

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

DANIEL

A TEST OF LOYALTY



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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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Forward

Nothing excites me more than to discover deeper insight from the Scriptures. As I began to focus my study on prophecy, I was amazed how many well-known Bible stories have such profound end time parallels. This is the first of ten stories which were originally published in a monthly newsletter during the first ten months of 2002. Here are my reasons for republishing these stories:

First, I hope each booklet will be widely distributed because everyone needs to know that the Bible has never been more relevant and timely than right now! I realize many other Bible stories have end time parallels, but I have chosen these particular stories because they are rich in content. As each story is placed into proper context, it is easier to understand *how* and *why* God's people will be tested during the Great Tribulation.

Second, I want you to have enough background information about the character in each story to feel as though you were there when the story took place. Understanding the tests, struggles, mistakes, and victories experienced by the characters should encourage and prepare us for the days ahead.

Last, I want you to know that faith in God means to submit to His demands and remain loyal to Him in the face of life-threatening adversities. If any concept stands out, I hope it is this: Faith in God is much more than believing there is a God. When people truly love God, their everyday actions will reflect a dedicated commitment to honor

His ways, which are distinctly different from the ways this world honors. A faith-filled Christian often stands in direct opposition to what the world esteems;¹ therefore, honoring God is not always a pleasant experience.

The pressure to conform to the status quo explains, in part, why ancient Israel frequently apostatized.² Tragically, the priests of Israel failed to lead the people to understand that as a nation, they must be vigilant because mankind is inherently rebellious toward God.³

When the draw of our carnal nature is combined with the pressure to conform to the world's ways, serving God becomes a frustrating challenge and requires *patient* faith.⁴ God understands our dilemma. This is why He preserved so many stories of faith in the Bible. Unless we examine and understand the failures and the victories of our forefathers, we will repeat their mistakes.

The Bible is clear; salvation comes through faith in God. Given this sublime truth, I hope you will gain a new appreciation about many aspects of faith as you read these booklets. Faith in God is so much more than intellectual assent to, or agreement with, an idea. Faith in God leads to adventure and fills your heart with peace and joy. True happiness springs from knowing and loving the great "I AM."

Larry Wilson, September 2020

1 Romans 8:7

2 2 Kings 17:15

3 Ezekiel 22:26

4 James 1:3

Daniel - A Test of Loyalty

Someone once said that loyalty is like the juice of an orange – the flavor cannot be determined until the orange is squeezed to the breaking point. The Bible testifies to the truthfulness of this statement. Loyalty is one of the powerful forces within the human heart. Circumstances can *squeeze* us to a point causing us to reveal our highest loyalties which can produce either good results or evil results. Many examples in the Bible demonstrate both results. Judas Iscariot was loyal to his dreams of self-importance, power, and wealth, instead of humility, poverty, and service. When he realized that following Jesus would not fulfill *his* dreams, Judas betrayed the Savior of the world for \$200.00 (30 pieces of silver).

For a while, King David was loyal to his passions for Bathsheba. Then, he killed her husband, Uriah, who was one of David's most loyal soldiers, to hide his illicit affair and try to legitimize her subsequent pregnancy with the cloak of marriage. Peter swore his loyalty to Jesus was 100%, but when Peter realized he might have to share a martyr's death with Him, three times he denied knowing Christ. The Philip-

pian jailer was loyal to his job until an earthquake destroyed the jail.

Saul was loyal to his religion until Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. Afterward, he proved an unwavering loyalty to Christ. Paul suffered extreme persecution from both the Jews and Romans as he preached salvation through Jesus. Eventually, Nero sentenced Paul to death because of his loyalty to God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose to be loyal to the God of heaven rather than worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. They were thrown into a fiery furnace for their decision.

John the Baptist was loyal to God's standards when he plainly told King Herod that living with his brother's wife was a sin. His remarks cost him his life. King Saul almost killed his own son, Jonathan, because of Jonathan's loyalty to David's heavenly anointing. Jeremiah was loyal to the Word of the Lord when he told the people the truth about their apostasy. His own people threw him into a cistern to die. Job's loyalty to God was tested with some of the harshest suffering ever recorded.

Noah was loyal to God's command and suffered an incredible amount of ridicule, but his loyalty and faith saved his family. Ruth was loyal to Naomi by choosing to suffer with her in poverty and this action resulted in her becoming an ancestor of Jesus. Rahab,

the prostitute, was loyal to the spies who entered Jericho, and by doing so, she saved her family. Queen Esther was loyal to her people and ultimately became instrumental in delivering them from destruction. The prophet Daniel was another man of loyalty who was *squeezed* hard. He chose to defy the decree of his king by openly praying toward Jerusalem, and for this act he was thrown into the lions' den.

Webster's definition of loyalty means being constant and faithful, bearing true allegiance to something. The truth is every human being has loyalties, but the real question is, "To what or whom are we loyal?" *Our highest loyalties are revealed when we are squeezed into a decision that favors one loyalty over another.* Inevitably, we all face situations where circumstances leave no option but to favor a higher loyalty and disfavor the lesser one! For this reason, it is hard to say where our highest loyalties really lie until we are "squeezed" by difficult choices. This "squeezing" process explains why there will be the Great Tribulation. God is going to "squeeze" the loyalty out of every human being to reveal who loves Him above everything else.¹

I thought a Bible study on Daniel and his lions' den experience might prove helpful as we focus on the subject of loyalty. Most Christians have rejoiced in the story of Daniel's escape from the lions, but few know

¹ Revelation 3:10

the bigger picture. Daniel's loyalty had a profound impact on two significant nations! To make this story as compelling as possible, I have added background information to help you "stand in Daniel's sandals."

A Prisoner of War

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel to Babylon as a prisoner of war in his first siege of Jerusalem. Bible scholars believe Daniel was about 18 years of age. It was King Nebuchadnezzar's policy to take the best captives and prepare them for government service. The king had wisely established a school to train captives from tribal nations, so they could eventually return to their homeland and serve the empire of Babylon as rulers who were loyal to the king of Babylon. It was for this purpose that Daniel and some of his friends were inducted into the king's academy. The book of Daniel begins with Daniel and his closest friends asking the king's steward if they could be excused from eating at the king's table. They wanted to maintain a simpler vegetarian diet, but the steward refused this request. He was sure Daniel and his friends would become sick and feeble if they ate nothing but vegetables and water. If they became sick because of his negligence, he could lose his job or his head! However, Daniel persisted and eventually, the steward conceded. When the time came for the king to test the trainees, Daniel and his friends excelled. In fact, the Bible says their knowledge was ten times

better than their fellow students.¹ Do you think the success of Daniel and his friends had anything to do with their loyalty to God? I do.

A short time later, Daniel gained worldwide recognition when God used him to interpret a dream given to Nebuchadnezzar. As a result of that incident, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to a high government position in which all the *wise* men of Babylon reported to him.² Do you think that Daniel's success had anything to do with his loyalty to God? I do.

Why Was Daniel Sent to Babylon?

Historians tell us that Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem three times. He finally destroyed the city in 586 B.C. because Israel's kings refused to submit to his "higher" authority. In actuality, God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed and its citizens put in captivity for 70 years because Israel refused to submit to God's "higher" authority. The Bible carefully justifies God's anger with Israel. To understand God's wrath against Israel in 605 B.C., we must begin with the requirements He gave through Moses.

Sabbath Rest Required for the Land

A few weeks after the Exodus, **"The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: "When you enter the land I am going**

1 Daniel 1

2 Daniel 2

to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.” ’ ’¹

This text is self-explanatory. God required the land to rest every seventh year. Why would any nation refuse a year's vacation every seventh year? The Lord continues, **“You may ask, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?’ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.”²** There is a profound point in these verses: God promised to send a bumper crop every sixth year so there would be enough food to observe a year of rest! Contrary to what many Bible students believe, the Sabbath rest for the land was not for agricultural purposes. In fact, God made the land produce its greatest harvest during the sixth year—when the land was in its most exhausted condition! The lesson to be learned

¹ Leviticus 25:1-5

² Leviticus 25:20-22

from the Sabbath year is simple. God established the Sabbath year rest *to test* His people. There is no other reason. Would they be loyal or rebellious?¹

If You Don't Keep My Sabbath Years

God also warned Israel: **“If in spite of this [lesser punishments] you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I myself will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”**²

It does not take a rocket scientist to understand these words. God said the land was going to rest, with or without Israel. God wanted His people to understand a profound truth: “[The Lord said] **the land is**

¹ See Exodus 16 for a parallel concerning the seventh day.

² Leviticus 26:27-28,31-35, insertion mine

mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.”¹ God wanted Israel to know their occupation of His land was conditional on their steadfast loyalty to Him.²

Because You Have Rebelled

The Old Testament indicates repeatedly that Israel did not remain loyal to God. Their cup of disobedience overflowed and around 615 B.C. God gave a prophecy to Jeremiah: He said, “**‘I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will make it desolate forever.’**”³

Consider three vital points. First, God calls King Nebuchadnezzar “My servant.” This is an important

1 Leviticus 25:23, insertion mine

2 Leviticus 18; Deuteronomy 28

3 Jeremiah 25:9-12

concept. God chose a pagan king to be an agent of His wrath against Jerusalem. (Parallel: The Antichrist will be an agent of God's wrath during the Great Tribulation.) Second, God said that Jerusalem would be destroyed and that Israel would be prisoners of war in Babylon for 70 years. Third, Babylon—for the same sins as Jerusalem—would eventually be destroyed.

430 Years of Rebellion

During the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, God anointed two prophets, Daniel and Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prisoner of war like Daniel, but lived among the captives, while Daniel lived in the halls of power. Ezekiel was timid and afraid of public speaking, so the Lord prompted him to “act out” various signs for Israel to observe. **“This will be a sign to the house of Israel. Then [Ezekiel] lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.”**¹ This text is important because God indicates the length of the twelve tribes' rebellion was 430 years. (390 + 40 = 430) This number should

¹ Ezekiel 4:3-6, insertion mine

catch your attention because it is the same number of years that Israel spent in Egypt.¹

These two separate and distinct instances of 430 years have three elements in common: apostasy, timing, and vigil. First, the apostasy of the Israelites in Egypt is no different than the apostasy of the Israelites in the promised land of Canaan! Apostasy is always the course of fallen man. Second, God's timing is perfect in both instances. The Bible says God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery according to His promise to Abraham, exactly 430 years *to the very day*.² If God delivered Israel from Egypt on time, then it should be no surprise that He sent them into captivity on time as well. It should be noted that when Israel violated 70 Sabbath years, God sent them into captivity!

How do we know this? Ezekiel performed the "430-day" sign for all of Israel to see. There are exactly 70 Sabbatical years in 430 years. In other words, the Babylonian captivity was 70 years in length because that is the exact number of Sabbath years Israel violated. Remember God's warning. **"Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land**

1 Exodus 12:41

2 Exodus 12:41

will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”¹ This text demonstrates the last significant point in common between these separate 430-year periods. God keeps vigil. He does not sleep. He is very much aware of everything that takes place on Earth, and He will step into the affairs of men when the timing is just right. He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt during the right year, and He sent Israel into Babylonian captivity on time and during the right year! Furthermore, the next text demonstrates that God also delivered Israel out of their Babylonian captivity during the right year and right on time.

Prophecy Fulfilled

The Bible says, **“God gave them [the Jews] all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of**

¹ Leviticus 26:34-35

the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”¹ Again, the reason for the Babylonian captivity is simple and obvious. God handed Israel over to Nebuchadnezzar because of their disloyalty. They refused to keep His Sabbaths, so He evicted them and the land rested for 70 years.

Zooming Forward

Now that we understand *why* Israel went into Babylonian captivity, we need to zoom forward in time to the fall of Babylon, when Nebuchadnezzar’s reign ended. Historians say Babylon fell on Tishri 16 (around October 13), 539 B.C. Darius came to the throne during that year (his ascension year), and so his first calendar year (according to the religious calendar of the Jews) was 538/7 B.C. The first year of Darius’ reign is Daniel’s 68th year in captivity. Daniel was taken captive during 605 B.C., a “Sabbath year,” and he calculated that the 70 years of desolation decreed upon Jerusalem would end on the “Friday year,” 536 B.C. (Counting inclusively, 605 B.C. minus 536 B.C. equals 70 years.)

When God established the “week of years” at the time of the Exodus, God required Israel to set their slaves free every “sixth year” or “Friday year.” The “seventh year” or “Sabbath year” was to be celebrated as a year of freedom from the bondage of slavery.² Daniel

1 2 Chronicles 36:17-21, insertion mine

2 See Exodus 21:2 and Jeremiah 34:14-16.

was aware of the Jubilee Calendar. He also understood how the “week of years” synchronized and knew that 536/5 B.C. was a “Friday year,” as well as the 70th or final year of captivity.

The Political Situation in Daniel’s 68th Year

It was extremely unusual in ancient times for a conquering king to give a prisoner of war a position of authority in his government. The possibility of rebellion was just too great. Incredible as it seems, we know of three times this happened to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel interpreted his dream. Belshazzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel read the handwriting on the wall. Daniel was also promoted to one of the highest positions in the kingdom when Darius became king. Do you think Daniel’s promotions had anything to do with his loyalty to God? I do.

It is my understanding that Daniel believed God had placed him in a very powerful political position within the government of Darius so that *he, Daniel*, might facilitate Israel’s release from captivity. However, Daniel was nearing 90 years of age and knew that if he acted on his own wisdom, he could interfere with God’s plans, just as Moses did when he wrongfully killed the Egyptian.¹ Daniel also knew if his actions backfired, it could result in a lot of suffering for his

¹ Exodus 2:11-14

people, just as it did when Moses and Aaron ordered the Hebrew slaves to rest from their labors.¹ Daniel was acutely aware that he could dishonor God if his actions to free his people aroused suspicion, jealousy, or any hint of rebellion against the Medes and Persians. Many of the Chaldeans intensely hated the Jews, and any move on Daniel's part to free his people would probably be construed as treason. If this occurred and he was convicted in a court of public opinion, the punishment would be sudden death.

About 70 years after Daniel died, the Chaldeans' hatred for the Jews escalated on a national scale. The noble, Haman, obtained a universal death decree from King Artaxerxes for all Jews in the Persian kingdom, but God used Queen Esther to save her people.

Daniel's dilemma had other ramifications. During the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews multiplied and integrated into the fabric of the province of Babylon. Some Jews prospered and others remained servants or slaves of the Chaldeans. When Darius began his reign over Babylon, most of the original captives from Jerusalem had died. Therefore, their offspring who lived in Babylon had little attachment to a place where they had never lived or even seen. In fact, when Cyrus set the Jews free in 536 B.C., Ezra 2 indicates that only a minority of captives, 29,818 Jewish males, returned to Jerusalem.

¹ Exodus 5:5

The Greatest Problems

Politically, Daniel knew the emancipation of his people after 70 years in Babylon could cause a number of problems for King Darius. If many Chaldeans lost their servants, they would incur financial losses, which would produce terrible social unrest. Daniel was also aware that during the 70 years of desolation, tribal nations had moved into the territory abandoned by Israel, and a *returning* Israel could be embroiled in wars and land disputes. Even more, the greatest cause of concern for Daniel was that Darius did not rule over the land of Canaan where Jerusalem was located. Any decree that freed the Jews from the province of Babylon would also require a decree by King Cyrus, who ruled over Canaan. The ultimate goal, of course, was that the Jews recover the land they had lost, and all the circumstances surrounding this situation greatly perplexed Daniel. What could *he* do to facilitate the freedom of his people? Even if they were set free, how could Daniel motivate a majority of the Jews to return to Jerusalem? Daniel's mind churned over these issues for months because he understood how a significant exodus from Babylon could be a political nightmare for King Darius, as well as King Cyrus.

Jealousy Knows No Bounds

From Daniel's point of view, the upcoming 70th year, 536/5 B.C., would not be a good year for an attempt to

release the Jews. Even though Daniel held one of the highest positions in the empire, a new king was on the throne. This meant a new administration was in place adhering to a new set of laws and corporate culture which included a large group of powerful nobles who hated the Jews. As Daniel pondered his helpless position, it became apparent to him that Israel's deliverance from slavery would have to be an "Act of God," a miracle as great as the exodus from Egypt. To his credit, Daniel faithfully carried out his responsibilities within Darius' administration. The Bible says of this time period, **"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."**¹

Sometime during Darius' first calendar year (538/7 B.C.), Daniel decided his best course was to seek God through fasting and praying, and wearing sackcloth and ashes. Time was running out! The 70th year was approaching fast. So, Daniel sought the Lord in utter humility to find what God wanted of him. To be seen in sackcloth and ashes was a sign of mourning or extreme humiliation. To the Medes and Persians, Daniel's appearance must have been very odd since Daniel usually wore clothing appropriate for his exalted office. Regardless, Daniel embarrassed (humbled) himself before God as a man in sackcloth and

1 Daniel 6:3

ashes demonstrating that God could use him in whatever meaningful or menial way God desired.

Unknown to Daniel, King Darius had planned to promote Daniel above the other two governors of his empire. Darius decided to do this because he had contracted a degenerating health problem. Darius favored Daniel because Daniel was “pure in heart,” a very unusual quality among people in politics, then and now. Darius also wanted to make Daniel, “the Jew,” his number two man in the kingdom because this would strategically protect his throne when he became too weak to fulfill the duties of his office. Unlike the other two administrators, Darius knew Daniel would be loyal to him instead of having an inner ambition to acquire the throne. Besides, Darius knew that a Jew would not aspire to be king over an empire of Medes and Persians. By putting Daniel in the number two seat, his throne would be safer from the schemes of ambitious politicians and administrators.

Somehow, this information about Darius’ plans was leaked to the administrators and they were filled with jealousy and rage. No self-respecting Mede or Persian would be subject to a Jew! Jealousy and hatred for Daniel, “the Jew,” led them to search for anything they could use to mar Daniel’s reputation and disqualify him from such a position of honor. They studied Daniel’s personal history and tried to find a flaw in his character, but were unable to find anything. The Bible

says, **“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. 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.’”**¹ Given the hatred and determination of his enemies and the notorious behavior of politicians down through the ages, these are amazing words!

Putting the Squeeze on Daniel

Finally, the administrators and satraps concluded that the only way to stop Darius from promoting Daniel was to *prove* to Darius that Daniel’s loyalty to his “Jewish” God was higher than Daniel’s loyalty to the king. They thought the question of loyalty would prove their point to Darius. When it comes to politics, kings have to be gods. Their ego and government rests upon nothing less than total submission and devotion to their will. If no one wants to obey the king, how can he be king? Therefore, “loyalty tests” were used by ancient kings to ferret out people with bad attitudes toward the authority of the king. This may explain why Darius did not quibble or hesitate to issue a loyalty decree. Loyalty tests were simple: During the specified month, suspects were arraigned

¹ Daniel 6:4-5

and questioned before a court of political leaders. If the suspect freely confessed allegiance to the king as the highest authority on Earth, the suspect would then affirm his loyalty to the king with an oath. However, if the suspect were hostile toward the king or plotting rebellion, a “loyalty test” became a life and death issue, even though the suspect may not have been caught doing anything wrong. This is why loyalty tests were so effective. If the suspect refused to take an oath affirming his allegiance and submission to the king, he was declared a rebel and killed immediately.

On the other hand, if he lied about his allegiance to the king and gave an oath of loyalty, his sympathizers would see that he was a common coward and a liar. Who could respect such a disgusting person? This technique for testing loyalty was simple and effective. Incidentally, the Caesars also used loyalty tests. Thousands of Christians perished because they would not bow down before the “man-god,” Caesar.¹ During the Great Tribulation, God will also use a simple loyalty test. A test of worship will put the “squeeze” on every person whose deepest loyalties will be “squeezed out” for everyone to observe.²

The Perfect Plot

The crafty administrators asked Darius for permission to conduct a “loyalty check.” Since the province

1 John 19:15; Romans 10:9

2 Revelation 13:8-18

of Babylon was a new territory for Darius, a loyalty test appeared to be a “good idea” to help secure his throne. If Daniel should slip through the 30-day decree trap, Darius would never know the real motives behind the administrators request for the loyalty test. However, if Daniel were caught in their trap, he would be “legally” killed because the law demanded the sudden death of anyone caught in rebellion against the king. If Daniel were destroyed, the administrators would not be implicated in Daniel’s death. The “loyalty test” seemed like the perfect way to eliminate Daniel, or so they thought.

When the administrators asked the king for a loyalty decree, they must have known that Darius did not know about Daniel’s current state of humiliation. If Darius had been aware of Daniel’s behavior, praying to his God three times a day in sackcloth and ashes, this knowledge would have foiled their plot. **“So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘May King Darius, live forever! 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 human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the**

Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ So King Darius put the decree in writing.”¹

Daniel Springs the Trap

“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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 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 human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’ The king answered, ‘The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ Then they said to the king, ‘Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.’ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.”²

Did you notice how fast Daniel *willfully* disobeyed the king’s decree? Why did one of the kingdom’s

1 Daniel 6:6-9

2 Daniel 6:10-14

highest officials publically defy the law of the king? The answer lies in the fact that Daniel understood the reasons behind the *loyalty test*. Daniel remembered his three friends and their fiery furnace test, and he knew he was being tested just like his three friends. Evidently, Daniel was notified of the decree suddenly and without warning. I find it interesting that Daniel did not go to his immediate superior, King Darius and plead his case! When Daniel learned of the loyalty test, he ran to (not from) his prayer room. This action says volumes about Daniel's loyalty to the God of heaven!

When Daniel humbled himself before God and man by wearing sackcloth and ashes, Daniel's heart was ready and willing to submit, even to death, if that were God's will. Daniel was willing to do *anything* God required of him to facilitate the release of his people. Daniel's loyalty to God is extraordinary and God's approval of Daniel is amazing. In fact, Daniel's loyalty became the very tool that God used to glorify His name before the Medes and Persians so He could deliver the Jews from captivity! If the plot to kill Daniel was clever, God's use of the situation was even more brilliant. God used the administrator's hatred of Daniel, Darius' affection for Daniel, and Daniel's loyalty (and ultimately the lions' den) to set Israel free from slavery. Watch how these elements combined to accomplish God's plan.

King Darius Humiliated

The next morning, “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!’ 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. 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.”¹

Daniel was arraigned before King Darius. When the king saw the old prophet in sackcloth and ashes, he became furious with his administrators. He saw through their plot. Daniel, the “Jew,” was no rebel and Darius knew that. In fact, Daniel was the only administrator the king could trust! According to law, however, Daniel was subjected to the usual “loyalty” interrogation and without hesitation, confessed to praying to his God three times a day. Daniel did not offer excuses, plead his case or beg for his life. Even more importantly, he did not swear an oath of loyalty to King Darius as his highest authority. King Darius churned with grief. He condemned himself all night for failing to consider the intense hatred of his administrators for Daniel. How ironic the twist of events.

1 Daniel 6:16-18

Darius was planning to promote Daniel, but now he would have to kill him instead. Darius knew Daniel was unjustly condemned, but not even the king himself could change the law of the Medes and Persians. With these words, **“May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”** Darius bids farewell to Daniel. The king gives the order and with his own ring and the rings of those who hated the old Jew, seals Daniel’s fate to be thrown into the lions’ den. Daniel was at peace, Darius was in torment, and the administrators were on their way to a secret celebration party.

King Darius Exhilarated

“At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. 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?’ Daniel answered, ‘May the king, live forever! 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, Your Majesty.’ 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. 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. Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: ‘May you prosper greatly! 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. 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.’ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius [the Mede] and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”¹

Thoughtfully consider the profound experience of Darius that morning. Upon hearing Daniel’s voice, a pagan king was given every reason that morning to put his faith in the God of Daniel. The tomb was opened and “a dead man” was received by the living! The king immediately published another decree requiring every person in his kingdom to fear and reverence the God of Daniel, “the Jew.” The news about Daniel’s miraculous deliverance was told everywhere!

Only when you consider the Chaldeans’ intense hatred for the Jews does the significance of Darius’ actions stand out. Because of Daniel’s loyalty, the

¹ Daniel 6:19-28, insertion mine

God of heaven was exalted to the highest position through the eyes and lips of a heathen king. This demonstrates an interesting point all religious people would do well to remember. The objective of serving the God of heaven is to bring honor and glory to God, not to self.

Israel Set Free

The story of Daniel's miraculous deliverance, and the immediate destruction of his enemies by the *same* lions that refused to eat Daniel, has been closely examined for important reasons.

First, remember that God's timing is *always* perfect! Evidently, the lions' den episode happened during Darius' first calendar year, 538/7 B.C. This allowed time for Darius to become acquainted with Daniel and to develop such confidence in him that Darius wanted to make him the number two man in his kingdom. As we are about to see, the timing of the lions' den event shows God's perfect timing!

God used the hatred of the administrators and the loyalty of Daniel in a way that no one could have anticipated. I believe the events unfolded as follows: When Daniel sought the Lord in sackcloth and ashes for instructions on what he should do to facilitate the deliverance of Israel, God heard Daniel's prayer and prepared him for unexpected events. God did not give Daniel wisdom to outfox the evil administrators, nor

did God rain down plagues on Babylon like He did in Egypt. Instead, God gave Daniel *peace* in the face of death. This peace is reflected in Daniel's courageous action after learning about the law.

After Daniel violated man's law, God honored Daniel's loyalty to His law with protection and enormous notoriety. No one had ever spent a night in a den of ravenous lions and lived to tell about it. Simultaneously, God eliminated an obstacle that stood in the way of delivering His people. God granted Darius a *legal* opportunity to purge his government of those who had proven to be disloyal to the king's interests. Politically speaking, the death of these administrators would make the release of the Jews a manageable problem for the king, even though Darius did not know the Jews were about to be set free. After Darius destroyed those who hated Daniel, the king promoted Daniel to the number two position in his kingdom and no one else complained!

Evidently, King Darius died the year following the lions' den event, and King Cyrus absorbed the territory of Darius into his own expanding kingdom. Therefore, the ascension year of Cyrus over the province of Babylon was 537/6 B.C., and his first calendar year was 536/5 B.C. Because of Daniel's notoriety from the lions' den event, and because he was the highest official in Darius' kingdom, Daniel became well acquainted with King Cyrus. During the spring of 536/5

B.C., which was the 70th year of captivity, King Cyrus met with Daniel, who informed the Persian king that the God of heaven had chosen him to be a great king before he was even born. Daniel showed King Cyrus, in the prophet Isaiah's writings, where the king is called *by name* 200 years before being born.¹

When Daniel explained to King Cyrus why he was fasting and praying, the behavior that ultimately sent him to the lions' den, the king's heart was moved at the loyalty and devotion of this elderly man to the supreme God over heaven and Earth. Daniel informed Cyrus that God had appointed the Persian king to set the Jews free, "without price or reward,"² for the purpose of rebuilding His temple. This same God of heaven had delivered Daniel from the lions' den and the rest of the story is history.

Cyrus issued the decree in Daniel's presence in the 70th year, a Friday year, in the spring of 536 B.C. The Bible says, **"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a**

1 Isaiah 45:1-4

2 Isaiah 45:13

temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.”¹

The timing could not have been more perfect. The decree of Cyrus ended 70 years of captivity (counting inclusively). It is amazing how God took one loyal man through the lions' den so Daniel could present God's will to a king who now controlled the province of Babylon, as well as the territory of Judea! This decree was possible because Cyrus ruled over the province of Babylon where the Jews were captives, as well as the territory of Judea where Jerusalem was located. The greatest problem was solved. God's timing is so perfect. His ways are so magnificent! God required slaves to be released during the Friday year (the sixth year) and this is exactly what He did for the nation of Israel. The decree of Cyrus occurred in 536 B.C., a Friday year.

The Bible does not indicate that Darius died in 537/6 B.C. For two reasons, this point is deduced from the course of events recorded in Daniel 6 and Daniel 9. First, even though they are contemporary kings, Darius and Cyrus did not rule over Daniel or the province of Babylon at the same time. Second, history says that Cyrus had been a Persian king for more than 20

¹ Ezra 1:1-3

years before his *first* year over the province of Babylon came about. In order for Cyrus to become king over the province of Babylon, death had to eliminate Darius from the throne in 537 B.C. If this is correct, Cyrus' ascension year over Babylon is 537/6 B.C. and Cyrus' first calendar year is 536/5 B.C. The Bible confirms this scenario by saying, **"So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."**¹ This text can be understood from the perspective that Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius which was followed by the reign of Cyrus. Of course, this text can also be interpreted to mean that Daniel prospered during the co-regent reign of both kings, but it seems evident that both kings did not rule over Daniel or the province of Babylon at the same time. Other facts may come to light in the future that offers a better answer. Ancient history aside, the good news is that we know the 70 years were fulfilled in a timely manner. The Bible says, **"The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."**²

1 Daniel 6:28

2 2 Chronicles 36:21

Calendar of Events

Julian Years

1
 2
 3
 4

January January January January

539 B.C.	538 B.C.	537 B.C.	536 B.C.	535 B.C.
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Tuesday Year 67th Year	Wednesday Year 68th Year	Thursday Year 69th Year	Friday Year 70th Year
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Spring Spring Spring Spring

Jewish Years

1. **Babylon falls, ascension year for Darius**
2. **First year for Darius, lions' den**
3. **Darius dies, ascension year for Cyrus**
4. **First year for Cyrus, frees the Jews**

End Time Parallels

As we see how God used the loyalty test to set His people free, we can observe parallels in the Great Tribulation. Revelation 13:8 says, **“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.”** This text implies that false worship will become a matter of law during the Great Tribulation be-

cause all of the world will not voluntarily worship the beast. In other words, when the world is *squeezed* by threats of severe punishment, **“all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast”** except those who have a higher loyalty to worship God. The human race is about to be squeezed very hard. That ancient serpent, the devil, the roaring lion from the lions’ den, is about to make war upon the saints.¹

Revelation 13 predicts the devil will wage war upon the saints for 42 months using the force and penalty of law to *squeeze* us to a point that our highest loyalties are revealed.² The end result is that the saints will be *legally* persecuted! **“He [the Antichrist] was given power [from God] to give breath [life] to the image of the first beast [the one-world church-state which the devil will set up], so that the image could speak [decree laws] and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a [visible] mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.”**³

The coming loyalty test will boil down to survival. Those people who are loyal and worship God will be hunted down as criminals and cut off from the neces-

1 Revelation 12:17

2 Revelation 13:5

3 Revelation 13:15-17, insertions mine

sities of life so they will be forced to live by faith. However, those people who have the highest loyalty for personal survival will submit to the mark of the beast, a tattoo that will be placed on the forehead or the right hand. Officials in the devil's government will wear his name tattooed on their foreheads. This is a counterfeit of what God intends to do for the 144,000, who will wear the name of Jesus and the Father on their foreheads throughout eternity.¹ Those who reject the message of the 144,000 will wear the literal number, 666, tattooed or branded on their right hand. Billions of people will submit to wearing a mark that they know is evil in order to survive. This test will prove who receives our highest loyalties!

Another parallel between Daniel's experience and the Great Tribulation is timing. Just as God set His people free right on time, God will free the saints from the curse of sin right on time. Several prophecies of Daniel and Revelation tell us there are important time periods during the Great Tribulation. God has predetermined the number of days and we know His timing is perfect!

There are many more end time parallels between Daniel and his lions' den experience and the Great Tribulation. I have mentioned a few to encourage you to practice putting the Lord first in your life. I encourage you to seek the Lord through prayer and fasting. We want God to use us to share the good news of the coming King of

¹ Revelation 14:1

kings. We pray for the outpouring of Holy Spirit power. We want to be sure we are willing to do anything that God asks. If Daniel had been lax about his loyalty to God when the test came, he would have fumbled, faltered, and failed.

Loyalty to God does not suddenly spring up when the consequence for disobedience against the law of the land is death. Loyalty to God is a way of life that requires practice and determination. The dictionary describes loyalty as being constant and faithful, bearing true allegiance. Ready or not, the highest loyalty of every human being is about to be revealed!

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