

EAGLES RENDEZVOUS

UNRAVELING THE FUTURE STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Found Wanting or Found Waiting? Daniel 5 & 6

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

Daniel 5

1 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. 5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. 9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. 10 The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! 11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father-your father the king, I say-appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

12 This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." 13 So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. 15 The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. 16 Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

17 Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. 18 "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he

wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. 21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. 22 "But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. 23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. 24 Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. 25 "This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN 26 "This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. 27 Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. 28 Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." 29 Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, 31 and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

There is some confusion about the person of King Belshazzar, mainly on account of the writing of Josephus, that the last king of Babylon was Nabonidus. Archeological finds in Babylon confirm that Nabonidus or Nabunaid, as he is also called, was away on a military campaign during the events described in this chapter, and left his eldest son as coregent in the capital of the empire. The hopeless condition of the capital city of Babylon was equaled by the state of Berlin when the Russian army surrounded it at the end of World War II. Belshazzar's orgy was, evidently, an effort to flee reality.

As Nebuchadnezzar embodies the magnificence of Babylon, so Belshazzar represents its corruption. The two kings stand for the highest and lowest points of the empire. The Septuagint text states that Belshazzar's feast was a celebration for the dedication of his palace, a feat that makes the party even more unreal in view of the siege of the city by the Persian army. The inhabitants of the city may have thought their fortress to be impregnable. Belshazzar may have known the actual condition of the defenses and tried to escape from reason by drowning his misery in an orgy of alcohol, sex, and sacrilege. This palace dedication must have taken a religious character in that the god Bel was honored. The name Belshazzar means: "Bel, protect the king." The king, therefore, had particular reason to pay his dues to this deity. This fact makes the king's order to bring in the gold and silver goblets that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem into an act of serious defiance and sacrilege to the Name of YHWH. We do not know how informed Belshazzar was regarding Nebuchadnezzar's edict in the previous chapter. When later, in the present chapter the king's mother enters, she reproaches him his lack of knowledge of history. It is obvious, though, that the king knew about the sacred vessels of the temple in Jerusalem, and his specific order that they be used for the feast cannot be written off as an oversight or mistake. It was done deliberately to desecrate what belonged to the God of the Israelites. Belshazzar wanted to prove that YHWH had been conquered by Bel. The wine may have influenced the king's decision.

The expression “the handwriting on the wall” has made its way into the English language as a proverbial warning of impending doom. This kind of announcement of judgment is unparalleled in the Bible. In all other instances where God warns men of an impending disaster, the message is conveyed by the word of a prophet or a dream. It is also unusual in that, in general, God’s prediction of punishment is always an act of grace; it leaves the door open for repentance and escape. King Belshazzar did not have that option. He had passed the point of no return and was heading straight to his doom.

We may assume that, as the king lifted up the cup filled with wine, which had been part of the temple ritual, he made irreverent references to the Almighty whose temple had been destroyed in Jerusalem. The appearance of the writing finger caused a complete and stunned silence. Some may have thought initially that their senses deceived them and that the wine had caused some delirious state of mind in which one sees things that do not exist.

The only other time the Bible mentions writing by the finger of God is in connection with the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. We read in Exodus: “When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.” The light of the lampstand also cast its shadows on the wall. It could be that the finger caught the light and the hand and arm to which it was attached remained in the dark. The effect was dramatic enough to produce terror among the participants. It appears that the walls of Babylonian palaces were adorned with all kinds of paintings and writings, celebrating the exploits of the kings. It is significant that, on the same wall on which the king was accustomed to read the flattering legends of his own magnificence, he beholds the mysterious inscription which tells his fall.

Scholars have speculated much about the inability of the astrologers to read the writing. We may assume that, if the writing were in letters and words that were familiar, the king would have been able to read them himself. It may be that the king’s emotional condition at this point prevented him from reading anything at all. This would explain why he grew more terrified and changed color again when he heard that even his wise men could not read the writing. Also the king’s promise to elevate whoever could read and explain the words to the rank of third ruler in the kingdom has led to much conjecture. The explanation that Belshazzar’s father, Nabonidus, was still alive and that Belshazzar himself was regent in his place seems to be the easiest.

We suppose that the feast that had been going on had been noisy. But when the handwriting appears, the tumult and screams become so loud that they attract the attention of the queen who decides to enter the hall and find out what is going on. This queen could be the widow of Nebuchadnezzar since verse 3 mentions that his wives and concubines were already present at the feast. The queen’s greeting “O king, live forever!” stands out as a supreme sample of irony in the context of this story. The words constituted merely a polite form of court etiquette, but in view of the fact that King Belshazzar only had a few more hours of life left to him, they strike us as a sample of the sharpest divine sarcasm. The greeting contrasts rather sharply with the disrespectful attitude the queen seems to take toward the present ruler of the empire. Her admonition to stop trembling and not to turn pale must have added to the embarrassment of the monarch. The queen’s suggestion to call in Daniel also sounds rather as a reproach to the king’s present state of affairs than as a piece of friendly counsel. Daniel is equated with the glory

of the empire under Nebuchadnezzar, a glory that had obviously faded into oblivion under the present monarch. The fact that Daniel was not called in at first has also led to endless hypotheses. His exclusion may have been intentional, since Daniel was part of the religious system of which the temple treasures from Jerusalem were the symbols. Perhaps Daniel had fallen from grace at the death of Nebuchadnezzar. It may, therefore, very well be that Belshazzar was ignorant about Daniel.

The fact that the queen calls Nebuchadnezzar “your father” does not mean that Belshazzar was literally his son or even his grandson. The term is used rather loosely in Scripture as well as in Oriental cultures. Although the king, supposedly, did not know Daniel, he was obviously familiar with the episode of insanity in Nebuchadnezzar’s life. Belshazzar could not plead ignorance of the facts, nor of the role the God of the Israelites, the King of Heaven, whose vessels he had desecrated, played in Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration. When Daniel is brought before the king, the king questions him in a rather rhetorical manner that suggests that more information was given to him than the words our text put in the mouth of the queen. She had not mentioned the fact that Daniel was a Jew and that he was one of the exiles. If Belshazzar was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar’s edict, he knew Daniel at least by name. He may have supposed that this legendary chief astrologer was no longer alive. In that case his words express his awe and amazement to meet this famous historical person.

Daniel’s answer to the king seems rather out of place in the setting of an audience with royalty. A similar frankness in the court of Nebuchadnezzar would probably have cost him his life. The note of compassion and intimacy we noted in the relationship between him and Nebuchadnezzar is totally lacking here. When he entered the banquet hall and realized the kind of carousing that had been going on and seeing the holy objects from the temple in Jerusalem, Daniel must have been deeply shocked. Even a polished and polite person like Daniel found it difficult to show courtesy to someone who had so blatantly insulted the God he worshipped. To accept gifts and honors from this king would have meant condoning the sacrilege. Daniel may also have had a better eye for the danger of the hour. He knew the city of Babylon was under siege and could fall to the Persians at any moment. He had no guarantee that his own life would be spared by the enemy. At the end, Daniel was clothed in purple and a gold chain was put around his neck at the king’s command, but he may not have had any choice in the matter.

In Daniel’s blistering accusation of king Belshazzar and his blasphemy we hear the voice of God Himself pronouncing the verdict over this man’s life. Several theories have been proposed to explain why the Babylonian astrologers were unable to read the words MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Some suggest that the words were written in old Hebrew script that was unfamiliar to the Babylonians but known to Daniel. Others believe that the characters of the alphabet were reversed, one letter being substituted for another. Still another theory suggests that the Babylonians had been stricken by sudden blindness. Since there is nothing in the text that explains the problem, we have to leave it. One obvious difficulty is the fact that to the common reader the words would make no sense. The literal meaning of *mene* is “counted,” *tekel* “weighed,” and *parsin* “divided.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: “The three words, Mene, Tekel, and Peres, as they stand, are passive participles, rightly rendered counted, weighed and divided. They are also, when left without vowels, viz., MN, TKL, PRS, the names of three ancient weights that might be paralleled with our terms, a pound, an ounce, half a pound.

It is possible that the words interpreted are names of weights or coins as indicated above. If so, then they are a play on words. Maneh (Aram.), a weight of fifty shekels, equivalent to about two pounds (see Ezek 45:12), parallels mene, which means divided. Tekel, a coin or weight, equivalent to the Hebrew shekel, suggests tekel in the sense of weight. Peres (a half mane) suggests Peres, divided. It also ominously suggested Persia, which appears in verse 28." God's evaluation of King Belshazzar and his kingdom is full of irony. God writes down on the king's wall how much He thinks Belshazzar is worth. If only Belshazzar had acknowledged the One who valued him!

God had written a riddle on the wall of Belshazzar's palace and Daniel solved the puzzle for the king. He must have been familiar with Jeremiah's prophecy about Babylon, which made the explanation of the riddle relatively simple to him. Jeremiah had foretold that attackers from the north would invade Babylon (Jeremiah 51). He had stated that the city would be well stocked with provisions and protected by walls, fortifications, and gates. The city would be taken by trickery and the capture would involve the drying up of certain channels of water.⁹⁰ Finally, the city would be taken while a feast was going on in which the leading people of the nation would participate. This knowledge made the interpretation of riddle rather simple for Daniel. Those who know the Word of God know the times and know what has to be done. Daniel was like the men of Issachar, of whom it is said that they "understood the times and knew what Israel should do."

At Belshazzar's command Daniel is clothed in purple and a gold chain is put around his neck, and for one hour or less he is made the third ruler of the empire. The king's act is amazing in that he rewards Daniel after the searing condemnation he pronounced on him and his kingdom. Another remarkable feature in this rewarding is that Belshazzar obviously did not understand the seriousness of his own condition. He must not have believed that his kingdom was finished and that he himself had only one hour or less to live. Some scholars doubt that the events occurred as rapidly as this chapter describes. They believe that the feast mentioned here took place some time prior to the capture of the city. This assumption is based on a different reading of the text in the Septuagint. Others, however, hold the view that all happened in one night, that the punishment for Belshazzar's blasphemy was instantaneous.

Daniel 6

1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." 6 So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever!

7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8 Now, O king, issue the

decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered-in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing. 10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands-in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 13 Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."

14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. 15 Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed." 16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. 18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. 19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" 21 Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." 23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. 25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly! 26 "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. 27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions." 28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This chapter paints a moving picture of Daniel's behavior during the ultimate test of his faith. This faith was demonstrated in the first chapter of this book in his choice to obey the law of Moses regarding dietary restrictions. Nebuchadnezzar's order that the candidates be fed from the king's table had been negotiable; Darius' edict that prohibited prayer to YHWH was not.

Darius reorganized the empire upon his ascension to the throne by dividing it up in 120 provinces with a governor at the head of each province. These 120 were in turn accountable to 3 administrators who were answerable to the king. The purpose of this is expressed well in the words: "that the king might not suffer loss." Evidently, Darius ruled primarily for his own

benefit and not for the good of the people. We are not told how and why Daniel rose to the top and how long it took for this to happen. Daniel's ascension was, obviously, the Lord's doing. Darius may have prioritized himself; God had other priorities for the Persian Empire and the world for which Daniel was the chosen tool. That Daniel executed God's plan by going through death is not uncommon for the way God acts in this world. God could use Daniel because he was totally dedicated to Him and to the Kingdom of Heaven. His fellowship with God gave him a testimony of integrity that set him apart from everyone else in government circles and ultimately endangered his life.

King Darius planned to promote Daniel and give him a position that would make him superior to the all other administrators and satraps. The reason for this was Daniel's exceptional qualities and accomplishments. As a Jew, Daniel cannot have loved life at the Babylonian or Persian court. His heart was in Jerusalem. But he understood that his being led into captivity had been an act of God. Instead of pouting over the injustice done to him and blaming God for his fate, he accepted God's will for his life and decided to glorify God in his circumstances.

Whether Daniel's promotion had already taken effect at the beginning of this chapter or whether the king had only stated his plan, we do not know. As in the case of an appointment of any cabinet minister, Daniel's life became the object of intense scrutiny. His peers decided to go over Daniel's life and work with a fine toothcomb with the intent to find discrepancies that would disqualify him for his new office. They came up with a perfect record in performance and business ethics. So they turned to his private life and decided to use his religion against him. At this time, Daniel must have been almost 90 years of age. He had been among the first to be taken into a captivity that was to last 70 years. Daniel's reputation, combined with his age, must have made him a very difficult target for the opposition. The course of action decided upon by Daniel's adversaries seems rather ridiculous to us. Obviously, there are details about the political and religious climate in the Persian Empire that are withheld from us. The proposition brought by the satraps must have been presented in the guise of a measure to find a solution for the religious tensions that were plaguing the nation at that time.

It was not until the proposition had been signed into law, that Darius understood that the purpose of it was not to ease the religious climate of the empire but to remove Daniel from office. It is difficult to comprehend how all this could have happened without Daniel's knowledge and presence. It is obvious that when the administrators and satraps went to the king with their motion, they did so behind Daniel's back. They may have chosen a moment in which Daniel was absent from the court. It seems unlikely that all the 120 satraps appeared in this audience. Possibly the two governors pretended to represent everyone, including Daniel and the satraps. If the whole government apparatus came to the king, and they were all involved in the plot against Daniel, King Darius would have fed all 122 of them, plus their wives and children, to the lions, thus completely depleting his government. The delegation must have claimed to represent a wide array of government offices. Vs.7 mentions royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors. This gives the impression of a universal agreement among all who were involved in the government of the empire. The way the proposal was presented suggested to the king that there existed a state of emergency in which quick acting by the king was required in order to prevent a general breakdown of the nation's stability. The law would give the king the emergency powers needed to stabilize the nation. Although the

proposal seems outrageous to us, we must understand that it was not unusual for potentates in ancient times to claim divinity.

There are several points to be observed in the way the concept of the law was presented to the king. First of all, there is the time factor of thirty days. If the law were made perpetual, it would mean the elimination of all other deities, which would, undoubtedly, create severe unrest in the nation. The people would put up with a restriction of their religious life for one month, especially if the law was presented as a means of meeting a state of emergencies. The NIV reads that they appeared before the king “as a group.” The Aramaic word used is *regash*, which means literally: “to gather tumultuously.” The proposal was, of course, flattering to the person of Darius. He must have felt that his administrators wanted to express their genuine admiration for him. The idea of being “god” for one month must have had some attraction to his majesty. The ease with which Darius seems to have consented to the proposal shows that he had little notion who God is. One of God’s attributes is eternity and all His attributes are inseparable. If one of them would be removed, God would cease to be God. Being “god” for one month is an impossibility. It may be that the wording of the proposal was done in such a way that it would be considered rhetorical. The words “pray to any god or man” could be interpreted as putting all exercise of religion on hold. The king may have been induced not to take the wording literally. But when Daniel was caught in the act of praying to the God of Israel, the governors insisted on a literal interpretation.

Thus Daniel is brought to the ultimate test of his life: face death by continuing to pray to God, or stay alive by suspending the ritual of prayer for thirty days. We must observe that Daniel had the choice of becoming “a closet Christian.” The Jewish prayer is a prescribed ritual consisting of decking oneself with a prayer shawl and head cover and performing certain motions. Daniel could have continued his spiritual fellowship with God without any outward demonstrations of piety. He decided not to yield one inch of his spiritual life to the enemy of his soul. As a young man he had chosen not to defile himself ritually; this had set the course of his life which brought him to the logical conclusion that he could not do anything different at this point. Daniel’s prayer before an open window that pointed in the direction of Jerusalem suggests that he had his quarters arranged in such a way that he could pray, facing Jerusalem. For a man of Daniel’s rank it must have been easy to have a custom-designed house.

We would have expected that Daniel, when he heard of the decree, would have prayed in panic that the Lord would protect him from the lions’ den. Instead we read that he prayed and gave thanks. Daniel’s willingness to give his life to the Lord and give it with thanksgiving was his best protection against Darius’ evil decree. It was his thanksgiving that “shut the mouths of lions.” His habit of praying three times a day may have been inspired by one of David’s Psalms in which the poet states: “Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.” Evening is mentioned first because that was the beginning of the Jewish day. This is based on the Genesis record of creation: “And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.” The evening and morning prayer had probably corresponded with the bringing of the evening and morning sacrifices in the temple. Daniel’s adversaries must have taken their time to observe his habits closely. They either did not rush into his living quarters the first time Daniel went on his knees to pray, or if they did, they must have studied his routine before they presented their proposition to the king.

When Daniel's enemies rushed into his private chambers, they found him praying. For the second time in this chapter we find the word *regash* in the text, which the NIV translates: "as a group," but which also has the meaning "gathering tumultuously." The same word is used again when they rush to ask for an audience with the king. Had these men known that they had less than 24 hours to live, they would have exhibited less enthusiasm for their cause.

Poor King Darius did not have a chance. He discovered on the first day of his being "a god" that his hands were tied and that he could not exercise his free will. King Darius was not "god" enough to save Daniel's life. The accusation against Daniel is presented in a very clever way. The wording "who is one of the exiles from Judah" makes Daniel, who was after all the highest ranking officer in the empire, a mere captive of a conquered nation. His transgression is also presented as an insult to the person of the king. Their suggestion was that the king could not overlook Daniel's behavior without losing face, which would seriously damage his political image. It seems never to have penetrated to King Darius that his being victim of the system was more insulting to his person than Daniel's prayer to the Almighty. Darius was not even at liberty to pardon whoever he wanted.

Against his will and own better judgment, King Darius orders Daniel's execution by having him thrown to the lions. Evidently, the law also required the king to be present, thus adding injury to the insult of his person. Part of being "god" is that no sleep is needed. Darius's sleepless night constituted a profound emotional crisis in which he came to grips with the foolishness which had enticed him into the trap that his advisors had set for him and for Daniel. When morning breaks upon him, Darius is a changed man, who assumes his full authority of being the head of the empire. The king's rushing to the lions' den is also an indication of his faith in the God of Daniel. We may assume that no one ever survived this mode of execution. Darius may have had his doubts but, at least, he left open the possibility of a miracle. It was a miracle he needed for himself as well as for his favorite government official. He was not disappointed. It is remarkable that the king went personally to the lions' den to check on Daniel's condition. It indicates how deeply he felt himself involved in this. He realized that he had been used as a pawn by his advisors for the destruction of his beloved servant.

As we noted before, this is the first time in this book that Daniel addressed a king with: "O king, live forever!" It was customary court courtesy, but we do not read that Daniel ever used it. Maybe Daniel's greeting here is more meant as a blessing than a greeting. Having gone through death and resurrection, he imparted God's blessing of eternal life upon the man whose heart was open for this revelation. Daniel does not give us any details about the angel that spent the night with him and kept the lions at bay. Unlike King Darius, Daniel may even have enjoyed a good night's sleep. Darius' command that Daniel's accusers be thrown to the lions shows the radical change that took place in the king's heart and attitude. We question the justice of the command that the wives and children were also implicated. Apparently, Darius' act of vengeance was not unusual among the Persians. The king may have been afraid that the offspring of those condemned to death would later plot to take revenge upon the king. Wiping out the whole family would take care of that threat. The testimony of Daniel's deliverance by the power of God thus reached far beyond. Darius' proclamation does not imply the disappearance of idols throughout the empire. We may assume that all local deity continued to be worshipped but they were subjected to the supremacy of the God of heaven and earth.

APPLICATION

1. We always make _____ again and again!

2. The _____ cannot be silenced.

3. _____ doesn't get easier.

4. Success is _____.

5. Your competitors, colleagues, bosses _____.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has your faith ever been challenged and how did you respond?

2. In what areas do you need to be more faithful and how?