

THE LIONS' DEN

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Lessons: Daniel 6

When the City of Babylon was captured by the Medes and Persians under the leadership of Cyrus (on that fateful night when the writing appeared upon the wall of Belshazzar) there was much for the new king to do. He was now heir to the vast empire of Babylon, and it was necessary for him to set forth at once with his army to set this kingdom in order. During his absence, which lasted for two years, he set over the country a man called Darius. Now Darius was an old man, but he was very kind and sought to rule wisely and well. He placed 120 princes or satraps over different parts of the country, and gave the supreme power to three governors, of whom the highest was Daniel, chosen because he had proved himself so wise.

The Babylonian princes were very angry at this. Daniel had been a captive, a slave, under the previous kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. He was a Jew and a foreigner, and they hated him because he was given greater power than they. Jealousy arose in their hearts. They watched him very carefully, to see if they could not find something of which to accuse him to Darius, so that they might take away his power. But Daniel ruled so well that Darius grew to love him more and more, and there seemed no way by which the princes might turn the king against him.

Then they tried to catch the king by a trick. They knew that he was proud and loved to have people praise him. And so one day they proposed that he issue a decree forbidding any one in the whole kingdom from asking for anything from any one but himself and from giving praise or thanks to any one but himself, for a period of thirty days. Darius readily agreed to this, and he signed the decree. Now it was a law among the Medes and Persians that any decree signed by the king could not be changed unless all the governors and princes were willing.

When Daniel heard of the decree he refused to obey it. For he could worship none but the Lord. He was very loyal to the king and was ready to do anything that might be required of him, if it was right. But when he was asked to do something that was directly against a commandment of the Lord, then he knew that he must obey the Lord rather than the king. He knew that it was written in the Law of Moses, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." So when he heard that the decree had been signed, Daniel went right on praying to the Lord, morning and evening, as was his custom.

Family Talk

When the Jews prayed to the Lord they went into their houses, opened the windows toward Jerusalem, and prayed there, facing toward Jerusalem. The princes knew this, so they watched Daniel's house. When they saw him kneel down in prayer, they went at once and reported the matter to the king. Darius was very sorry indeed. He loved Daniel. He had no desire to injure him. He was even willing that Daniel should pray to his God. And he saw that it was only jealousy that had made the princes angry against Daniel. So Darius thought and thought all day about how he might avoid casting Daniel to the lions. But the princes came in the evening and reminded him that he could not change the decree. It had been signed and must be carried out. So, at last, sadly, Darius allowed Daniel to be arrested and thrown to the lions, saying to him, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you" (Daniel 6:16).

In those days the kings kept lions and other wild beasts for their amusement, and it was a common punishment to cast criminals to the lions and allow them to be eaten up. The lions were kept in a great cave, before which a heavy stone was placed. Daniel was bound and cast into this pit. And the king stayed up all night, anxiously thinking of Daniel and wondering whether he could possibly be saved. And early in the morning Darius went out to the lion's den and called in to Daniel, asking whether he were still alive. And Daniel answered that the Lord had sent an angel and closed the mouths of the lions so that they had not hurt him, because he had done no wrong. Then Darius was very glad, and he had Daniel taken up out of the pit, and those wicked princes were cast to the lions instead. Daniel was made the greatest ruler in the kingdom, and Darius sent out a decree that all in his kingdom should worship the God of Daniel, because He was the only true and living God.

This is a story with a meaning. Evil spirits are like wild beasts. They love to kill and to destroy. But the Lord has shut them up in the hells, as if in a den, lest they should do harm to the angels and to people on earth. However, when we do what is wrong we come under the power of these evil spirits, who seek to take away our life and make us like themselves. The evil of jealousy—when we hate others because we want things they have—can never bring us happiness. Even if we do get the things we want, we will not enjoy them; we will only want other things. We will always be unhappy, because when we are jealous the evil spirits are given power over us. But, if we do nothing wrong, then even if we were in the middle of hell, no evil spirit could possibly harm us. For the Lord would protect us. Evil spirits cannot hurt the good, and, if we trust in the Lord and serve Him and keep His Commandments, as Daniel did, then, though evil spirits seek to do us injury, they will be powerless against us.

Amen.