**DANIEL CHAPTER 6**

This morning we are going to look at the familiar story of Daniel in the lion’s den. Daniel is most likely in his 80s or even 90s at this point in his life. He has had a successful life and established himself as the great prophet statesman of Babylon. His 60-plus years of service to the royal court have outlasted the Babylonian Empire itself. As we saw last week in Chapter 5, Babylon was conquered by Cyrus and came under the control of the Medes and the Persians.

As far as we know, Daniel’s great faith in God had never been severely challenged by his pagan authorities; at least not like it had been in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Recall when they faced a life and death ordeal back in Chapter 3 (fiery furnace). Daniel had not been present when all that happened. So, as Daniel nears the end of his life he is about to face his greatest challenge. This chapter stands as a testimony to Daniel’s faithfulness and also to the sustaining power of Daniel’s God.

READ Daniel 6:1-2. A person identified in 5:31 as “Darius the Mede” is now the ruler of Babylon. The interpretive challenge is that there is nobody in Medo-Persian history by that name. Historians do not know for sure who this person is. Darius is simply a term synonymous with “king.”

So, who is Darius the Mede? Perhaps he is Cyrus himself. Perhaps he is someone that Cyrus set up as temporary ruler while he was away on his conquests. We just don’t know for sure who this guy is. Here are some of the suggestions by historians: (1) Cyrus. I personally don’t believe it is Cyrus because the last verse in Daniel 6 states that “Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” So the Bible indicates Darius is someone different from Cyrus. (2) Cyaxares II is a distant relative of Cyrus, like a great nephew. (3) Cambyses II is Cyrus’s son. (4) Gubaru is an ally of Cyrus’s. (5) Astyages is the maternal grandfather of Cyrus. (6) Some historians have even gone so far as to suggest that Darius is a fictional character. I don’t believe that is the case because the Bible deals in truth. Whoever Darius is, he is real.

Daniel has such a solid reputation and is so well respected that the new Medo-Persian regime selects him to serve as one of their 3 commissioners. The King James Version refers to them as “princes” but their role is more like our modern day commissioners. This governing body oversees the affairs of the kingdom. The 120 satraps, ruling officials over the various provinces, fall under the authority of the 3 commissioners. The commissioners report directly to the king. So Daniel is one of the most powerful and respected men in the new government.

READ Daniel 6:3. The Spirit of God is at work in the life of Daniel. His life demonstrates excellence. He is extraordinary in many ways. So much so that the king decides to make him the top man in the kingdom.

[Question 1] From the verses we just read, how do the Medo-Persians view Daniel? Let’s answer that one first. Good, bad, indifferent? [wait for responses]. They obviously hold Daniel in high esteem, right? But why do they view Daniel so highly? [wait for responses] V 3 says “for an excellent spirit was in him.” One commentary I read said that Daniel “had experience, wisdom, a sense of history, leadership, a good reputation, ability, attitude, and revelation from the God of heaven.” He was a very remarkable individual.

But just as we see today, Daniel’s success and prosperity make him a target by unscrupulous people. And that is what we see next.

READ Daniel 6:4.

[Question 2] Just plain old-fashioned jealousy! Why are these officials so jealous of Daniel? Perhaps it’s his position. He’s where they want to be and because Daniel is there and they aren’t, they’re jealous. Perhaps it’s Daniel’s outstanding character and reputation. He’s lived a pure life, a life above reproach. He’s done nothing but good things. But Daniel’s godliness and the beauty of his life serve as a condemnation of the dark corruption which characterized the lives of so many of the governing officials.

READ Daniel 6:5. These men cannot dig up any dirt on Daniel. What a remarkable testimony! They can find only one area that they might possibly exploit and that is his spiritual life. You see, Daniel has a reputation for loving his God. He is known to be a praying man. He has religious convictions that are completely different from his work associates. They know that three times every day Daniel can be seen on his knees before an open window praying to the God of heaven, with his face toward Jerusalem. We will see this later in v 10. This is the only thing they have on Daniel; a peculiar habit that they don’t understand. Perhaps they can use it to their advantage.

READ Daniel 6:6-9.

[Question 3] They decide to capitalize on a weakness in the king. Knowing that the king is a man full of pride, thinking of himself as a god, they approach him about signing a decree making it illegal to petition any god or man other than Darius for 30 days. Of course we the audience know that they are only targeting Daniel’s prayer life. The penalty suggested for an individual who violates this decree is a bit extreme. They will be cast into the dreaded lion’s den! Darius, his head swelling with pride, seals this ridiculous decree into law.

How stupid could those Medes and Persians be? The very thought of making it illegal for someone to pray? How unthinkable! How barbaric! I mean no civilized modern society would ever consider passing a law to limit a person’s prayer life, would they?

[Question 4] So-called “Christian” America did exactly that in 1963. The United States government passed a law prohibiting school-led prayer. And just like our country’s godless law failed to stop Christian students and teachers from praying in school, King Darius’s foolish decree doesn’t stop Daniel from praying either.

The next verse makes it quite clear that Daniel is fully aware of the king’s decree.

READ Daniel 6:10. Daniel knew about the decree but prayed anyway.

[Question 5] I asked a similar question when we studied Chapter 3 and Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego faced their fiery furnace trial - Do you think that Daniel struggled with his decision not to pray, at least publicly, for 30 days or do you think his civil disobedience came easily? I believe that Daniel had **NO** struggle at all with his decision.

READ Daniel 6:11. Daniel ignores the decree and he keeps right on praying like he had done his entire life.

[Question 6, First part] We all know that Daniel made the choice to continue praying as always, but what were his choices? (A) He could say, “Thirty days is not too long and I’ve been praying all my life. I’ll just omit praying for thirty days and then start up again afterward;” (B) He could say, “I don’t need to open up my window for everyone to see me praying, besides, that’s only showing off;” or (C) He could say, “I don’t have to pray out loud. God will still hear me even if I pray silently to myself and nobody will know.” All that being said…

[Question 6, Second part] But Daniel chooses to do none of these.

READ Daniel 6:10. Daniel goes straight for the open window that faces toward Jerusalem. He does what has become a habit in his life, a routine activity. He does what he has always done without even thinking about it. He’s not ashamed of the Lord and he’s not going to live his life in fear.

The next thing we see are these tattle tells going straight to the king and telling on Daniel like a bunch of second-graders.

READ Daniel 6:12-13. The men who observed Daniel praying say, “You know what you decreed, O king. That Daniel is right back at it up there making his petitions to God. That’s a violation! Now you have to throw Daniel into the den of lions!”

Darius knows he has been duped. His own pride got the best of him. READ Daniel 6:14. The king spends the rest of the day trying to undo his edict. He puts his lawyers to work to find a loophole in the law. He is desperate to find a way to save Daniel.

[Question 7] Why didn’t the king just change the law? Because he could not!

READ Daniel 6:15. You talk about a master scheme. These guys have pulled it off! The king legally has his hands tied. He has no choice but to have Daniel delivered to the lion’s den. As far as everyone knows Daniel is about to die!

READ Daniel 6:16-17. What do you make of Darius’s statement about Daniel’s God? Does the king really believe that Daniel’s God will deliver him? Based on the verses the follow I don’t think so. He know that Daniel is a man of great faith and he is hopeful that Daniel’s God will deliver him, but the king, not being a believer, fears the worst. Notice, that Daniel himself never utters a word.

The first part of verse 16 answers the conjecture by some that Daniel was either let down gently into the den or was led into the den via a side door. The den was a large underground cave with an opening at the top. The Bible says, “and Daniel was…cast into the lion’s den.” Daniel was CAST into the den – possible synonyms for cast include pitched, tossed, hurled, flung, thrown, and so forth. He was not let down gently. However, knowing how the story ends and that God is powerful enough to shut the mouths of hungry lions for 12 hours (we all know the story), I think we can agree that God is able to cushion Daniel’s fall. I believe He did just that.

The authorities placed a stone at the mouth of the lion’s den and seal it with all of the official signet rings. Why do they do this? Because Daniel’s punishment is an official act of the Persian government. Sealing the entrance to the den was akin to signing an execution warrant. All the powers that be are in agreement with it. It is a done deal and nobody, not even the king himself, can legally interfere with the process.

Now we get insight into the king’s mindset while Daniel is in the lion’s den. The king doesn’t behave like a man who is confident Daniel will be delivered. Look at verse 18…

READ Daniel 6:18. Apparently King Darius does not sleep at all that night. The Bible says, “his sleep fled from him,” which means he didn’t sleep. It is a miserable night in the palace for the king. He fasts. He grieves. He does not want to be entertained. His conscience bothers him. He wonders how Daniel is doing. Is he still alive? Is his God protecting him? All night long he waits…and waits…and wonders…and waits some more…hour after miserable hour…

But as soon as it is daybreak King Darius cannot stand it any longer. He has to find out right away…

READ Daniel 6:19-20. “in a tone of anguish” – the king is expecting the worst.

READ Daniel 6:21-22. The only description we are given of what went on inside the lion’s den is here in Daniel’s own words.

[Question 8] Of course the king is happy. His worst fears have not been realized. Daniel is still alive and well!

Why did God protect Daniel? The last phrase of verse 23 tells us: “because he had trusted in his God.” Isaiah 54:17 is a well-known verse that rings true here in this story and in the story from Ch 3 of the fiery furnace. Isaiah says that “no weapon that is fashioned (formed) against you (to those who trust in God) shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.” Time and again we see this repeated with God’s people throughout scripture. God’s protection and deliverance offers a powerful testimony about the greatness of our God to a an unbelieving world.

Well the story doesn’t end there.

READ Daniel 6:24. This is a terribly grisly scene. Daniel has been vindicated with an exclamation point!

[Question 9] Let’s look now at the impact that Daniel’s faith had on the king.

READ Daniel 6:25-27. This sounds similar to the words that King Nebucchadnezzar had proclaimed at the end of Chapter 3. Both Darius and Nebucchadnezzar were pagan kings, both saw the awesome power of God demonstrated in the lives of His servants and both were compelled to praise Daniel’s God as the one true living God! If pagan kings can do that, how much more ought we as God’s children, redeemed and delivered, praise Him for delivering us from the flames of hell?

READ Daniel 6:28. Daniel is a successful man because he trusted in his God. He was in constant communication through prayer. Everything Daniel accomplished was only after he sought God’s guidance and direction. Every successful action of Daniel’s recorded in Scripture is preceded by prayer. Successful Christians are praying Christians. The power of God will be unleashed when we pray.

And with that we come to a major transition point in the book of Daniel. The last half of the book will be focused on Daniel’s prophecies.