

Daniel in the Face of Opposition

September 15, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Daniel 6:1-23

Session Outline

1. The Plot (Daniel 6:1-9)
2. The Stand (Daniel 6:10-16)
3. The Result (Daniel 6:17-23)

Theological Theme

God's people are to obey and trust Him in all circumstances, even when it goes against the prevailing culture. Living for God will always draw opposition and possible negative consequences, but He is always faithful.

Call to Action

When opposition arises, what is your first reaction? Who do you go to? Who you go to matters.



Leader Guide

Daniel in the Face of Opposition

Introduction

When people think of their favorite children's Bible stories, Daniel and the Lion's Den is often included. There are some great points from this account that kids can understand and apply, but the reality is that what Daniel faced was brutal and life threatening. This was a result of his choice to live a godly life regardless of his circumstances or the difficulties of living in a foreign land as an exile. Daniel is a great example of what it means to trust and obey God. The application for adults to be found in this lesson is beyond that of what a children's story may tell and deserves our attention in every detail.

- ❓ What are some of your favorite children's Bible stories?
- ❓ What are the main points from Daniel and the Lion's Den that you remember as a child?


Session Summary

In the face of opposition to God, the best response is to pray like Daniel. It is easy to compromise the truth when we are threatened. By all reason, Daniel faced a punishment of certain death if he chose to continue his habit of praying three times a day in plain sight. But instead of cowering in fear, Daniel continued faithfully in prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord.


God used this situation to show His glory and reinforce Daniel's faithful witness. The king recognized Daniel's faith and even expressed his own hope in the God of Daniel when there was nothing even the king could do to save Daniel. God is still the only hope for the world, and those who trust in Him are equipped to stand firm in Him no matter the opposition.

1. The Plot (Daniel 6:1-9)

Once again, as throughout his time in exile, Daniel distinguished himself as man of character and resolve and was given a position of honor and power by the king. As one of three leaders directly under Darius, Daniel was described as having an extraordinary spirit. The power given to him and that he was so highly regarded bothered his contemporaries and made him the subject for attack. But Daniel lived in such a way that his enemies could find nothing in his character or actions to bring against him. This doesn't mean he was without sin but that he lived an upright life full of integrity and blameless in his behavior.


 Is it possible for us to live the way Daniel did? Why or why not?

When godly people are distinguished and elevated, it will bring opposition. Those who live by worldly standards will take notice and feel threatened. When Daniel was given a position of power and distinction, the ungodly plotted how they could have him removed from power. It is no surprise that the world comes after those who stand for the Lord and live by His standards. Jealousy is a powerful motivator and caused the men to start conniving. Yet, they had trouble finding anything to bring out about Daniel that would hurt him in any way.

 What would it look like for us to live in a way that people have trouble finding anything against us? What would this mean about the way we handle the times we do sin?

Daniel had lived a life of such integrity that there were no skeletons in his closets and the men knew they wouldn't be able to entrap him in sin. Consider whether someone could say the same about you and what that kind of life says about the Lord. In their scheming against Daniel, the men finally concluded that the only way they could catch him doing something "wrong" was to make a law prohibiting worship of God. In that area he was unwavering and steadfast.

The men came up with a convincing argument that appealed to Darius's ego and the trap was laid. To ensure their plan worked, these men sought a type of law that couldn't be changed. They had the foresight to recognize the affection Darius had for Daniel and that he might seek to protect Daniel after realizing the implications of the ruling.

 Application: What needs to change in your life so that others might have trouble charging you with a lack of integrity?

Success and Envy

Daniel continued to prosper under Persian rule. Darius the Mede made him one of three administrators over the 120 districts within his jurisdiction. Daniel was so successful that he aroused the jealousy of other administrators and officials. Knowing Daniel was loyal to his God, they devised a plot through which they hoped to have him executed for treason.

2. The Stand (Daniel 6:10-15)

Though Daniel submitted to the authority of the land and respected those in power, he was loyal to God above all. When the decree was signed, Daniel continued his practices of worship. He didn't pray more or less; he simply continued the disciplines already established in his life. Daniel refused to compromise his faith in any way, just as he had when faced with the food in Daniel chapter 1. He showed more allegiance to the Lord than any earthly ruler. Daniel shows us what it looks like to love God above all else.

Daniel's custom was to pray in his upper room, in front of his windows toward Jerusalem, three times a day. Faced with an option to give up his customary prayer time or be thrown into a den of lions, he chose to obey God rather than men. Daniel did not fear the civil consequences of his disobedience but trusted God's ability to provide for him or bring him home to heaven.



What does this tell you about the importance of having regularly spiritual disciplines as a foundational habit of your life? Why is that important, even in seasons that are free from distress?

The men knew they would find Daniel praying because of his past record of faithfulness. Although they portrayed Daniel's prayer life as disrespectful to the king, nothing could be further from the truth. Daniel had repeatedly shown respect to the ruler while also submitting to God as his ultimate authority. Faced with the option of giving up his faithful practice to save himself, Daniel trusted God no matter what.

Once the men caught Daniel breaking this new decree, the king was distressed at their report. Darius had been used in the plot against Daniel and nothing could be changed about the decree. His foolish decision to listen to the enemies of Daniel and give in to his pride came back to haunt him as he faced the loss of his trusted leader. We too must be careful about making bold decisions based on wrong motives that will have undesired consequences.



Darius let his pride blind him to what the men were really doing. When was a time you were tempted to let your ego get in the way of faithfulness to God?



Application: What is an area where you might be tempted to change how you act or speak to please men rather than God? How can you rely on God to stand firm in those moments?

3. The Result (Daniel 6:16-23)

With no other recourse, the king had to throw Daniel into the lion's den as decreed. It is obvious that Daniel's example had a great influence on the king. Darius recognized the faith that caused Daniel to live differently and showed respect for Daniel's God. Even Darius realized it was up to God to deliver Daniel. Then the king sealed the den of lions, and Daniel was left to his fate.

After a sleepless night of fasting, Darius rushed to check on Daniel. Note his address of Daniel when he arrived. In this crisis, the Lord whom Daniel served was front and center in Darius's mind. Daniel answered and assured Darius that God had indeed saved him from certain death. Daniel stood firm that he had done no wrong before the king, even as his obedience to God had defied the decree.

- ❓ What did Daniel's obedience show about God that the king and others might not have witnessed had Daniel compromised to obey the law?

Daniel reminds us that sometimes believers will be unjustly accused and even persecuted, but God is more powerful than anything the world brings against us. The Lord demonstrated once again that He can deliver His people from any circumstance. Things may not happen in the way we expect, but God's plans are always for our good and for His glory. Had Daniel not gone into the lion's den, Darius may not have witnessed God's undeniable power and faithfulness to His people. Because Daniel obeyed God, the name of the Lord was spread far and wide.

- ❓ How was Daniel's situation used for His good? How was it used for God's glory?

When the morning came and Daniel was not harmed, he made clear that his salvation had been from the Lord. Consider the words Daniel spoke about what happened that night with the lions. He gave respect to the king and then declared emphatically it was the Lord who saved him.

The king was not only thrilled Daniel was saved, but he also punished the ones who had plotted against him. He commanded that those who had set up Daniel with the decree were to be thrown into the den of lions.

This reminds us that God's justice always reigns, whether in this life or the one to come. The fact that the lions immediately devoured those thrown into the pit also refutes any argument that Daniel was not eaten because of some natural cause. God alone protected Daniel, and God alone deserved the glory.




- ❓ Application: What is your primary takeaway from this account that you might have missed hearing it as a child?

Conclusion

We can draw much application from Daniel's life. In the face of calamity, we can trust in the Lord and have peace. Although Daniel had found favor with the King during his exile in Babylon, others became jealous and plotted against him. Still, Daniel refused to compromise his faith and stayed loyal to the one true God.

Those who wanted to bring about Daniel's downfall couldn't find anything to accuse him of, so they attacked his faith. Knowing his commitment to his prayer life, they conspired to design a decree condemning anyone who prayed in this way to the lion's den. When the world comes after our faith, we can be like Daniel and continue to seek and obey the Lord. Daniel did not waiver despite the punishment he faced.

All the turmoil he faced did not change the way Daniel lived, but it did change others. We too are to live in a way that influences those around us toward faith in the Lord.

-  Where do you need to develop further spiritual disciplines as a means of drawing near to God every day?
-  How can we as a group encourage one another toward faithfulness to God over the world?
-  How can you seek a gospel conversation with someone by sharing the story of Daniel and the lions?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for how He is faithful to you in all things. Ask for wisdom and equipping to commit to Him daily so you are prepared when attacks come your way.

Memory Verse

Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm." —Daniel 6:21-22

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Daniel* by Daniel Akin
- *Daniel* by Rodney Stortz
- *Daniel: Holman Old Testament Commentary* by Kenneth Gangel

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Daniel

Purpose

The theme of the book of Daniel is the hope of the people of God during the times of the Gentiles. The phrase, “the times of the Gentiles,” used by Jesus (Lk 21:24), refers to the time between the Babylonian captivity and Jesus’s return. It is a time when God’s people live under ungodly world dominion. The book promotes hope by teaching that at all times “the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms” (5:21). Daniel’s purpose was to exhort Israel to be faithful to the sovereign God of Israel during the times of the Gentiles. He accomplished this by recounting examples of godly trust and prophecies of God’s ultimate victory.

Author

The critical view of the book of Daniel suggests it was written by a second-century BC Jewish author, not the historical Daniel. This view is largely based on a naturalistic perspective that denies the possibility of the authentic foretelling found in Daniel. On the other hand, the traditional view maintains that Daniel the prophet did indeed write this book sometime shortly after the end of the Babylonian captivity (sixth century BC). Internal testimony supports this claim. In the text itself, Daniel claimed to have written down visions given by God (8:2; 9:2, 20; 12:5). Passages which contain third-person references to Daniel do not disprove his authorship. After all, authors commonly refer to themselves in the third person, as for instance Moses does in the Pentateuch. Moreover, God speaks of himself in the third person (Ex 20:2, 7). Finally, Jesus Christ attributed the book of Daniel to Daniel himself (Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14).

Setting

The historical setting of the book of Daniel is the Babylonian captivity. The book opens after King Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Judah (605 BC) when he brought Daniel and his friends to Babylon along with other captives among the Judean nobility. Nebuchadnezzar assaulted Judah again in 597 and brought ten thousand captives back to Babylon. In 586 he once again besieged Jerusalem, this time destroying the city, the holy temple, and exiling the people of Judah to Babylon. Daniel’s ministry began in 605 when he arrived at Babylon with the first Jewish captives, extended throughout the Babylonian captivity (which ended in 539), and concluded sometime after the third year of Cyrus the Great, the Medo-Persian king who overthrew Babylonia (see Dn 1:21; 10:1).

Special Features

Daniel, whose name means “God Judges” or “God’s Judge,” was a sixth-century BC prophet living in exile in Babylon. Daniel recounts key events firsthand that occurred during the Jewish captivity and also shares visions that were given to him by God.

Extended Commentary

Daniel 6:1-23

6:1 In one of the best-known stories in the book, Daniel was cast into the lions' den for his faith. Since Daniel was about fifteen years old in 605 BC when the Babylonians brought him as a captive to Babylon, and since the events in Dn 6 most likely took place in the second or third year after the Medo-Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, Daniel would have been approximately eighty-two years old when he was thrown to the lions, not a teenager as is often pictured in Bible story books. Darius began organizing the newly conquered Babylonian Empire and immediately decided to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom. These 120 satraps were lower tier officials who helped rule the entire empire or just over the part of the empire that was formerly under Babylonian control.

6:2 The king appointed three administrators over the 120 satraps to assure that taxes would be properly collected without any embezzlement or corruption by the 120 government officials. For these positions, the king needed men with trustworthy reputations. So he chose Daniel as one of these officials. He must have heard of Daniel's reputation; perhaps he was even aware of Daniel's interpretation of the writing that had appeared on the wall the night Babylon fell.

6:3 Daniel proved to be a superlative administrator because of his extraordinary spirit, a phrase used previously to describe his character (5:12). Therefore, the king planned to set him over the whole realm as prime minister.

6:4–5 The king's choice of Daniel created jealousy among the other court officials, and they wished to denounce Daniel. Since Daniel was both diligent and honest in his work, they could find no corruption in him. Therefore, they sought to trap him by creating a law to ban Daniel from worshiping his God.

6:6–7 When these corrupt officials approached the king, they falsely claimed that all government officials supported the proposal that for thirty days, anyone who petitioned any god or man except the king would be thrown into the lions' den. By agreeing to this law, Darius probably had not claimed deity but rather adopted the role of a priestly mediator (see note at 3:4–5). His goal was to unite the Babylonian realm under the authority of the new Persian Empire.

6:8–9 The irrevocability of a law of the Medes and Persians is confirmed elsewhere in Scripture (Est 1:19; 8:8) and secular literature (Diodorus of Sicily, XVII:30).

6:10 Even though the law prohibiting prayer had gone into effect, Daniel still prayed with his windows opened toward Jerusalem. Jewish people in exile always pray toward Jerusalem—even today—just as Solomon had instructed in his prayer of dedication for the temple (1Kg 8:44–49). Daniel prayed not out of rebellion toward the king but out of obedience to the greater command of God. As the apostles would later say, "We must obey God rather than people" (Ac 5:29). So great was Daniel's reputation for spiritual commitment that even his enemies knew he would obey God rather than bow to the king's edict.

6:11–13 The true purpose of the administrators in v. 6 comes out.

6:14–15 The king was very displeased not because Daniel had defied him but because he came to understand that the true purpose of the law was to trap Daniel, whom he respected. We can only imagine what strategies the king tried in order to rescue Daniel, but the administrators would not be put off.

6:16 The Persians used mutilation by lions as one of several brutal forms of execution. It was Daniel's continual service to God that caused him to be cast into the lions' den; now the king hoped that this devotion would cause God to deliver Daniel. The word for den can also be translated as "pit."

6:17–18 Daniel was cast into a pit over which a stone was placed and sealed with the signet rings of the king and his nobles. King Darius then spent the night fasting and presumably praying for Daniel.

6:19–20 Note the question on the mind of Darius was the ability of Daniel's God.

6:21–23 God uses angels to accomplish his purposes, including protection of his people (Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14). He had done so for Daniel's three friends in the furnace many years earlier (Dn 3:25). As on that occasion, this may have been an angel or even the angel of the Lord (i.e., a preincarnate appearance of the Messiah). Daniel was not claiming perfection in declaring that he was found innocent before God. Rather, Daniel claimed that his allegiance to God made him guiltless in this matter. It was Daniel's faith in God, not his works, that brought him deliverance from the lions.¹

References

1. "Daniel," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).