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DANIEL IN THE DEN OF LIONS.

JULY 30. – DAN. 6:10-23.

"The Lord is thy keeper." – Psa. 121:5.

NOTHING gives us a higher opinion of the kings of ancient times, their willingness to recognize character and merit wherever it might be found, than does the record furnished in the Book of Daniel. If we were surprised at Nebuchadnezzar's impartial treatment of his captives, in the selection of Daniel and his companions, and their education and advancement in the kingdom; if we were surprised that the king so greatly honored Daniel for the interpretation of a dream; if we were surprised that, when convinced that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were servants of the true God, Nebuchadnezzar gave them still higher positions in the empire; and if we were surprised that Belshazzar took no offence at Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall, but highly honored and rewarded him for his faithful, plain, outspoken words, – we are still more surprised to find that King Darius of the Medes and Persians, so far from destroying all the rulers of Babylon, including Daniel, apparently spared all except the king alive, and gave Daniel a [R2501 : page 183] very high position in the empire. We may reasonably assume that, altho God's providence was in the matter of Daniel's preferment, nevertheless there was some creditable generosity in those heathen kings, as well as some natural ability and good quality manifested by the Prophet Daniel.

As one of the three presidents of the empire, and having charge over a hundred and twenty of its provinces, Daniel stood in the way of many who sought office, and, as a man of unimpeachable character, no doubt he stood in the way of many schemes for the plundering of the treasury; for such public plundering and dishonesty, said to be very general throughout Eastern countries to-day, was probably so then to a large extent. For these selfish reasons, Daniel was sure to have a host of secret enemies, who sought his downfall. From the narrative we

might suppose that these enemies, many of whom would be prominent in official life, had watched in vain to find any real cause of complaint, and that they finally concluded that, if fault would be found at all, it must be on account of his religion.

How this reminds us of the Apostle's testimony, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," and again, our Lord's words, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you!" (2 Tim. 3:12; John 15:19.) Even where there are no selfish motives to impel the persecution, there is ever present the distinction between "light" and "darkness:" and the fact noticed by all is mentioned by our Lord, – that all who are themselves of the darkness hate the light and all who walk in the light. (John 3:19-21.) Some one has truly said, "Whosoever does well and is faithful and true, while others are dishonest and false, must expect to be opposed and hated. Every effort will be made to injure his character, to drag him into the mire, and to make it appear that he is no better than those who assail him. Envy is sharper than a serpent's tooth, and deadlier than the poison of asps."

Shakespeare has truly said: –

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny."

"That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect;
For slander's mark was ever yet the fair;
So thou be good, slander doth yet approve
Thy worth the greater."

Sometimes we speak of the snares that are laid for the feet of God's servants as fixed by Satan, their great Adversary, and this may be so, at least by supervision, and yet apparently there are some so fully imbued with the spirit of their "father, the devil," that his nefarious schemes and plots seem to come quite naturally to them.

And thus it was with Daniel's enemies, who sought his ruin. Very skilfully they counseled with the king respecting the necessity that the people should recognize him as a god, and urged this as essential to the enforcement of obedience to the king's commands amongst his new subjects. The theory of the empire was that the king's person was specially possessed by Ormuzd, the deity of the empire, that his word was therefore representatively the word of that god, and that therefore all of his decrees were infallible and inviolable, even by himself. Taking advantage of this law of the Medes and Persians, that no decree could be altered or abrogated, these plotters succeeded in having the king set apart thirty days in which it should be a crime to offer a petition or worship to any other person or god save to Darius himself.

We are not to suppose that the king had so false an idea of his own personal consequence, nor that these his officers entertained the view that he was an infallible god: rather, it was a matter which they suggested as a piece of statecraft, a fraud upon the people, justified, in their perverted judgments, by the greater peace and security from the prevalence of such a superstitious reverence for the king and his laws. The false reasoning was of the Jesuitical sort, which says, An evil or a falsehood is justified if beneficial results are hoped for; – the same false principle which operates in the minds of many intelligent preachers who, while thoroughly disbelieving in the doctrine of eternal torment themselves, countenance and encourage, or at least do not discourage, a belief in the falsehood on the part of their hearers; hoping that the prevalent superstition on the subject may prove a restraint upon the masses.

Having obtained the king's signature to the new law, the conspirators exulted in the thought that Daniel at last was in their grasp, and already practically destroyed. They seem to have known the man's character so well as not to doubt that he would be faithful to his religious convictions, and thus furnish them all the opportunity desired for his apprehension. And it was so. After the matter was proclaimed as law, as having had the king's signet, Daniel worshiped

as before, kneeling three times a day before the Lord in prayer, thanksgiving and supplication – with his windows open toward Jerusalem, his expectations bright with hope in the Lord's promises, and especially with the thought that now the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation were about fulfilled, and that very soon Cyrus, according to the prophecy, would become king, and send back the covenanted people to the land of promise.

We are not informed why Daniel had adopted a [R2501 : page 184] habit of private worship in so public a manner as to be generally known to the people – a manner so different from that which the Lord commended to the household of faith of this Gospel age, saying, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet [secret apartment], and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to the Father which is in secret." (Matt. 6:6.) Quite probably the custom of Babylon was such as to make Daniel's more open course the reasonable and proper one. Possibly all worship was more or less public or visible, and for Daniel to have worshiped in secret might have been misunderstood to mean that he did not worship at all; while to worship as he did, not before an idol, but with his face toward Jerusalem, the typical city of God, the great King, and its Temple, the typical habitation of God, the great King, would be his standing confession of God before the various nationalities of Babylon, including his own people, the Jews, who would need just such an illustration of faithfulness to the true God and separation from idolatry.

Daniel was not satisfied to merely close his eyes in prayer after he had retired to rest, as do many people living under the greater light of this Gospel age, and under greater privileges and opportunities and grander promises. He had a great God who was worthy of reverence and worship, and he was great enough as a man to appreciate that it was a privilege to have intercourse and fellowship with his Creator. He was not only not ashamed to bow the knee to the Almighty, but was unwilling to assume a less humble position before God than he and others assumed toward earthly kings. Our judgment is that it is

impossible for any Christian to maintain a proper consistent walk in life, and to build up such a character and faith structure as are represented by the Apostle as composed of "gold, silver and precious stones," without prayer; – more than this, without regularity in prayer; – we would almost be inclined to say, without *kneeling* in prayer: and we believe that the experiences [R2502 : page 184] and testimonies of the truest and best of the Lord's people who have ever lived will corroborate this.

One of the points of the Adversary's attack, surest to have a baneful influence, is along this line. When the Lord's people become overcharged with the cares of this life, instead of realizing their danger and seeking the help of the Lord to order the affairs of life differently, the suggestion comes that they are too weary to pray, or that another time will be more favorable: or perhaps they are so fully engrossed that reverence and acknowledgment to the Lord, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, is entirely forgotten: or perhaps sin lieth at the door, and they seek not to think of the Lord, and therefore avoid the throne of grace: or perhaps coldness has come in from some other cause, and the Lord seems afar off, and prayer becomes a mere formality and is by and by abandoned. The child of God who is in a proper condition of heart-harmony will desire to commune with his Creator, – not only to hear his Word, but also to offer thanksgiving and worship; as surely as he will desire natural food and drink for the sustenance of his natural body. Whoever has not this experience should seek it; and, according to our Lord's promise, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

According to a preconcerted arrangement, the conspirators assembled themselves at the proper time to be witnesses of Daniel's devotion to the true God, and then proceeded to the king to announce that the first one to disobey his decree, and therefore to come under its punishment, was the aged, honored and trusted President of a hundred and twenty provinces of the empire, Daniel. The king was sorely displeased with himself: evidently he had not thought of Daniel, and

of the possibility of such results following his decree. He had been advised to make it, it had seemed to flatter him, he had yielded to the urgent representations of the supposedly well-intentioned and wise men; and now he discerned that he had been deliberately led into a trap for the very purpose of destroying his most valued counselor, of whom, evidently, he had not thought to ask advice before signing the decree.

The king sought every possible way to make void the decree or to excuse Daniel from its penalty; but the conspirators were close at hand with arguments to prove that such a course would be contrary to the usages of the nation, would mean the undermining of the authority of the king and the loss of confidence in his decrees by the people; and he found no escape from his dilemma: his counselors even seemed to threaten the stability of his throne themselves, assuring him that "no decree *may* be changed." Finally the king commanded that Daniel be brought and cast into the den of lions; expressing to Daniel, however, the hope, "May thy God, whom thou servest continually, deliver thee." The exemplary conduct of Daniel, previously and at this time, had its effect upon the king, as expressed by the word, "*continually*." He had confidence that God was with Daniel, and that the God whom Daniel so sincerely worshiped and so intelligently trusted, must be more powerful than all other gods. Such should be the lesson of every Christian life, one which would testify not only to his own character and faithfulness to God, but one also which would testify to the good character and faithfulness of the God whom he worships.

The conspirators were bent on having matters [R2502 : page 185] thoroughly accomplished, and hence the stone (which covered the den and was probably fastened to its place with an iron bar) was doubly sealed with wax, to prove that it was not tampered with – one seal was the king's the other that of the lords of the empire, who were amongst the conspirators, so that there might be no subsequent alteration of the conditions or delivery of Daniel during the night. If the lions were not very hungry at the moment Daniel was first cast in,

it was reckoned that they would certainly become so before morning. How the hearts of these evil men longed for the death of a good man, who had done them no injury – except as his life may have been a living epistle, contradictory to theirs, or as he may have thwarted some of their efforts to do evil!

It is very much to the king's honor that we read that he was so troubled in mind that he could not sleep, but spent the night fasting, and very early in the morning made haste to the den to see whether or not Daniel's God had delivered him. So amongst the friends and neighbors of a true Christian are some who know and appreciate God only as they know and appreciate the Christian character.

The king's words, as he approached the den, were a wonderful tribute to Daniel's faithfulness as a servant of God. "Is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?" The king here associated, and that properly, Daniel's faithful service to God with his hope respecting God's faithfulness to Daniel. And this reminds us of the words of the Apostle (1 John 3:22), "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." – Compare John 8:29.

The heart of Darius was glad as he heard Daniel's voice saluting him, assuring him of his safety; and he at once caused him to be delivered from the den. Daniel expressed one reason for the Lord's deliverance, in the words, "Before him innocency was found in me – as also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." We note the fact that haughtiness and bravado are wholly lacking in the prophet's announcement of the great favor of God manifested on his behalf. There is a lesson here which many of the Lord's people need to learn; namely, that, having done their part, they are not to boast of it, nor to parade their sanctity, nor to speak exultingly of the results, as tho they were of their own achievement, but are simply, like Daniel, to give the glory to God.

The expression, "God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths," need not be understood literally to signify that an angel was personally present and literally prevented the lions from opening their mouths; for tho such a course would be entirely possible, we are to understand the term, angel, in a general way to signify any power or agency which God might employ, and the expression, "shutting of the lions' mouths," would simply signify that they had been restrained from doing violence to Daniel. Nor would we question that an angel of the Lord could have been with Daniel, and kept him company in the den, if such were the will of God; but the presence or absence of an angel was not essential to the divine protection granted.

Not many of the Lord's people are cast into dens of literal lions, and yet at times quite a good many of them have had experiences which strongly resemble this – as for instance, the Apostle Paul, in recounting his experiences, mentions perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils by his own countrymen, perils by the heathen, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, and caps the climax in the specification of "perils amongst *false brethren*." (2 Cor. 11:26.) It is possible for human mouths to do us more harm than the mouths of brute beasts; the Apostle James points this out when he says: "Behold, how small a fire enkindles a great forest! And the tongue is a fire in the world of unrighteousness. The tongue is established among our members as the one which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of life, and it is enkindled of Gehenna; for every species, both of wild beasts and of birds and of reptiles and of sea-creatures, is tamable and has been tamed by the human race; but the tongue of men no man is able to subdue. It is an irrestrainable evil, full of death-producing poison." – James 3:6-8.

As God's providence was over Daniel, permitting him to come under the power of natural wild beasts, and making this a test of his fidelity to God and to principles of righteousness, so the Lord's providence sometimes permits his faithful ones to be exposed to the venom and malice and hate and misrepresentation and slander of

human tongues, far more vicious and far more terrible every way than the wild beasts of the jungle, which can harm but for a moment. Nevertheless, as the Lord was able to deliver Daniel, he is not less able to send his angel (his providences) to shut the mouths of those who would do injury to his people. They may gnash upon them with their teeth, as the lions may have been permitted to do to Daniel, to test his faith in the Lord; yet we are to remember that all things are subject to him with whom we have to do, and whose service we have entered through vows of consecration.

In some instances it may please the Lord to grant a wonderful deliverance, as in the case of Daniel, while in other instances the providential dealings may result otherwise, as for instance in Stephen's case: his plain **[R2502 : page 186]** but kind statement of the truth to his Jewish brethren "cut them to the heart," and "they *gnashed on him with their teeth*, and cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord and cast him out of the city, and stoned him....And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But even in such a case the victory was with the Lord's servant, of whom we read, "But he, being full of the holy spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God." And the record further is that Stephen, in the midst of such persecution, had the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to such an extent that his face was "as the face of an angel" – serene, calm, unperturbed. – Acts 6:15; 7:54-60.

The Scriptural record is that after Daniel's deliverance King Darius caused all the conspirators to be cast into the den of lions, and that thus they were all destroyed. Josephus adds something from tradition, **[R2503 : page 186]** to the effect that, when Daniel was delivered the conspirators claimed that his preservation was due to the fact that some one had fed the lions before he was cast into the den, and that the king undertook to demonstrate the matter by having the lions liberally fed, and then casting into the den those who had conspired against Daniel, who were speedily devoured.

This reminds us of how Haman was hanged upon the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Psalmist seems to speak of it as a principle associated with the divine government, that those who dig pits for others are likely to fall therein themselves. (Psa. 7:15,16; 9:15,16.) And who has not observed that those who gnash upon others with the tongue of scandal and falsehood, envy and malice, are likely in the end to be injured by the very falsehood and bitter words wherewith they seek to injure others? There is a law of retribution at work, in accordance with which a recompense of evil is dealt out to all evil-doers, either in the present life or in the life to come.
