

## Peace and Strength in the Midst of Your Lion's Den

### Daniel Chapter 6

Daniel 1-6 forms the historical portion of the book (605 BC to 539 BC). Beginning in the next lesson we will examine the prophetic portion of Daniel (chapters 7-12). In these historical chapters we find a wonderful example of how a follower of the Most High is to live in a world that has no recognition of God.

- 1. Daniel pictures the New Covenant believer...** The name Daniel has three syllables and each one in Hebrew has a meaning. "Dan" means "judge." The little "ee" sound means "my" in Hebrew, and "el" is the Hebrew word for God "God". So, Daniel's name means "God, my judge" or "God is my judge."
- 2. Daniel's entire life was centered around God...** Daniel's way of looking at the world was drenched with God. This is seen in the way he ate (Dan. 1:8, 16), the way he interpreted dreams (Dan. 2:28; 5:26), the way he viewed events in his world (Dan. 1:17) and the way he prayed (Daniel 6). Read the entire text.
- 3. Daniel's commitment to God was known by the world...** Daniel's life of prayer was so well known and so established as part of his character that his enemies knew that this was one place they could count on him not weaseling. Verse 10 of Daniel 6 illustrates the courage and confidence of conviction:

*"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."*

#### I. Daniel acted in full knowledge of the law and its consequences, not ignorance.

Don't forget, Daniel is right on the brink of being promoted to the main ruler over Persia. Think of the rationalizations that must have rushed to his head— *"my influence would be so great if I held that position ... I can do more for God alive than dead ... it's only thirty days, and then I can pray again ... legalism is surely a worse sin than expediency ... etc."* But he rejected all these rationalizations.

#### II. He went to his house not out into hiding or out into the desert.

He could have kept on praying to his God without putting himself at risk if he had just gone underground for thirty days. There is no law that says you have to pray 'according to one's custom.' He went to the room with windows (open windows)—the one in the second story of the house, the one most visible, the one that faced Jerusalem and not the palace in Babylon. Daniel is not just praying contrary to the king's decree. He is making a public statement. We would say today, he is demonstrating. He is doing an act of public civil disobedience. And he is doing so in a public way.

#### III. He prayed three times a day and every day knowing that he was being observed.

He would make sure that he is not missed in his refusal to obey this law. When Daniel prayed, he did not use words that were vague and ambiguous that some clever defense attorney could argue were really made to Darius because they didn't specify which god was addressed. It says, "He gave thanks before his God." Not Darius. And not the gods of the Medes and Persians, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Daniel did not change the way he prayed or do anything different to the pressures of the law Darius had made. It says at the end of the verse that he prayed "as he had done previously." There were many ways to pray that might not have been detected and would have fulfilled the law of his God. But Daniel prayed daringly, defiantly, and in his usual disciplined way of three times a day. This activity is a bold declaration of Daniel's faith in God.

(Read Matthew 6:5-6). Does this indict Daniel's public demonstration of prayer? I don't think so. Jesus was warning against our love of praise for prayer, not our *willingness to suffer for prayer*. He was not saying that it is wrong to be seen in prayer. He was saying it is wrong to want to be seen so as to be praised for your piety. *Blessed are you when men persecute you for righteousness' sake* (Matthew 5:10); but *woe to you when you use your righteousness to seek their praise* (Matthew 6:2-4).

### **Daniel's prayer was disciplined and regular.**

When the time came for a demonstration, Daniel did not have to change anything. He already was praying three times a day in a stated place. There was pattern and routine and discipline. Does it strike you as strange that in America today almost no Christians pray this way? I'm sure that there are some who would celebrate this absence of order and design and habit and pattern as a sign of freedom from legalism. I might believe it if I saw anything like the freedom and power of Daniel where discipline like his is absent. But I don't see it, I don't believe it.

Could it be that Daniel's discipline in prayer was the secret of his unexpected, unplanned, spontaneous encounters with God? Could it be that discipline is not the boring substitute for spontaneity and power but the garden where it grows? You till the garden with patient discipline and suddenly God makes a plant grow with supernatural power. Plan some discipline into your prayer life this year. Be like Daniel.

### **Daniel's prayer was more precious than life.**

Just think of it. Daniel knew that the penalty for praying would be the lion's den. I don't think Daniel knew that he would be delivered any more than Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew it as they stood before the fiery furnace and said, "If God does not deliver us, be it known to you, we will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:18). This must mean that prayer is more important than life. Daniel would rather pray than save his life. Not praying was a worse prospect to Daniel than being eaten by lions. That is a radical commitment to prayer. Just think of it. Can you say with Daniel: "You will have to take my life before you take my prayer?" This is a challenge for all of us in our trust in the kingdom of God!

"Legalism is not attacking the American church today in the form of spiritual discipline. Not by a long shot! That is not our besetting danger. I think the most distinctive form of legalism (not the only one) in our day is almost exactly the opposite, with two sides to the coin. One side is a fear of anything remotely resembling the biblical concept of discipline implied in phrases like "train yourself in godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7) or "strive to enter by the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24) or "take up your cross daily" (Luke 9:23) or "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:13) or "I pommel my body and subdue it" (1 Corinthians 9:27) or "If your right eye offends you pluck it out" (Matthew 5:29) or "strive together with me in your prayers" (Romans 15:30). That whole reality of Christian discipline, that has marked the greatest saints for 1900 years, is feared today in the new legalism. The other side of the coin is the emergence today of what you might call psychologically correct speech. If you don't use a certain language to describe morality and ethics and duty and God's commandments that is "psychologically correct," then you are defective as a Christian people helper. In place of the old list of taboos there is now a new list of taboos: words like "ought" and "should" and "must" dare not (read: should not) be used. And warnings like "those who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21), and "if you live according to the flesh you will die" (Romans 8:13) are banned. They are simply not "psychologically correct" ways of dealing with reality. If there is a creeping legalism in American evangelicalism it is not the discipline of Daniel's praying three times a day. And I urge you to consider whether some of our weakness in the cushy, self-indulgent, meet-my-need American Christianity." – John Piper