

BIBLE CHARACTERS

by

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CHAPTER 6

THE EDICT OF DARIUS.

"To establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions" (Daniel 6:7)

We find that Darius - who was probably one of the high military commanders engaged in the siege of Babylon - takes the kingdom, while Cyrus is off conquering other parts of the world. As soon as he attains the throne he makes his arrangements for governing the country. He divides the kingdom into one hundred and twenty provinces; and he appoints a prince or ruler over each province; and over the princes he puts three presidents to see that these rulers do no damage to the king, and do not swindle the government. And over these three he places Daniel, as president of the presidents. Very possibly Darius knew the man. He may have been in former days at the court of Nebuchadnezzar; and if so, he probably considered Daniel an able and conscientious statesman. Anyhow, the king either knew, or was told, sufficient to justify his confidence. And now Daniel is again in office. He held in that day the highest position, under the sovereign, that anyone could hold. He was next to the throne. If you will allow me the expression, he was the Bismarck or the Gladstone of the empire. He was Prime Minister; he was Secretary of State; and all important matters would pass through his hands.

We do not know how long he held that position. But sooner or later the other presidents and the princes grew jealous, and wanted Daniel out of the way. It was as if they had said, Let us see if we cannot get this sanctimonious Hebrew removed: he has bossed us long enough. You see he was so impracticable: they could do nothing with him. There were plenty of collectors and treasurers; but he kept such a close eye on them that they only made their salaries. There was no chance of plundering the government while he was at the head. He was president, and probably all the revenue accounts passed before him. No doubt these enemies wanted to form a ring. And they may have talked somewhat after this fashion: If it were not for this man we could form a ring; and then, in three or four years, we could make enough to enable us to retire from office, and have a villa on the banks of the Euphrates; or we could go down to Egypt, and see something of the world. We could have plenty of money - all we should ever want, or our children either - if we could only just get control of the government, and manage things as we should like to. As things go now we only just get our exact dues; and it will take years and years for them to mount

up to anything respectable. If we had matters in our own hands it would be different; for King Darius does not know half as much about the affairs of this empire as does this old Hebrew: and he watches our accounts so closely that we can get no advantage over the Government. Down with this pious Jew!

Perhaps they worked matters so as to get an investigating committee, hoping to catch him in his accounts. But it was no use. If he had put any relatives in office unfairly it would have been found out. And if he had been guilty of peculation, or in any way broken the unalterable laws of the kingdom, the matter would have come to light.

Now I want to call your attention to the fact that one of the highest eulogies ever paid to a man on earth was pronounced upon Daniel at this time by his enemies. These men were connected with the various parts of the kingdom, and on laying their heads together they came to this conclusion - that they could find no occasion against this Daniel, except they found it against him concerning the law of his GOD. What a testimony from his bitterest enemies! Would that it could be said of all of us! He had never taken a bribe: he had never been connected with a ring: he had never planted a friend into some fat office with the design of sharing the plunder and enriching himself. If he had been guilty in any of these things these scrutineers would have found it out: they had a keen scent: they were sharp men: they knew all about his actions and his history: and they would have been glad to have found out something - anything - which would have led to his removal from his high position. But they said - and said with regret: We shall not find any occasion against him. Ah, how his name shines! He had commenced to shine in his early manhood; and he shone right along. Now he is an old man, an old statesman; and yet this is their testimony. There had been no sacrifice of principle in order to catch votes; no buying up of men's votes or men's consciences; no counting in or counting out. There had been none of that. He had walked right straight along.

Young man, character is worth more than money. Character is worth more than anything else in the wide world. I would rather in my old age have such a character as that which Daniel's enemies gave him than have raised over my dead body a monument of gold reaching from earth to sky. I would rather have such a testimony as that borne of Daniel than have all that this world can give.

The men said, We will get him out of the way. We will get the king to sign a decree; and we will propose a penalty. It shall not be the fiery furnace this time. We will have a lions den - a den of angry lions; and they will soon make away with him. Probably these plotters met at night, for it generally happens that if men want to do any downright mean business they meet at night: darkness suits them best. The chief-president himself was not there: he had not been invited to meet them. Very likely some lawyer, who understood all about the laws of the Medes and Persians, stood up, and talked something after this fashion: Gentlemen, I have got, I think, a plan that will work well, by which we may get rid of this old Hebrew. You know he will not serve any but the GOD of Abraham and of Isaac.

We know that very well. And if a man had gone to Babylon in those days he would not have had to ask if Daniel loved the GOD of the Bible. I pity any man who lives so that people have to ask, Is he a Christian? Let us so live that no one need ask that question about us. These men knew very well that Daniel worshipped none other than the GOD of the Bible, the GOD of the Hebrews, the GOD of Abraham, and the GOD of Moses; the GOD who had brought His people

Israel out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the Promised Land: they knew that very well.

And these plotters said one to another, Now, let us get Darius to sign a decree that if any man make a request of any GOD or man - except of the King Darius - for thirty days, he shall be put into the lions den. And let us all keep perfectly still about this matter, so that it wont get out. We must not tell our wives, for fear the news may get about the city: Daniel would find it all out; and he has more influence with the king than all the rest of us put together. The king would never sign the decree if he found out what the object was. Then they may have said, We must draw it so tight that Darius will not be able to get out of it after he has once signed. We must make it so binding that if the king once signs we shall have that Daniel in the lions den: and we will take good care that the lions shall be hungry.

When the mine is all ready, the conspirators come to the king, and open their business with flattering speech: King Darius, live forever! When people approach me with smooth and oily words, I know they have something else coming - I know they have some purpose in telling me I am a good man. These plotters, perhaps, go on to tell the king how prosperous the realm is, and how much the people think of him. And then, perhaps, in the most plausible way, they tell him that if he signs this decree he will be remembered by their children's children - that it would be a memorial forever of his greatness and goodness. What is this decree that you wish me to sign? And running his eye over the document he says, I don't see any objection to that Will you put your signet to it, and make it law? He puts his signature to the decree, and seals it with his seal. And one of them says, The law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not? and the king answers, Oh, yes; the law of the Medes and Persians: that is it. In the pleasure of granting the request of these people he thinks nothing about Daniel; and the presidents and princes carefully refrain from jogging his memory. They had told the king a lie, too; for they said, ALL the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute; although the chief-president knew nothing at all about it.

There was probably a long preamble, telling him how popular he was; saying that he was liked better than Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar. They most likely tickled his vanity, and told him that he was the most popular man that had ever reigned in Babylon; and then they may have gone on to tell him how attached they were to him and his rule, and that they had been consulting together what they could do to increase his popularity and make him more beloved; and now they had hit upon a plan that was almost sure to do it. They would point out that if no one called upon any GOD for thirty days, but only on him, the king, making him a GOD, it would render him the most popular monarch that had ever reigned in Babylonia; and his name would be handed down to posterity. And if he could get men to call upon his name for thirty days they would probably keep it up, and so permanently reckon him among the gods.

If you touch a mans vanity he will do almost anything; and Darius was like most of the human race. They touched his vanity by intimating that this would make him great. He thought it a very wise suggestion, and he agreed with them exactly.

It was not only Daniel they were thus going to get out of the way, but every conscientious Jew. There was not a true Jew in the whole of that wide empire who would bow down and worship Darius; and these men knew that: and so they were going to sweep away at a stroke all the Jews who were true to their faith. They hated them.

And I want to tell you that the world does not love Christians nowadays. The world will persecute a man if he attempts to live the life of a true Christian. The world is no friend to true grace: mark that! A man may live for the world, and like the world, and escape persecution. But if the world has nothing to say against you, it is a pretty sure sign that GOD has not much to say for you; because if you do seek to live unto CHRIST JESUS you must go against the current of the world.

And now they are ready to let the news go forth; and it is not long before it spreads through the highways of Babylon. The men of the city knew the man: knew that he would not vacillate. They knew that the old man with the gray locks would not turn to the right hand or the left: they knew that if his enemies caught him in that way, he would not deny his GOD or turn away from Him: they knew that he was going to be true to his GOD.

Daniel was none of your sickly Christians of the nineteenth century: he was none of your weak-backed, none of your weak-kneed Christians: he had moral stamina and courage. I can imagine that aged white-haired Secretary of State sitting at his table going over the accounts of some of these rulers of provinces. Some of the timid, frightened Hebrews come to him, and say:

Oh, Daniel, have you heard the latest news?

No. What is it?

What! have you not been to the king's palace this morning?

No! I have not been to the palace today. What is the matter?

Well, there is a conspiracy against you. A lot of those princes have induced King Darius to sign a decree that if any man shall call upon any GOD in his kingdom within thirty days he shall be thrown to the lions. Their object is to have you cast into the den. Now if you can only get out of the way for a little time - if you will just quit Babylon for thirty days - it will advance both your own and the public interest. You are the chief secretary and treasurer - in fact, you are the principal member of the government: you are an important man, and can do as you please. Well now, just you get out of Babylon. Or, if you will stay in Babylon, do not let any one catch you on your knees. In any case do not pray at the window which looks towards Jerusalem; as you have been doing for the last fifty years. And if you will pray, close that window, draw a curtain over it; shut the door, and stop up every crevice. People are sure to be about your house listening.

And some of our nineteenth century Christians would have advised after the same fashion: - Cannot you find out some important business to be done down in Egypt, and so take a journey to Memphis? or can you not think of something that needs being looked after in Syria, and so hurry off to Damascus? Or, surely you can make out there is a need for your going to Assyria, and you can make a stay at Nineveh. Or why not get as far as Jerusalem, and see what changes fifty or sixty years have wrought? Anyway, just be out of Babylon for the next thirty days, so that your enemies may not catch you: for, depend upon it, they will all be on the watch. And, whatever you do, be sure they do not catch you on your knees.

How many men there are who are ashamed to be caught upon their knees! Many a man, if found

upon his knees by the wife of his bosom, would jump right up and walk around the room as if he had no particular object in view. How many young men there are who come up from the country and enter upon city life, and have not the moral courage to go down on their knees before their roommates! How many young men say, Don't ask me to get down on my knees at this prayer meeting. Men have not the moral courage to be seen praying. They lack moral courage. Ah! thousands of men have been lost for lack of moral courage; have been lost because at some critical moment they shrank from going on their knees, and being seen and known as being worshippers of GOD - as being on the Lord's side. Ah, the fact is - we are a pack of cowards: that is what we are. Shame on the Christianity of the nineteenth century! it is a weak and sickly thing. Would to GOD that we had a host of men like Daniel living today!

I can picture that aged man, with his gray hairs upon him, listening to the words of these miserable counselors, who would tempt him to trim, and hedge, and shift - to save his skin, as men say, at the cost of his conscience. And their counsel falls flat and dead. I can fancy how Daniel would receive a suggestion that he should even seemingly be ashamed of the GOD of his fathers. Will he be ashamed or afraid? Not likely! You know he will not; and I know he will not.

They will be watching you; they will have their spies all around. But if you are determined to go on praying, shut up your window; close all your curtains; stop up the keyhole, so that no one can look through to see you on your knees, and so that no one can overhear a single word. Accommodate yourself just a little. Compromise just a little.

That is just the cry of the world today! It is, Accommodate yourself to the times. Compromise just a little here; and deviate just a little there, just to suit the opinions and views of a mocking world. Do you think that Daniel, after having walked with GOD for half a century or more, is going to turn round like that? Ten thousand times, No!

True as steel, that old man goes to his room three times a day. Mark you, he had time to pray. There is many a business man today who will tell you he has no time to pray: his business is so pressing that he cannot call his family around him, and ask GOD to bless them. He is so busy that he cannot ask GOD to keep him and them from the temptations of the present life - the temptations of every day. Business is so pressing I am reminded of the words of an old Methodist minister: If you have so much business to attend to that you have no time to pray, depend upon it you have more business on hand than GOD ever intended you should have. But look at this man. He had the world, or nearly the whole, of the king's business to attend to. He was Prime Minister, Secretary of State, and Secretary of the Treasury, all in one. He had to attend to all his own work; and to give an eye to the work of lots of other men. And yet he found time to pray: not just now and then, nor once in a way, not just when he happened to have a few moments to spare, mark you - but three times a day. Yes, he could take up the words of the fifty-fifth Psalm, and say:

**As for me, I will call upon God;
And the Lord shall save me.
Evening, and morning, and at noon,
will I pray and cry aloud;
And He shall hear my voice.**

Busy as he was, he found time to pray. And a man whose habit it is to call upon GOD saves time, instead of losing it. He has a clearer head, a more collected mind, and can act with more decision when circumstances require it.

So Daniel went to his room three times a day: he trod that path so often that the grass could not grow upon it. I would be bound to say those plotters knew whereabouts he would be going to pray: they knew the place where Daniel's prayer was wont to be made; and they were sure they should find him there at his usual hours. And now again he has

a purpose firm,
And dares to make it known.

He goes to pray as aforetime; and he has his windows open. Like Paul, in later days, he knew whom he had believed; like Moses, he saw Him who is invisible. He knew whom he worshipped. There was no need to trace back the church records for years to find out whether this man had ever made a profession of religion. See him as he falls upon his knees. He is not careful to inquire whether there are any outsiders, or whether they can hear. In tones not one atom softer or quieter than his custom, he pours out his prayer to the GOD of his life; to the GOD of his people; to the GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He does not omit to pray for the king. It is right to pray for our rulers. If we cease praying for our rulers, our country will go to pieces. The reason they are not better is oftentimes because we do not pray for them. Does Daniel pray to Darius? Not he! He prays for Darius, but not to him.

There are men listening there near the open window: the hundred and twenty princes have taken good care of that. They themselves are their own witnesses, and some of them gather together as listeners, so doing their own vile work. If there had been any newspaper reporters in that day, how anxious they would have been to have got hold of every word of that prayer! Give them the smallest chance; and they would have taken it down, and telegraphed it all over the world, inside of twenty-four hours. After Daniel has prayed, and given thanks, - given thanks, mark that! - he goes out, and walks along the street with a firm step. He is undaunted. If it be the will of GOD that he shall pass from earth to Heaven by the way of the den of lions, he is prepared for that. GOD's presence is with him. Like Enoch, he bore within himself this testimony - that he pleased GOD.

Do you see the Hebrew captive kneeling,
At morning, noon, and night, to pray?
In his chamber he remembers Zion,
Though in exile far away.

Do not fear to tread the fiery furnace,
Nor shrink the lions den to share;
For the GOD of Daniel will deliver,
He will send His angel there.

Children of the living GOD, take courage,
Your great deliverance sweetly sing
Set your faces toward the hill of Zion,
Thence to hail your coming King!

Are your windows open toward Jerusalem,
Though as captives here a little while we stay
For the coming of the King in His glory,
Are you watching day by day.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
