

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

PART SIX – HOW NOT TO BE DINNER FOR A HUNGRY LION

Daniel had been given a job he did not want as third ruler of the kingdom of Babylon under Belshazzar whose only talent was in running drunken parties. After one night Daniel's job was over, Belshazzar was dead, and a new regime had begun. The Medes, from the north of what is now Iran, and the Persians from the south were the new government. Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian shared power and introduced a very different way of governing which gave much more autonomy to the various parts of their empire. This would shortly open the way for the Jews to return to Judah but for the moment there were some huge challenges.

Remarkably one of the first acts of Darius, the new king, was to confirm Daniel in the new job Belshazzar had given him on his last night in power. Darius may have been guided by a desire for as much continuity of those with experience as possible. He may already have heard something of Daniel's massive reputation. Very quickly the wisdom of choosing Daniel became apparent. He was absolutely honest, highly capable and loyal. The reason was the same simple fact that had been recognized over the last 66 years of his life. It was not him but the Spirit who lived in him, the same secret we can discover.(Matt.5:14-16; 10:16-20; Col.1:27)

As Jesus would warn in the New Testament, Daniel would be hated because He is hated.(Matt.5:11,12; 10:22; Jn.15:18) It should be no surprise to us when people give us a hard time because they are jealous of our good reputation. Daniel's fellow officials realized that they would never be able to charge Daniel with the corruption which was their normal way of life. They needed to set a trap for him as the king's favourite, and the king. They were well aware that Daniel made no secret of his trust in his God. That would be their pretext.

His enemies flattered the king to catch him off guard. How would he like to make a law that for 30 days no-one was to ask anything of any god or man other than him? Such a rule would help to establish the reputation of the new king as the source of all good in their lives. And just to make sure the new law was taken seriously, how about the death penalty for anyone who broke it? The king kept some hungry lions! The idea appealed to Darius and he signed the regulation into law. The Medes and Persians had a custom that once a law was made it could not be changed. The trap was set!

Daniel was well aware of the new law and had absolutely no intention of changing his practice of spending time with God three times every day. Neither did he intend to hide his worship of God. Those who were jealous of Daniel therefore had no problem catching him in prayer contrary to the new law. They reminded the king of his decision and Daniel's defiance of it. In accusing Daniel, they pointed out that he was a foreigner, to imply his disloyalty despite his 66 years serving in Babylon and now Persia.

The king was cornered and could find no way out. His pride would not let him admit he was wrong. He must do what he had promised and throw Daniel to his pet lions. So

impressed had he been by Daniel's faith in God that he expressed confidence that somehow God would save him. The sentence was carried out by the reluctant king and the entrance to the lions' den sealed to be sure there was no escape or trick. In the same way Jesus' enemies would seal the tomb to make sure the body was not removed.(Matt.27:62-66) The king went back to his palace a deeply disturbed man. He had no interest in food or entertainment and could not sleep, wondering what was happening to an honest man.

At dawn the king was back at the lions' den to check what had happened to Daniel. His conviction that God would keep Daniel was expressed in his shouted question into the lions' pit, enquiring whether God could have possibly kept Daniel alive. Daniel was able to answer in person with a new pledge of loyalty to his earthly king and a new testimony to the faithfulness of his heavenly King. Like Jesus, Daniel had been 'resurrected' from the dead.(Matt.28) The king was greatly relieved and delighted. He ordered Daniel set free and his enemies and their families to become the lions' breakfast instead! The hungry lions who had had to spend the whole night unable to open their mouths now made up for their God-enforced fast with enthusiasm.

The apostle Peter compared the Devil to a lion, ravenously hungry and prowling around looking for food.(I Pet.5:8) He encouraged us that he can be resisted, but only by faith. Daniel's story powerfully illustrates this in action.

The chapter closed with Darius' testimony to what he had discovered about the living eternal God who should be the only King of Darius' kingdom. Thus he learned at the beginning of his reign what Nebuchadnezzar had only grasped almost at the end of his time and Belshazzar had failed to learn at all. The door was wide open for Daniel to continue his ministry for a few more fruitful years.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER SIX

Q.1 There was a change in the government. Were conditions any easier for Christians under the new system? Is life on earth ever likely to get easier before Christ returns? What did the new king think of Daniel? What is the only reason why anyone will ever be impressed by us?

Q.2 How did Daniel's enemies try to get him this time? How did Daniel react when he heard the new law? How are we inclined to react when it gets tough to be a Christian at school for example?

Q.3 What does a lion picture in the New Testament?(I Pet:5:8) What are the lions in your life? What was the outcome of Daniel being thrown to the lions? Whom does God send to 'shut the lions' mouths' as far as we are concerned? What happened to the king and Daniel's enemies? Is it worthwhile risking the lions' den?