

DANIEL'S PROSPERITY

"So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Daniel 6:28).

The biography of Daniel is one of the grandest on record. Through thousands of years his name has blazed like the sun in mid-heaven. Millions yet unborn will behold him from afar towering high among the greatest of men.

Judging from his character as a lad, Daniel must have been reared in a God-fearing Jewish home. Well disciplined, early in life he learned how to say "no" to temptation, and to say it emphatically. When he was twenty years old Daniel was carried from Jerusalem to Babylon as a captive. Along with three companions, Daniel was selected to take the honored place of a student in the Royal College, and there he received instruction in all the learning of the Chaldeans.

At the beginning of his captivity, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not permit anything to keep him from glorifying God. He preferred death to permitting his testimony for God to be marred by anything questionable. Although it was not an easy thing to do, this brave and courageous young man refused to disobey God.

Daniel was not a compromising weakling, who gave way to temptation under the pressure of trying circumstances, and then when he had failed excuse himself by saying, "It could not be helped, I was forced into it." Daniel chose to do right when it meant standing alone.

"To every man there openeth a high way and a low,
And every man decideth which way his soul shall go."

Darius, the king, changed the system of government by dividing his empire into one hundred twenty provinces. Over each of these provinces he set a prince. Over these princes he set in authority three presidents, of whom Daniel was first, and over the entire group Daniel was placed in charge. Daniel the one hundred twenty-two were to obey. To Daniel they were to give an account of their work. Daniel soon encountered the jealousy of the presidents and princes. They despised Daniel's supervision, not because it was domineering or dastardly, but because his administration was honest and upright. There was no hope for fraud as long as Daniel was in charge. There was no chance for loot while he had authority over all of them, and his word was law.

These disgruntled presidents and princes called in the last reserve of their diabolical ingenuity for plans to get rid of Daniel. They sought to find occasion against him concerning the kingdom. After all their secret scrutiny, they failed to find anything questionable. Their thorough search revealed that he was faithful to all the interests of the kingdom.

The Bible says, "Neither was there any error or fault found in him" (Daniel 6:4). There was not any shady dealings anywhere. There was no taking a bypath for personal gain, no false balance, no short measure, or no hidden leaf anywhere. There was not one crooked fingerprint or one dirty footprint.

Finally, their chicanery devised a trap for him which centered on his religion. They said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, excepting we find it against him concerning the law of his God" (Daniel 6:5). What a compliment to Daniel! What testimony to his integrity! What praise, though they were seeking censure. What cleanliness, though they searched for smut! What honor, though they sought shame! What straightness, though they hoped to find crookedness.

A deputation of Daniel's enemies went to the king and flattered him by asking him to sign a decree binding all men for thirty days to abstain from worshipping any God, or asking a petition of any God or man, except the king himself. The proposed decree contained the stipulation that anyone violating it should be cast into the lions' den. When the flattered king yielded and signed the decree by which these jealous courtiers hoped to bring about the ruin of their superior, whom they hated, they were filled with glee.

Daniel was unaffected by the decree. Knowing that, when human laws are found to clash with the divine commands, it is right to "obey God rather than man," Daniel maintained his regular prayer habits. He refused to be coerced to do wrong, even by a king's decree. Daniel's attitude was this: "I prize the privilege of praying so highly that rather than miss it, I will lay down my life. I would rather die praying than to live without praying." Utterly oblivious to consequences, Daniel lived dangerously, but victoriously. The man who stands straightest in the presence of sin is the one who bows lowest in the presence of God.

In the mansion Daniel had windows which enabled him to look toward Jerusalem, five hundred miles beyond the hills. Living by principle instead of policy, Daniel went into his room three times a day, committed himself to God, and prayed in the freshness of the dawn, in the splendor of the noontide, and in the shadows of the evening, knowing full well that there was a death penalty for it. That is religion with the windows open. Daniel did not have a shut-window religion, a hideaway devotion, or behind-the-doors loyalty. He did not put his religion behind a lattice, or shutter, or in the secret of darkness. Thanksgiving to God continued to well up in Daniel's heart, and he refused to allow anything to keep him from discharging his duty to God. This prime minister found time to pray to God three times each day. How his example shames many of us! He shames us as his defiant devotion shines like a blessed radiance across the centuries. His determination was above and beyond that of Jacob who, wrestling at the brook, said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). Daniel had praying devotion -- "He kneeled upon his knees." He had constant devotion -- "three times a day." He had rejoicing devotion and defiance -- "gave thanks for his God." He had fearless devotion -- "his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem." He had an unalterable devotion -- "as he did aforetime." Daniel had an excellent spirit.

There was but one thought in the minds of all those men who had kept their malicious eyes on Daniel, and that was to put him out of the way. These men assembled and found Daniel defiant as to the decree. Delightfully they saw him kneeling in prayer. Jubilantly the keyhole-gang heard him pray. See them tiptoeing around, vandals on velvet feet, to catch a man at prayer. Never, with such joy to themselves, had they seen one kneel. Never, with such jubilant joy, had they heard a man pray. It was as though reprobates rejoiced in righteousness, as though vicious villains took delight in virtue, as though bandits gave thanks for beneficence.

Daniel was trapped while praying. Two hundred forty-four feet had made stealthy trips to entrap two feet. Two hundred forty-four eyes watched with malicious joy while Daniel's two eyes looked away toward Jerusalem. Two hundred forty-four ears listening to a prayer trying to find occasion against him to feed him to famished lions. One hundred twenty-two mouths were ready to testify against him in order that he might be put out of the way.

They came. They saw. They heard. Elatedly they sneaked away, and with triumphant

tread went to the king and informed him of the violation of his decree. When the king heard it he "was sore displeased with himself." And no wonder. He certainly should have been displeased with himself, after signing such a foolish and evil writing and making real and effective such a diabolical decree. Darius was displeased with himself. He felt besmirched and hurt that he could do such a shameful thing. So, he went to work to try to undo what he had done, but the law was unalterable. Finally, the king was obligated to see that the decree was carried out. As the sun was disappearing behind the curtains of the night, Daniel was cast into the lions' den and "A stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den." The bringing of Daniel seemed to be bountiful blessing upon their baseness. Their casting of him into the den of lions was, to them, a comforting conclusion to their contemptible conniving. The stone which was brought was a symbol that their scheme was surely successful. To his malicious enemies the closing of the mouth of the den meant the closing of Daniel's career as "president over all." The seal was a sign that their sinister designs had not succumbed until they had reached a wicked maturity.

There were the devilish designers, duped Darius, a den of death, and Daniel. And conqueror over all of these was Daniel.

"And the king went to his palace," but he did not go in peace. He was dreadfully and depressingly disturbed. He could not sleep. Due to the activity of his conscience, all through the night he imagined he heard the crunching of bones in the jaws of the lions. To him his palace was a torture chamber that night. He was never able to close his eyes in sleep the whole night. Because of his mental upheaval, lions were roaring in every closet. Because of disturbances in his brain, he saw blood stains on the marble steps. The lights of the palace burned red, as when innocent blood gleams on white snow. It was a night of mournful monotony and misery, with a nameless fear clutching at his heart. The balance of the night did not bring any rest or peace to his troubled soul. He was in a palace, but weary with woe, sick with sorrow, crushed with care, and sick with sordid sinning.

Early, the next morning Darius went in haste to the lions' den. "And when he came to the den." Yes, back again at the place of his dastardly doings. Back again at the spot where the sentence of death supposedly had been executed. Back, hoping that what he had decreed to be done was not done at all. Back, hoping that what was started had been stopped. Back, hoping that Daniel had not been hurt. With a voice of deep solicitude, he called for Daniel, the servant of the living God. To his surprise and amazement, Daniel was alive and unharmed.

Recognizing his voice the king said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" (Daniel 6:20). Daniel assured him that God had sent His angel and had shut the mouths of the lions so that they had not injured him, and that all of this had been done because of his innocence. With great joy, the king commanded that Daniel be taken out of the lions' den.

Oh, if the king had only been as slow to do as he was now swift to try to undo! Would that we were as slow to shoot the bow as we are eager to call back the arrows we have shot. Would that we were as slow to strike the match as we are eager to put out the conflagration the match kindles. Would that we were as slow to speak as we are eager to recall some things we sometimes say.

By this signal preservation of the life of Daniel among the lions, God displayed at once His power over the creatures of the forest which He had made, and His care over His servants when He calls upon them to suffer for His cause. Under the protection of

God, Daniel was as safe in the den of lions as he would have been in the palace, and under the protection of the king.

"No manner of hurt was upon him, because he believed in his God" (Daniel 6:23). Had Daniel trusted in anyone else or in anything, he certainly would have perished, but because his faith was in God he was delivered. In God is our highest wisdom and truest safety, even though there are some who claim that faith in God, as a principle by which to live, is the obsolete conception of an unscientific and unlightened day in the past. Daniel relied on God for the preservation of his life. We, too, should count it a joyous privilege to live in dependence on God.

With great joy the king commanded that Daniel be taken out of the lions' den. He also commanded that the men who had brought accusation against Daniel be cast into the den, together with their wives and children. The Bible does not commend the act of that heathen king, but it does record the fact of what took place. Thus the cruel deed of Daniel's enemies descended upon their own heads, and their lives were snuffed out.

So, the deserved doom descended with the swiftness of lightning and with the power of grinding millstones upon Daniel's dastardly decree-producers. Their deed descended upon their heads, sweeping them away like a mountain avalanche. In the place where they wanted Daniel to die, they died. The lions they wanted to eat Daniel ate them. The jaws that they wanted to crush Daniel's body crushed theirs. The feast they wanted Daniel to furnish the lions they furnished. What they wanted Darius to do to Daniel, Darius did to them. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Each man gets out of life the rebound, the development of what he put into the world. Reaction is equal to action. Whoever sows passion, reaps shame. Whoever sows foul thoughts will reap the foul countenance of a fiend.

"The thorns I reap are of the seed
I planted.
I pluck them, and I bleed!"

That is to say, though the road of wrong you take may seem smooth and soft and sweet, beneath every silken couch of sinful indulgence nests of serpents brood. The scene that begins with flowers shall end with thorns and bitterness. For the moment the judge may seem to be asleep. For a little while the watchman may seem to be unobservant. For a while the rebound may seem far off. But any man who yields to sin's allurements and lets sin reign in his mortal body that he should obey it in the lusts thereof shall find out at last that God never slumbers, and that His laws never sleep. Go where you will. Hide where you will. Cover your tracks as best you can. But nature and God are upon the tracks of the wrongdoer.

"Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Daniel 6:25-28).

Here we see the value of one individual. After all, the greatest works have been done by individuals. No learned society or group discovered America, but one man, whose name was Columbus, did. You are just one. I am just one. But each one counts. Each counts as one link in a chain counts, just as one shingle in the roof counts, just as

one brick in a wall counts, and just as one letter in the alphabet counts. If one man only, like Daniel, meant so much in the cause of righteousness in his day, how much more can each of us mean in these tremendous days of opportunity in which we are living! "And Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."