 6:5–13; Luke 11:1–13; 18:1–14; and James 4:3.

Personal motives that stand behind prayer practices vary widely. Prayer has been used as a tool to gain political clout, as a public act of remembrance, or as a habitual nicety before meals. These kinds of prayers are often little more than exercises in ceremonial theism. Such "window dressing" prayer may achieve the desired earthly outcome, as it motivates people to act. The danger of such prayer is that it

treats God as a kind of cosmic vending machine: insert the right words, get the right publicity, and receive the vended outcome. We know better in that regard, but do we do better?

A first step in doing better with regard to prayer is to remind ourselves that God is already aware of our needs (Matthew 6:32)—we can't tell him something he doesn't already know. The foundational part of prayer, rather, is that it orients us to God's faithfulness and ability to provide and protect. In prayer, we address the God who loved us enough to give his Son for our sins. And he wants to hear from us!

LESSON CONTEXT

The context for this lesson is generally the same as last week's lesson. However, several years had passed between the events of Daniel 3 and today's Scripture. The most notable is that a new empire replaced the Babylonians: the Persians (2 Chronicles 36:15–20).

After a hand wrote a message of warning to Babylonian king Belshazzar, the king died (see Daniel 5:1–30). Scripture does not reveal exactly how he died, only that it occurred and that the 62-year-old "Darius the Mede" (5:31), "son of Xerxes" (9:1), replaced him in power.

Today's study has as its backdrop the appointment of 120 "satraps" (princes) under the oversight of three "administrators" that included Daniel (see Daniel 6:1–2). Daniel's reputation with previous kings influenced Darius. The king preferred Daniel over all the other satraps and administrators and "planned to set [Daniel] over the whole kingdom" (6:3). However, the king's high regard for Daniel led Daniel's peers to scheme against him. Although they tried to find fault with Daniel, they could not find grounds to file charges against him (6:4–5). Instead, they developed a trap that Darius could not overturn.

Their plan encouraged Darius to establish a decree that whoever should pray to any deity or man, except the king, for 30 days would be thrown into the den of lions (see Daniel 6:7). Prayer for a monarch (nation's ruler) was standard in the ancient Near East. But prayer to a monarch was exceptional. Further, the officials maneuvered the king to issue the decree "in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed" (6:8). There would be little Darius could do to prevent the enforcement of the statute after he "put the decree in writing" (6:9).

Violation and Consequence: Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16

Daniel experienced a high level of privilege (and wealth) as an official of the king (Daniel 6:1–3). However, Daniel knew he had to obey God, no matter what man might command or how much he might stand to lose personally by such actions. Just as the three Hebrew men would not disobey God in order to please the king, so Daniel purposely disobeyed a human law in order to maintain obedience to God. Later, Peter declared, "we must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29). We are always to obey the laws of our government unless they obviously conflict with something God has clearly commanded to us in His Word. In Daniel's case it involved prayer. What we may be called upon to face in the future no one knows. We need, however, to determine now to obey God if we would hope to stand then.

Daniel was faithful in opposition and prayed three times a day, and gave thanks before God as he did before.

1. What did Daniel do when he heard about the king's new decree to not pray to any other god or man other than the king? (Daniel 6:10–11)

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a consistent daily prayer time be beneficial to your relationship with God?

Digging Deeper

How can you guard against this practice becoming only a dry ritual?

These men were those who had pushed Darius to pass the decree that only the king was to be worshipped (see Lesson Context) couldn't wait to catch Daniel disobeying the law. Daniel's open windows made catching him in the act quite simple (see Daniel 6:10, above). He was praying and asking God for help as was his habit without regard for any danger it posed (compare 9:2–3).

2. What did the scheming officers do after the king signed the decree? (Daniel 6:11)

The phrase *heard this* refers to Daniel 6:12–13 (not in our printed text), in which the king's officials reminded Darius of his decree and then revealed Daniel's disobedience to it. As a result, Darius realized how his officials had manipulated him for their jealousy and selfish gain. They had used deception and Darius's naivete to launch their plan. He had inadvertently been a pawn in their scheme against Daniel. Rather than direct his displeasure toward Daniel, the king was distressed by his own behavior. The king had failed to see the underlying reason for the officials' request for the decree.

The king exerted himself in order to find grounds to save Daniel from the consequences of breaking the decree. Simply revoking the decree was out of the question (see Daniel 6:15, not in our printed text; compare Esther 8:8). For the king to provide a way out for Daniel seemed impossible.

3. How did the king react to finding out Daniel was praying to God? (Daniel 6:14)

What Do You Think?

How does hoping for God's deliverance from harm differ from expecting a worldly authority to help?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance expecting God's deliverance with acknowledging that he might have other plans?

The officials had forced the king's response, and he could not revoke the decree that initiated this chain of events. If Darius had responded in any way other than to approve the punishment, he would have revealed a disrespect for his culture and law. So he gave the order that the previously determined consequences were to be leveled against Daniel.

Even though he could personally do nothing to help Daniel, Darius believed Daniel's God would intervene on his behalf. Perhaps he had heard rumors of a previous deliverance from a fiery furnace.

Darius's response should prompt comparisons to Nebuchadnezzar's reaction when the three Jewish men refused to bow before the golden image (see Daniel 3). In that example, Nebuchadnezzar doubted that any god could rescue the three men (see 3:15). Only after seeing how God saved them did the king proclaim that "for no other god can save in this way" (3:29). Darius, however, believed that God could rescue Daniel, even without him having evidence.

4. What was the king forced to do? (Daniel 6:16)

What Do You Think?

How do you encourage others as they wait for God's deliverance?

Digging Deeper

What verses encourage you when you are waiting on the Lord?

Release and Vindication: Daniel 6:19–23, 26–27

The king's rising at the first light of dawn the next morning reveals his urgency and distress regarding Daniel's fate. Darius's anxiety regarding what he had done to Daniel led to a restless night (see Daniel

6:18, not in our printed text). Additionally, the lions' den had been sealed with the royal signet and the signets of the other officials (see 6:17, not in our printed text). No one would dare break the seal and save Daniel. The only way for Daniel to have survived the night with the lions would have been if God had intervened.

A night without sleep or food would have escalated the king's anxiety regarding the life of one of his most trusted administrators. As Darius approached the sealed den, he called out *in an anguished voice*, assuming the worst possible outcome.

The king's address to Daniel revealed his deepening understanding of the one true God. The pagan gods, idols, and images of Babylon (example: Daniel 3:1; 5:4) were lifeless (see Psalm 135:15–18). They were incapable of giving life to their worshippers. In contrast to these so-called gods, Darius recognized that the God of Daniel was *the living God* (also Daniel 6:26). Scripture uses this title regarding possible human doubt (examples: Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; Isaiah 37:4; Matthew 16:16; John 5:26) or regarding God's provision (example: Psalm 84:2) and power (example: Jeremiah 10:10). The people of Israel survived because the living God was in their midst (see Joshua 3:9–10) and He made them His people (see Hosea 1:10). When the other nations trusted in their idols, the Israelites could trust the living God, the Lord who was their help and their protection (see Psalm 115:1–11). Daniel's faithfulness to God was evident. The administrators and satraps acknowledged that Daniel was free from corruption and was entirely trustworthy (see Daniel 6:4). He behaved as a servant of the living God by showing honor and respect as a servant of the king.

5. What did the king do first thing in the morning after a long night with no sleep? (Daniel 6:19-20)

Even though Daniel's situation came about because of the king's lack of insight, Daniel still greeted him with respect and honor. Daniel responded politely and announced the reason for his safety.

Daniel first attributed his survival to the intervention of an *angel* from *God* (see also Daniel 3:28). Angels are heavenly beings who serve God and follow His commands (see Psalm 103:20). Their ministry includes serving God's people (see Hebrews 1:13–14; example: Numbers 20:16), including protection (see Psalm 34:7; example: Acts 12:11). This angel miraculously *shut the mouths of the lions* (see also Hebrews 11:32–33).

Second, Daniel noted that he survived because he was innocent before God and the king. Innocence does not mean that Daniel lived perfectly. Later, he confessed before God the ways that he had been a part of the sin of his people (Daniel 9:1–19). Instead, Daniel could claim innocence in this matter because he had followed God and was faithful to God's law.

The king's distress changed to joy and gladness upon seeing God's deliverance at work (compare Isaiah 25:9). Daniel escaped his ordeal without being *wounded* (compare Daniel 3:27). Although God saved Daniel, Scripture is clear that faithfulness does not obligate God to save believers from death by martyrdom. For some believers, martyrdom is possible (see Luke 21:16; examples: Acts 7:54–60; Hebrews 11:35–38). Anyone who remains faithful to God in the midst of suffering has been promised eternal rewards (see Revelation 2:10). Public displays of faithfulness will have a transforming influence on the community. This transformation can occur individually, such as how Darius became *overjoyed* for Daniel. However, it can also occur for a whole kingdom, as the following verses indicate.

6. What was significant about Daniel's response to the king? (Daniel 6:21-23)

After hearing from Daniel and observing how God had saved him from the lions, Darius proceeded with two actions. First, he commanded that the officials who had accused Daniel face the same punishment they had intended for him (see Daniel 6:24, not in our printed text). Second, Darius wrote *a decree* to "all

the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth" (6:25). Such wide-reaching language suggested the scope of *every part of the kingdom* (see also 3:4).

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that no one speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:28–29). Darius's decree went further—it legislated that all people *fear and reverence the God of Daniel*.

The decree provided several reasons why the king's subjects should fear Daniel's God. First, Daniel's God *is the living God*, and He alone can give life and sustenance to all who would receive it (see Daniel 6:20). Second, God's kingdom would never be destroyed and would never end (see Psalm 145:13). Earthly kingdoms, like the Babylonians, will end. However, God is the eternal king, and His kingdom will be eternal (see Exodus 15:18; Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27; Luke 1:29–33; etc.).

7. What did the king do after Daniel's deliverance by God? (Daniel 6:26-27)

What Do You Think?

How do you refute the idea that God is not active in His creation?

Digging Deeper

Do you have any habits that might suggest God is not active in creation? If so, what change will you make to acknowledge His continued work?

Another result of the miracle God performed in sparing Daniel was that the people were pointed to the God of miracles (v. 27 of today's lesson). God's miracles are not useless displays of power, but they are calculated to turn men and woman to Him in faith.

CONCLUSION

God in the Midst

God did not keep Daniel *out* of the den; He protected him *in* the den. Why? Because Daniel had faith in the Lord (v. 23; Hebrews 11:33) and was faithful to the Lord (Psalm 18:17–24). Perhaps Daniel meditated on Psalm 37:1–15 and Proverbs 11:8.

When the lions are about to attack, trust the Lord, and claim His promises.

PRAYER

Living God, You care for Your people and have promised to be with us no matter what we face. Give us the courage to face adversity and maintain faithfulness to You. Help us behave with mercy to those who have sought to harm us. Show us how to follow You in a manner that brings other people closer to You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Our faithfulness to God has personal and public implications.