

We continue our SUMMER SERIES titled “Campfire Stories”: re-telling the famous accounts of God’s mighty hand throughout the Old Testament. What do you do when your belief and devotion to God is in conflict with the beliefs and values of the society you live in? Well, Let’s open our Bibles to the Old Testament book of Daniel, chapter 1. We’ll see an example of a man who courageously, consistently stood with GOD among a people who stood against GOD.

I recall a time when my obedience to God put me in opposition with others. I was a freshmen red-shirt on the baseball team at Cal State San Bernardino. I believe I was the only Christian on a team of 40 college men. A Loud-Mouth 2<sup>nd</sup> Baseman: vulgar, obnoxious, and loud, asked me “Hey, have you learned how to PARTY???” I was 18 yrs old...far below the legal drinking age. I made a decision that I would obey God’s Word and NOT be given to drunkenness. I was a youth-group leader and wanted to model for younger teenagers that were facing the pressures of underage drinking. My reply: “I like to party!...but I don’t drink alcohol. I’m a Christian and I have decided I would not be given to drunkenness. I volunteer in youth group and I want to model for those young men how to have fun without getting drunk.” Mr. Loud-Mouth: “Thank your parents. You have morals. We are slob.”

As difficult as that was for me to stand with God that day, that was nothing compared to what Daniel would face for choosing to remain faithful to God.

Context: The book of Daniel is set right after Babylon’s first attack on Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, plundered the city & the Temple and took the Israelites into captivity. The king took the most promising young men of Israel and trained them to serve in the Babylonian government. They chose only the strong, healthy, and good-looking young men. They TRAINED these young men in the LANGUAGE & LITERATURE OF BABYLON.”

Daniel was one of these young men...and so were his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were about 16 years old. They went through a 3-year education on the Babylonian language, literature, and the Babylonian gods. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to separate Daniel and these young men from their Jewish roots to “forget about your God...He has been defeated” and “serve our gods instead.” The king even changed their names:

- Daniel (“God is my judge”) Belteshazzar (“May Bel protect his life”)
- Hananiah (“Yahweh is gracious”) Shadrach (“command of Aku”)
- Mishael (“Who is what God is?”) Meshach (“Who is what Aku is?”)
- Azariah (“Whom Yahweh helps”) Abednego (“Servant of Nego”)

Their Hebrew names spoke of the True God...but their names were changed to speak of the Babylonian gods. New names are a sign of new ownership: *you used to belong to Yahweh*, now you belong to Babylon. Nearly ALL of Daniel’s outward life was changed...but they could NOT change Daniel’s heart for God! Look at Daniel 1:8 (NLT) with me: <sup>8</sup> But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king.

- NKJV: “But Daniel *purposed in his heart* that he would not defile himself”
- NAS: “But Daniel *made up his mind* that he would not defile himself”
- NIV: “But Daniel *resolved* not to defile himself”

Daniel had made a decision in advance...a pre-decided purpose that he would only honor God! Daniel and his friends requested to eat vegetables instead of defiling themselves with the king’s food...which had most likely been offered in sacrifice to the gods of Babylon. Daniel and his friends completed the three-year training ordered by the king. And they graduated TOP OF THE CLASS! NO ONE impressed the king MORE than Daniel & his three friends. They were found to be 10 TIMES MORE CAPABLE than anyone else. Daniel spends nearly his whole life as an exile in Babylon! Daniel accepted his situation and made the most of every opportunity to honor and serve the Lord in a foreign land...he remained faithful even under the pressures of this alien culture.

Let’s turn to chapter 6 in the book of Daniel: Daniel is about 83 years old now. A new empire rules the roost as Persia has replaced Babylon. Darius the Mede is now the king. This chapter can be divided into four parts, or four acts in a play:

#### **ACT 1: The Plot Against Daniel (6:1-9)**

- Daniel 6:1-5 (NLT) / Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. <sup>2</sup> The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king’s interests. <sup>3</sup> Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire. <sup>4</sup> Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn’t find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. <sup>5</sup> So they concluded, “Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.”

Notice how Daniel carried himself: he served his adopted country well. Daniel sought peace & prosperity for the land in which he was captive. Daniel was capable, had great ability, responsible, completely trustworthy. We glorify God when we do our work well. You might ask, "How can I honor God in my workplace?" Here's how: Do good work! If you are a carpenter: make good tables. Treat your customers fairly. Don't rip people off. Be upright and honest in your business practices. Keep your word. Work Hard (If there's a piano to be moved, don't reach for the stool). Daniel's integrity is beyond question so these evil officers have to manufacture a fault in order to accuse Daniel. They know that Daniel's faith in God is a guiding principle of his life. To take Daniel down, they would have to put him in a position where he had to choose between obedience to his God OR obedience to the government.

- *Daniel 6:6-9 (NLT) / <sup>6</sup> So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! <sup>7</sup> We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup> And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." <sup>9</sup> So King Darius signed the law.*

The trap is set: for 30 days EVERYONE must pray only to King Darius. If you break this law, you will be thrown into the Den of Lions. What would YOU do if this became the law of our land? "See to you in 30 days, God!" Pray in secret? What do you think DANIEL does? He does exactly what those evil officers knew he would do!

**ACT 2: The Trap and the Punishment (Daniel 6:10-18)**

- *Daniel 6:10 (NLT) / <sup>10</sup> But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. There is no inner turmoil mentioned; no "What should I do?" by Daniel. He doesn't doubt or worry; He doesn't attempt to pray in private or where no one can see him. Daniel simply does as he had always done: he prays to God. Come what may: be it prison or death by lions, you will never stop me from praying to my God! Daniel would face Jerusalem as he prayed....why? For Daniel & the captives, praying toward Jerusalem had great significance, for it symbolized the direction of their heart's desire. The officials found Daniel praying to God.....let's pick up the story in Daniel 6:13...*
- *Daniel 6:13-17 (NLT) / <sup>13</sup> Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day."<sup>14</sup> Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament. <sup>15</sup> In the evening the men went together to the king and said, "Your Majesty, you know that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed."<sup>16</sup> So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you."<sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel.*

Daniel was "thrown into the den of lions." I've done a lot of research, and here's what a lions' den actually is: It's a den...with lions in it! We call it "den of lions." Think of a pit, or a cave of some sort with a small opening, filled with ferocious beasts where they could go to work on a man who had no chance of escape. Have you ever been face to face with a lion??? I have not...BUT I have walked up on a BEAR! I encountered a bear, but I had space to escape...I had a bike...I had other people to outrun...and I had a place to hide. BUT Daniel had NONE of these options. He had to face these lions...huge animals, the most awesome and dangerous of all wild beasts...just one swipe of its paw could kill a man, but in reality, death in this manner would probably take a bit of time as the lions have their way with you. For Daniel, a miracle of God was his only hope. Even powerful King Darius couldn't save Daniel now...for only God can save.

**ACT 3: DANIEL'S RESCUE & HIS ACCUSERS' DEMISE (Daniel 6:18-24)**

- *Daniel 6:18 (NLT) <sup>18</sup> Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn't sleep at all that night.*

It appears that King Darius had a worse night than Daniel did!

- *Daniel 6:19-23 (NLT) / <sup>19</sup> Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup> When he got there, he called out in anguish, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?" <sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, "Long live the king! <sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty."<sup>23</sup> The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God.*

God shows Himself able to protect, able to rescue, and able to deliver. Daniel points to God as the source of his salvation:

"My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths." But if you're a bit skeptical, like I can be at times, you might be thinking: did God really save Daniel?...or perhaps the lions weren't hungry that night? Or perhaps someone fed them...or drugged them? Perhaps there was some natural, rational explanation for why the lions didn't eat Daniel.

Well, let's keep reading...

- *Daniel 6:24 (NLT)* <sup>24</sup> Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.

This is a gruesome yet telling turn of events... "before they even hit the floor of the den", the lions tore them apart. The lions WERE hungry (HANGRY!), they were ready to pounce...and the only reason Daniel was spared was because of God's intervention. These accusers had set a trap for Daniel, but in the end they get caught in their own trap. The evil these men intended toward Daniel came back on them & their families. I struggle with this part: that the wives and children were also punished. This seems unjust...and it is! This story simply reveals the way things were in an Ancient Near East court. Remember, Darius is not a God-fearing man. He had no regard for God's law as given by Moses: Deuteronomy 24:16 "Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes." The sins of these accusers is far reaching...and their families pay the price.

**ACT 4: THE DECREE OF DARIUS - The FINAL Act (Daniel 6:25-28)**

- *Daniel 6:25-27 (NLT)* / <sup>25</sup> Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: "Peace and prosperity to you!" <sup>26</sup> "I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. <sup>27</sup> He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

Previously, King Darius issued a decree that people could only pray to him. The chapter ends with Darius writing a second decree...This time, King Darius commands reverence for Daniel's God throughout the entire empire!

Darius proclaims that the God of Daniel is the LIVING GOD: This means God not only EXISTS, but He is POWERFUL & ACTIVE. Because of Daniel's courageous obedience to God, Darius becomes witness to the truth that God rescues His people in astounding ways...God has done what Darius could NOT do: God has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.

This narrative of Daniel serves as life examples for later generations of God's people (including you and me).

*I have three reflections for us from this account in the book of Daniel:*

**#1. Daniel models how to STAND WITH GOD in the midst of an environment that STANDS AGAINST GOD.**

He maintained his faith in God while honoring and serving the king of Babylon. Daniel sought the welfare & prosperity of the land he found himself in. Daniel was a blessing to Babylon. Christians wrestle with how we are to engage culture: Do we blend in and hide? Do we retreat and isolate ourselves from our culture...not engage at all? Do we try force others to have Christian values & beliefs (make the culture "Christian"?) Daniel gives us ONE example of how to live in a culture at odds with Jesus. Daniel is not the ONLY example, but it is one we must consider. Let us learn from Daniel how to live as Christians in our present society.

**#2. Daniel didn't wake up one day with courageous obedience...God GREW Daniel in this manner as**

*Daniel devoted himself to prayer, reading God's Word, and to fellowship with other believers.*

Prayer is central in the book of Daniel...he was always seeking the Lord's guidance & help. Daniel knew how to honor & obey God (and not defile himself) because he knew what God said in His Word. And Daniel did NOT walk this alone...he had his buddies (Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah) and they stood strong together ("fellowship").

- *We have a 3-week class that I am co-teaching with Dinah Vaughn called "Growing Spiritually".*
  - Each week, we cover one of these spiritual practices that God uses to help us grow in Him.
  - Will you join us?
  - The next "Growing Spiritually" class is set for the first 3 Saturday nights in August at 5pm here at Neighborhood.

Can't wait until August?

- *We have a 5-week group happening every Sunday in July called AfterWord.*
  - Sermon Response Gathering (Talk about the message with other people, — Unpack the message, talk about the story, tell your story ...)
  - After the last service on Sundays at 12:45pm in July at Upper Crust Pizza on Churn Creek.
  - A great way to connect with others from Neighborhood.
  - Led by Phil & Dinah Vaughn...see your bulletin for more details.
  - Sign up in the lobby today...OR just show up!

*#3. God's Power and Protection are on display for those who trust in Him.*

God overruled the evil intentions of others to illustrate to generations of people that He is able to save in the most dire of circumstances. God shut the mouths of the lions! In the Psalms, deliverance from persecutions and trouble is sometimes described as "deliverance from the lions." Are you facing what appears to be a hopeless situation? What dire circumstances do you find yourself in today? Do you feel as though you're in a pit with hungry lions breathing down your neck?

**Remember the story of Daniel, my friends!**

*GOD is the living God!*

*He rescues and saves his people!*

*He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions!*

*...and God can rescue you as well.*