God Rescues Daniel from the Lions

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God glorifies Himself through the rescue of those who trust Him.

We have now arrived at the most famous story in the Book of Daniel. As we’ve seen, this man of God ruled with “light and understanding and wisdom” under Nebuchadnezzar (5:11). He had a reputation as a man with “an excellent spirit” (5:12), as one who had within him “the spirit of the gods.” “Light and understanding and excellent wisdom” (5:14) was the word on the street about him continuing into the reign of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king. King Darius the Mede shared their opinion and appointed Daniel to a position of significant leadership.

But suddenly, Daniel faced a crisis, a major test of faith. And within a few short days, we see a faithful 80-year-old man thrown into a pit with ravenous lions ready to tear him apart. Why? Because he wouldn’t stop praying.

What do you know about the story of Daniel in the lions’ den?

Why do you think this particular story has become so well known in the church and in our culture?
In Daniel 6, we encounter a real story about a real man who by supernatural protection escaped the claws and teeth of real lions so that the nations would know that the God of Daniel “is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end” (v. 26). As God’s people, we are to show courage as we trust in God and obey Him, no matter what. Our courageous witness of faith is a sign to the world that Jesus is the world’s true King.

1. Dedication to the Lord in Prayer (Dan. 6:1-10)

   1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; 2 and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. 5 Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”

   6 Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! 7 All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.”

   9 Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

   10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Voices from the Church

“Daniel...set the standard for Christians who would hold public office. He was serious about the work of statecraft, but he was even more serious about being known as a servant of God, determined to follow God’s precepts no matter the cost...Our society could use a few more political leaders like Daniel.”

—Joel Belz
The passage says that Daniel not only possessed “an excellent spirit” but “he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him” (vv. 3-4). But the envy and jealousy of the other officials led them to take Daniel down, “[seeking] to find a ground for a complaint against him with regard to the kingdom.” They had only one problem: “they could find no ground for complaint or any fault…no error or fault was found in him” (v. 4).

What was it about Daniel’s faith that made him such a model employee and public servant?

How does your faith impact the way you work?

The plot against Daniel was designed to use his integrity against him. By manipulating Darius into making an irreversible decree, the enemies hoped to trap Daniel in an act of disobedience to the king. Their goal was not to see Daniel demoted. Their goal was to see Daniel dead.

When Daniel was told that the document honoring Darius as the exclusive deity of the empire had been signed, what did he do? What he had always done. He obeyed God rather than man. He continued a pattern of spiritual devotion that had marked his life for years, a pattern his enemies knew very well. He went to his home and went upstairs to his place of prayer, with the windows open toward Jerusalem. He then got down on his knees and prayed three times that day and the following days, giving thanks to God “as he had done previously” (Dan. 6:10).

99 Essential Christian Doctrines
81. Priesthood of the Believer

God’s intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people’s need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, exemplified in the tearing of the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).
What statement did it send to the rest of the world when Daniel refused to obey the king’s edict?

What does prayer to God—higher than an earthly king—reveal about our ultimate allegiance?

2. Dependence on the Lord for Rescue (Dan. 6:11-18)

Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.
King Darius “was much distressed” at the situation and tried to find a way to deliver a man he obviously admired, appreciated, and respected (v. 14). Unfortunately, he had stepped into his own trap and he was caught. His evil administrators reminded him once more of the binding nature of the law of the Medes and Persians—it could not be changed (v. 15).

More importantly, these evil men had counted on Daniel to be true to his God. Daniel knew that past faithfulness would be no substitute for present faithfulness. Indeed, the past had simply prepared him for the present and the future. One’s character is not forged in the moment of adversity but revealed in the moment of adversity.

\[? \] What did this moment of adversity reveal about Daniel's faith?

\[? \] What role do you think Daniel's consistent practice of prayer had in shaping him to be this kind of man?

Much to his regret, Darius commanded that Daniel be “cast into the den of lions” (v. 16). The den was probably a pit with an opening at the top. As Daniel was about to be thrown into the pit, the king spoke to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” Stephen Miller notes, “Darius’s concern for his friend is touching…The words express the king’s hope.” Daniel, however, was not resting in the king’s concern or his hope. He was resting in the providence and sovereignty of his God!

Verse 18 informs us “the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.” No doubt Darius’ lords were out partying. Not so for the king. No food. No partying. No music. He knew he had been played, and it had cost him the life of his loyal friend, or so he thought.

Voices from the Church

“How did Darius know about Daniel’s God? Because Daniel lived a life of integrity before everyone and did not hide his witness. So God joined him in the lions’ den, and the lions became Daniel’s pillows for the night.”

—Tony Evans
3. Deliverance by the Lord for Mission (Dan. 6:19-28)

19 Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

21 Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. 24 And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. 26 I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. 27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” 28 So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.
As Darius came near to the den of lions, “he cried in a tone of anguish...‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?’” (v. 20). Most likely, he did not expect to hear a thing other than the satisfied purring of lions following their supper.

Suddenly, and no doubt to his joyful surprise, Daniel spoke (vv. 21-22)! This is the only time Daniel’s words are recorded in the entire chapter.

Next, we see how God used this entire story to show His greatness to the pagan world. Darius was clearly impacted by God’s miraculous deliverance of Daniel. In words reminiscent of the Psalms, and in particular Psalm 2, this unbelieving ruler wrote of the living God “to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth” (Dan. 6:25). Once more the language of Daniel anticipates the glorious missionary promise of Revelation 5 and 7.

<table>
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<th>Make a list of the attributes ascribed to God in the decree of Darius.</th>
<th>How is God’s ultimate mission of receiving glory and honor from people of all nations reflected in this edict?</th>
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Once again, God honored His faithful servant. Just as he blessed and honored Daniel under the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he did so again under the Medo-Persian king Darius (that is, Cyrus the Persian [v. 28]). The truth of James 4:10 rings forth: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

How does our dependence on God for salvation lead us to mission in God’s world?

Conclusion

All throughout the Bible, the stories point us to a coming deliverer, a rescuer, in fulfillment of the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. Sometimes we see how events like the Passover in Exodus 12 point us to Jesus. Other times we see how institutions like the temple and the sacrificial system point us to Christ. And still other times we see how people like Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel point forward to the coming King.

In the messianic Psalm 22, the Righteous Sufferer proclaims in verse 21, “Save me from the mouth of the lion!” God indeed saved the Messiah Jesus from “the mouth of the lion” when He raised Him from the dead on Easter morning. Praise God we can have courage as we follow a risen Savior!

Voices from Church History

“I know without a doubt that you are a faithful God for all those who put their trust in you. When I am in darkness, you are my light. When I am in prison, you are there with me. When I am deserted, you are my comfort. In death, you are my life.”

–Menno Simons (circa 1492-1561)

CHRIST CONNECTION: God showed His power to rescue Daniel from death. In the fullness of time, God showed His power to save His people from their sins and give them eternal life through the death and resurrection of His Son.
HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God sometimes calls us to civil disobedience when it is a matter of obeying Him.

1. How can we learn to show dependence on God when facing adversity?

2. What are some ways we can make sure God is seen as great for who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus?

3. Write a prayer asking God to help your group obey the Lord, regardless of the consequences.
Unit 1:

**Daniel Akin** (sessions 1-4) is the President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and also a professor of preaching and theology. He and his wife, Charlotte, have four grown children.

**Walter R. Strickland II** (sessions 5-6) serves as Special Advisor to the President for Diversity and Instructor of Theology at Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Stephanie, have three daughters, Hope, Kendra, and Kaiya.

Unit 2:

**Jimmy Scroggins** (session 7) is the Lead Pastor of Family Church in West Palm Beach, Florida. He and his wife, Kristin, have eight children, James, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaac, Stephen, Anna Kate, Mary Claire, and Caleb.

**Matt Capps** (sessions 8-10) is Senior Pastor of Fairview Baptist Church in Apex, North Carolina. Matt and his wife, Laura, have three children, Solomon, Ruby, and Abby.

**D. A. Horton** (session 11) currently serves as a pastor at Reach Fellowship, a church plant in Los Angeles, California. He and his wife, Elicia, have three children, Izabelle, Lola, and D. A. Jr.

**Robby Gallaty** (session 12) serves as the Senior Pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church and President of Replicate Ministries. He and his wife, Kandi, have two young sons, Rig and Ryder.

Special Session—Christmas:

**Rey De Armas** serves as one of the campus pastors at Christ Fellowship in Miami, leading the Coral Gables campus. He is married to Lauren, and they have two daughters, Zoe and Lexi.
SESSION 1

SESSION 2
1. Nate Saint, quoted in Introducing World Missions, 2nd ed., by A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) [eBook].

SESSION 3

SPECIAL SESSION—CHRISTMAS

SESSION 4

SESSION 5

SESSION 6
4. Ibid.

SESSION 7

SESSION 8
1. Andrew Murray, Humility (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982) [eBook].

SESSION 9

SESSION 10
1. J. I. Packer, Knowing God (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973) [eBook].

SESSION 11

SESSION 12