

THE LIONS' DEN

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Lessons: Daniel 6

When the Medes and Persians, under Cyrus, captured the City of Babylon on that fateful night when the writing appeared upon the wall, there was much for the new king to do. He now fell heir to the vast empire which Nebuchadnezzar had established, 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 of Babylon a man who is called Darius. This Darius was an old man, but he was very kind and sought to rule wisely and well. He placed 120 princes over different parts of the country, and gave the supreme power to three Presidents, of whom the highest was Daniel, so chosen because he had proved himself so wise.

The Babylonian princes were very angry at this. Daniel had been a captive, a slave, under 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, and they watched him very carefully, to see if they could not find something of which to accuse him to Darius, 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 they 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 they sent someone to him one day and proposed that he issue a decree forbidding any one in the whole kingdom, for a period of thirty days, from asking any petition from any one but himself, and from giving praise or thanks to any one but himself. Darius readily agreed to this, and signed the decree. Now it was a law among the Medes and Persians that any decree regularly 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. 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, which was right. But when he was asked to do something that was directly against the Commandment of the Lord, then he must obey the Lord rather than the king. He knew that it was written in the Law of Moses, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." So when he heard that the decree had been signed, he went right on praying to the Lord, morning and evening, as was his custom.

When the Jews prayed to the Lord they went into their house, and opened the windows toward Jerusalem, and there prayed, facing toward Jerusalem. This the princes knew, so they watched Daniel's house, and 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 willing that he should pray to his God. And he saw that it was only jealousy that had made the princes angry against him. So he thought and thought all day 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 he allowed Daniel to be arrested and thrown to the lions, saying to him, "Thy God will protect thee." (Daniel 6:16)

Of this he was not so sure, although he hoped that it might be so. In those days the kings kept lions and other wild beasts for their amusement, and it was a common punishment of criminals to cast them 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 him, and wondering whether he could possibly be saved. And early in the morning he went out to the lion's den and called in to Daniel, asking whether he were yet 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 had him taken up out of the pit, and those wicked princes were cast to the lions instead of him. And 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 men. 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 the 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, and 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 though we were in the midst 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 men seek to do us injury, they are powerless against us.