

Living in a Lion's Den without Being Eaten

About 538 BC, the prophet Daniel was living in Babylon which had just been conquered by the Medes and the Persians. As a young man his beloved city of Jerusalem had been conquered and destroyed, and he was brought to Babylon as a slave to serve the then King Nebuchadnezzar. Now in Daniel chapter 6, he is about 80 years old having served many kings in succession so well that he was put in a position of authority.

Daniel lived a godly life in an ungodly atmosphere marked by corruption, violence, cruelty, idolatry, and perversion. These were the norms of Babylon, yet Daniel stayed pure within an intimate relationship with the God of Israel. This made Daniel different, like an alien in a foreign land (which he was). Daniel lived a life uncompromised, undiluted, and unconformed to the culture in Babylon. He was set apart by: 1. Personal excellence—a high quality of work, 2. Personal integrity—he was tested, tempted, and threatened yet remained pure, 3. A rich spiritual life—he served and worshipped God even when the cost was high.

Result of Being Set Apart

Daniel distinguished himself to the king. The king recognized Daniel's hard work, talent, and integrity, and he made Daniel one of three commissioners to be in authority over the 120 satraps who managed the business affairs of the kingdom. Daniel's excellence produced his influence which provided his opportunity. Daniel was a moral leader in a society of immoral people. Daniel so distinguished himself that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom, "He possessed an extraordinary spirit and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom." (Dan.6:3).

A Dog Eat Dog World

What would have happened to a man like Daniel if he had worked in our day at a company like Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Health South, or one of the many crooked companies involved in scandals in the 21st century? THEY WOULD HAVE HAD TO GET RID OF HIM. We also live in a fast paced dog eat dog world where we encounter people who consider their ambitions and desires much more important than our welfare. The higher we climb the ladder of influence, the more sharks and lions we meet. In Daniel's case the sharks were all the other commissioners and satraps who had a "license to steal" before Daniel came in and starting checking the books and holding them accountable. You can imagine their appeal to Daniel, "come now what can it hurt to look the other way occasionally? After all, the king has great surpluses and he will never miss it. Let's just "cook the books" a little, maybe a little "after hours trading", or maybe we can "alter the price on our options". Nevertheless, Daniel had a perspective that was foreign to them, like Paul said in Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, do

your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than men...it is the Lord whom you serve." To protect themselves from Daniel's honesty, they sent out a squadron of private investigators to dig up some dirt on Daniel. To their dismay, Daniel was like no one else they knew—he was clean. What was their problem with Daniel then? The problem was that Daniel was too good at his job. In verse 2 it says his job was to make sure that, "the king might not suffer loss". Daniel was the head "watch dog" over the king's property. We know from the story in Esther that the commissioners and satraps expected to get rich, but Daniel would not "play ball". They began to hatch a plan to exploit his weakness which was a clear faith and obedience to God lived out in the open for all to see.

The King's Weakness

The king had the usual massive pride and big ego common to most kings, so the men approached the king with a sinister plan to exploit the king's big ego. They posited the idea that for 30 days all people should pray only to the king and to no other men or gods. If any man prayed to any other god, he would be thrown into the lion's den. Let's have a month O king where everybody focuses on you, celebrates you, after all you are the greatest! This sounded appropriate to the king so he passed the law, and a Persian law was unalterable, to alter it would mean the king made a mistake and we know that couldn't happen. The perfect plan was in place, Daniel would not stop praying to his God, and the king would not change the law.

The Prayer of Daniel

Daniel knew about the law (6:10), but he did not hesitate. He entered his house, opened his windows toward Jerusalem and prayed to the one true God as he did faithfully every day. The crooks had his house staked out so they gathered a multitude of witnesses to testify against Daniel. I confess that if it had been me, I would have kept the windows shut, but Daniel was more faithful and wiser than me.

At 80 years old it would have been tempting to take the easy way out, but in Daniel's perspective he wasn't just working for the king; he was serving God, glorifying God, and exerting influence for God. If he had backed off, compromised, or rationalized it would have cost him his witness and influence for God. This decision was very much like the decision Peter had to make in Acts 4:19. The ruling body, the Sanhedrin, had arrested him, threatened him, and commanded him to stop preaching the Gospel. Peter's response was, "you be the judge whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than God, for we cannot stop" preaching the Gospel.

The King's Dilemma or Sleepless in Babylon

The greedy bad guys wasted no time turning Daniel in for violating the new law. Can you imagine the accusation, "I accuse you of being faithful to God". Daniel probably said, "Thank you". The men brought the charge against Daniel, and the king started trying to find a way out of executing him. Verse 14 says the king spent all day "exerting himself to rescue him". The crooks kept insisting that no law of the Medes and the Persians could be changed, so at the end of the day the king had no choice but to have Daniel thrown into the lion's den. This was a large underground cave with an opening at the top. It was filled with hungry lions. Critics might say these were pets or previously fed or something, but verse 24 makes it clear they were vicious hungry predators. The king then thoroughly sealed the den so nobody could help or rescue Daniel. At this point we get a good idea of what the king thought of Daniel. First of all he knew that Daniel was righteous and the others were evil, because the king ended up having all Daniel's accusers executed. Secondly the king respected the God of Israel and knew of Daniel's service and faith in God. In verse 16, the king said, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you."

Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting and was unable to sleep because of his concern for Daniel. At dawn, the king hurried down to the den to see what happened during the night. I'm sure the previous executions in the den had left nothing but bones strewn about in the den so the king was anxious about what remained of his trusted servant Daniel. With a "troubled voice" he cried out "Daniel, has your God been able to deliver you from the lions?" You know the rest of the story that the angel of the Lord shut the lions' mouths, the king was very pleased, and the king then gave orders for all Daniel's accusers to be thrown into the den. The text says the king gave orders for Daniel to be taken out "because he had trusted in his God". This was such a great witness to the king that he made a decree and sent it out to all his kingdom that all "are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel". The conclusion in v.28 tells us that Daniel enjoyed great success and respect in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel was marked by personal excellence (he did his job very well), personal integrity, and a personal relationship with God that determined all that he did. The result of these qualities was:

1. Daniel occupied the highest position of authority in the land which made him a great witness for the Lord.
2. Daniel was able to bring great respect in Babylon and Persia for the God of Israel as well as his countrymen.
3. Daniel's respect and authority along with the king's appreciation of him set the stage for

Cyrus to allow the sons of Israel to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

4. With Jerusalem rebuilt, it set the stage for the fulfillment of all the prophecies about the coming of the Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection.

5. Because Christ came to Jerusalem and died for our sins, we are saved.

ALL BECAUSE DANIEL FOCUSED ON THE PROBLEM SOLVER INSTEAD OF THE PROBLEM.

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