

7. From the Lions' Den to the Angel's Den (1Q 2020—Daniel)

Biblical Material: Daniel 6, 1 Sam. 18:6–9, Matt. 6:6, Acts 5:27–32, Mark 6:14–29, Heb. 11:35–38.

Quotes

- God could have kept Daniel out of the lion's den. But God has never promised to keep us out of hard places. What He has promised is to go with us through every hard place, and bring us through victoriously. *Merv Rosell*
- His enemies had counted on the lions taking care of Daniel. What they hadn't counted on was his God taking care of Daniel. *Tony Evans*
- If God kills, lies, cheats, discriminates, and otherwise behaves in a manner that puts the Mafia to shame, that's okay, he's God. He can do whatever he wants. Anyone who adheres to this philosophy has had his sense of morality, decency, justice and humaneness warped beyond recognition by the very book that is supposedly preaching the opposite. *Dennis McKinsey*

Questions

What is the significance of this story? Is it an endorsement of stubbornly clinging to religious practices, or is there a deeper truth here? Once again, when is it rationalization and compromise (Daniel could have shut the windows, after all), and when is it a matter of principle? What does the end of the evil schemers tell us? How does God look in all of this?

Bible Summary

Daniel 6 recounts the attempt of jealous officials in the court of King Darius to eliminate Daniel. He is sentenced to be thrown to the lions, but survives because of God's intervention. In 1 Sam. 18:6–9 we read of Saul's increasing jealousy of David. We are told to pray in secret, and not to make a show of it (Matt. 6:6). Peter and the other apostles declare they have to obey God and not men (Acts 5:27–32). Mark 6:14–29 describes the foolishness of Herod, entranced by a girl's dancing. Heb. 11:35–38 speaks of the heroes and heroines of faith.

Comment

As always, we're considering how such Biblical information relates to our concept of God and how he operates in the context of the great controversy. There are plenty of questions here. Once again it is far more than just a matter of prayer. The devil uses Daniel's faithfulness as a weapon against him, deliberately targeting him because of his influence. The king is tricked.

Then Darius says some interesting things—even to the point of being convinced (it seems) that Daniel's God would save him. He asks in the morning if Daniel's God has been able to save him. Darius certainly sees the issue at the level of the divine! However his decree at the end enforcing compulsory worship of Daniel's God is very much like that of Nebuchadnezzar's, primarily respecting intervening power and might. Once again it is at the level of "signs and wonders,"—yet at least it got the king's attention, and others... Then again, what of the instant punishment meted out on the schemers?

I remember talking with Rebekah one time and she asked me, "But which God, Daddy? The nice one, or the nasty one?" For so much of the time down through the ages, the church has been saying that with God there is no real freedom. You do what He says, and that's that. No other

way. The only alternative... well we don't want to think about that! Which can be puzzling to some. As if God were saying to Adam and Eve: "Look, here's the choice: do exactly as I say or... death!" Some choice! This could even be termed "Hobson's choice," named after a horse trader in Cambridge, England, who would offer just one horse—the choice being take it or leave it.

What kind of freedom is God offering if we see him this way? Hardly freedom at all if the only viable choice is to slavishly follow His dictates. Add to that the fact that what God most wants is our love, and the situation gets worse. Love me or I'll execute you? Is that the message? Or is the choice God gave to Adam and Eve the choice to follow Him or to have the inevitable consequences of going their own way?

Why did Jesus come? Jesus answers: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness. The truth will set you free." John 12:46, 8:32. Christ came to show what God was really like—that He was primarily concerned with freedom, and to set humanity free from the slavery to sin. In fact, that is Christ's opening statement in His manifesto—quoting from Isaiah 61 to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. (Luke 4:18). Free indeed. (John 8:36).

Free from what to what? Free from the *compulsion* that sin truly is, the force that the Devil uses in his programme of lies and deception. Free from this self-centred way of living which is in reality a way of dying. Free from ourselves—our own worst enemy. Free to choose—to choose the God who values nothing higher than the freedom of His created beings. Free to follow the best advice - the advice of our Maker which we find to be true and trustworthy. Free to love God—which we cannot do while we are busy loving ourselves—free to love from an open and honest heart that willingly and freely agrees that God is truly right.

The choice is not "Do as I say, or else!" It is a plea from a heart of love that will *not* interfere with our freedom to choose, saying "Look at the evidence. Believe what I tell you, because you can see that it is proved true. Come to me and find healing from sin, comfort for your pain, and an eternal life together with me. Come! For if you don't, I cannot help you, and you will experience what sin does to you: utter self-destruction." It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. (Gal.5:1) This is a freedom that lasts forever, which is restricted only by our choosing, knowing that the way chosen by Lucifer can never lead to true happiness and individual fulfilment. Only with God can we be truly free. Forever free.

Ellen White Comments

Fallen angels feared that his influence would weaken their control over the rulers of the kingdom, for Daniel was high in command. The accusing host of evil angels stirred up the presidents and princes to envy and jealousy, and they watched Daniel closely to find some occasion against him that they might report him to the king; but they failed. Then these agents of Satan sought to make his faithfulness to God the cause of his destruction. Evil angels laid out the plan for them, and these agents readily carried it into effect.

The king was ignorant of the subtle mischief purposed against Daniel. With full knowledge of the king's decree, Daniel still bows before his God, "his windows being open." He considers supplication to God of so great importance that he would rather sacrifice his life than relinquish it. On account of his praying to God, he is cast into the lions' den. Evil angels thus far accomplish their purpose. But Daniel continues to pray, even in the den of lions. Was he suffered to be consumed? Did God forget him there? Oh, no; Jesus, the mighty Commander of the hosts of heaven, sent His angel to close the mouths of those hungry lions that they should not hurt the praying man of God; and all was peace in that terrible den. The king witnessed his preservation and brought him out with honors. Satan and his angels were defeated and enraged. {1T 295-6}