

Lesson 109

Daniel Serves Faithfully

God speaks through Daniel to several earthly kings.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Daniel faithfully served God through the reigns of multiple kings. God blessed him by granting him favor with each new king, placing him in a position of influence so that the name of God would be glorified in a foreign land.

Key Passages

Daniel 5:5–9, 5:22–28, 6:10, 6:16–17, 6:19–23

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain how God used Daniel in the service of several kings.
- Describe how God delivered Daniel from the mouths of lions.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 30:18 Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Daniel served under two kingdoms and at least four regimes. We see accounts in Scripture that take place during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. Daniel remained a highly favored court official throughout each reign, and God continued to use him. Daniel interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar early during the captivity. God had shown Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom would fall to another (Daniel 2:39). Later, when Belshazzar saw a hand writing on his wall (Daniel 5), Daniel was called in to interpret its meaning. Belshazzar had elevated himself above God, using the sanctified vessels from the temple to serve his guests as they worshipped their idols (Daniel 5:3–4). A hand appeared in their midst and wrote four words on the wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin (Daniel 5:25). After none of the Chaldean wise men could interpret the writing, Daniel was brought to the king. He refused the rewards the king offered but explained to him that God had judged the king, and he had been found wanting. Therefore, his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5:28). That very night, the Medo-Persian army invaded Babylon and the king was killed.

We next see Daniel in a situation similar to the one his three friends had faced earlier. Although Daniel is commonly presented as a youth in pictures depicting this account, he was about 80 years old during the reign of Darius the Mede. Daniel had served the kings of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires as a counselor for at least 60 years at this point and had been blessed by the God he faithfully served. Likely because of jealousy, the other leaders hatched a plot to have Daniel killed. They convinced King Darius to issue a decree that no one could pray to any god but the king for 30 days.

Daniel knew of the decree, and he faced a choice: continue to honor God by praying to him or face being thrown to the lions. The men who set the trap had surely seen Daniel's habit of praying three times a day and were waiting for him to remain faithful to God. Seeing Daniel praying as usual, the other leaders took the charge before the king, demanding that Daniel receive the due penalty. Despite the king's efforts to reverse the situation, Daniel was thrown into the den with the lions (Daniel 6:14–16).

As the morning dawned, King Darius ran to the den and called out to Daniel, asking if God had preserved him. To the king's delight, Daniel replied that God had sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions to protect him. Because Daniel trusted in God, he was saved through this trial. In response, King Darius had the families of all those who had plotted against Daniel thrown to the lions, where they were quickly devoured (Daniel 6:19–24). Darius also wrote an edict that everyone in his kingdom should fear God; it seems that Darius came to truly trust in God. Daniel continued to prosper in the reign of Darius and then King Cyrus.

Like Hananiah, Mishaiah, and Azariah, Daniel was faithful and maintained a positive testimony before kings. The writer of Hebrews undoubtedly had these men in mind when he penned 11:33–34 and spoke of those who had "stopped the mouths of lions" and "quenched the power of fire." And we are called to follow their example of faith in God. By faith in God's omnipotence and sovereignty, we must honor Christ whatever the cost.

Historical/Apologetics Background

There is some confusion regarding the identity of Darius the Mede, under whom Daniel endured the lions' den. Because the name was used in inscriptions for at least five Persian rulers, some scholars believe it is not a name, but a title. Some suggest that the title actually refers to Cyrus. However, the fact that Daniel refers to both Darius the Mede and Cyrus, king of Persia, suggests that they are not the same person. Whether Darius is a name or title, he was probably placed over the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus.

Another point of interest deals with the law of the Medes and the Persians. If Darius so favored Daniel, why did he not reverse his decree, or offer a new one to undo what had been done? From the time the wise men accused Daniel until sundown, Darius searched for a way to deliver Daniel (Daniel 6:14). Despite the best efforts of the king, he could find no way around the law. Three times in the chapter it is emphasized that the law of the Medes and Persians cannot be revoked (Daniel 6:8, 12, 15). Once enacted, a Medo-Persian law could not be

changed, even by the king. In fact, the “law of the Medes and Persians” is a common idiom referring to that which is inviolable or unchangeable.

Although the book of Daniel is a book of prophecy, it provides many historical details. These details help us to follow along with the historical context, and it also allows us to align secular accounts of history and opportunities to affirm the trustworthiness of Scripture. The book begins in 607 BC, when Judah was first captured by Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel and his friends were carted off to Babylon. It was not until 588 BC that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and burned Jerusalem. After an interim of several kings, of which only Evil-merodach is recorded in Scripture (2 Kings 25:27), Belshazzar began to reign in Babylon. Meanwhile, the kingdoms of Media and Persia were growing and allied against all other powers in the region. In 548 BC, the Persians conquered the Medes to form the Medo-Persian Empire. Ten years later, Cyrus conquered Babylon, and it was Cyrus who decreed in 537 BC that the Jews could return to Jerusalem. Although the record of Daniel ends around this time, his prophecies foretold the rise and fall of Gentile nations up until the coming of Christ. Throughout the book of Daniel, we are reminded of the sovereignty of God over the kingdoms of man and that he is faithful to fulfill his promises.

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