

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Daniel: a Protected Man

Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. (Daniel 6:14-23)

No one likes the realization that he has been duped, much less a king. Despite the king's realization that his ego created Daniel's problem, he could not find a way to alter his decree. I find it rather fascinating that a pagan king acknowledged Daniel's faith, "*Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.*" It is a polite way of saying, "I can't deliver you, Daniel. Hopefully your God will do a better job than I."

The dastardly deed is done. Daniel is finally locked in the lion's den, apparently near the end of the day. Do not overlook the contrast between the way Daniel spent his night and the way the king spent his night. Though the passage says nothing about how Daniel spent his night, there is at the least an implication. Daniel sleeps peacefully all night long. If we allow "poetic license" to carry our minds, we could well imagine Daniel using a lion's furry side as his pillow. Meanwhile in the palace the king spends a sleepless night, agonizing that his own egotistical indulgence may have cost his respected friend's life.

As soon as he can reasonably do so, the next morning the king arises and goes to the lion's den. "*O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?*" Clearly his faith in God is not nearly as strong as Daniel's. The day before, he assured Daniel that God would deliver him.

Hopeful wishing is not at all the same as assured faith.

Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. I was talking with an unbeliever many years ago about this incident, and he quipped that the lions were probably old, tired lions who had just been fed prior to Daniel's being thrown into their den. I responded with a question, "How then do you explain what happened to Daniel's enemies the next morning?"

Daniel attributes his deliverance at God's hands to his personal innocence, as well as to the king's innocence in this matter. Simply noted, God knew all about the political plot and stepped into the sordid affair and prevented harm from coming to Daniel. This does not mean that every faithful servant of God shall always be delivered from adversity. While we rightly focus much attention on the positive examples of faith in Hebrews 11, we should not overlook that the martyrs and suffering servants mentioned near the end of the chapter were no less serving God in faith than those people who appear in the first section of the chapter. There is no indication that those who suffered for their faith were inferior or that they suffered because of some hidden sin in their lives. To the contrary, the indication is that

they were every bit as faithful as those who appeared in the first list. Even being sawed asunder was for them a victory of faith, not a defeat.

How do we explain why one man, in this case Daniel, is delivered from danger because of his belief in God (Notice the closing verse of our passage above), while another equally faithful man (Isaiah, for example, who was apparently stuffed in a hollow log and sawed in two because of his faithfulness to his God) suffers because of his faith? I offer that we do not explain it. Scripture states the obvious fact that some are delivered because of their faith, while others suffer for their equally exemplary faith, but Scripture doesn't explain why. If Scripture doesn't explain this question, we would be wisely advised to follow Scripture and not invent contrived explanations for what we obviously do not know.

I especially reject contrived explanations that contradict Scripture and the moral character of God. Often people who are not satisfied with leaving any question unanswered, even if they do not have an acceptable answer, will offer a "non-explanation" of the question by appealing to God's "secret will." If challenged, they will protest, "Do you mean to say that you know all about all of God's will?" This is an obvious "straw man" logical fallacy, intended to skirt rather than address the issue. Their own explanation clearly indicates belief in the idea that God has two distinct wills, one revealed in Scripture and obvious to the serious Bible student, the other not revealed in Scripture and not known, even by those who claim to know so much about it. After all, if God has a secret will, who revealed that secret to those who claim to know so much about it? When attempting to explain the inexplicable, advocates of God's "secret will" invariably use this "secret will" argument to advocate that God in such cases categorically contradicts His "revealed will." They argue that He thus "appears" to contradict His revealed moral character by "orchestrating" or otherwise manipulating or even indirectly causing human acts of sin. While claiming to deny that God actually causes sin, their position cannot escape the obvious. If God did not so execute His "secret will," the acts of human sin that occur on these occasions would not have been committed. In a human court of criminal law a "white collar" criminal who was so intimately and deeply involved in a crime, though he was not actually present or actively engaged in the specific criminal act, would be tried and convicted as an accessory to the crime. And so he should be. In the first eight verses of the third chapter of Romans Paul directly addresses this error and refutes it. He applies the moral and logical point to the error. If God is so intimately

involved in human sin for whatever the reason, then God, not the man who actually committed the sin, should stand trial for the sin. Thus the "secret will" of God argument fails to explain the driving question, and it also effectively charges God with being a schizophrenic, double-minded and diabolical being, not the consistent, righteous, and holy God that Scripture always depicts Him to be. The god of the secret will is not the God of the Bible.

I am quite content to acknowledge God's intervening presence in the Daniels of the Bible, and occasionally in my own life's experience, and I am equally content to live with the unanswered question as to why God does not always so intervene.

Personal experience brings this lesson quite close to where I live. Over seven years ago I faced prostate cancer. After the surgery my surgeon told me that in his expert opinion within two weeks to three months my cancer would have spread outside my prostate and would have been a truly life threatening risk for me. He works in a large medical university, and is viewed as one of the university's leading surgeons. Normally it takes at least two months just to get a routine appointment to see him. The day I received the lab report of the needle biopsy confirming my diagnosis my wife phoned the university's urology department, explained my diagnosis, and asked for a "first-available" appointment with a urology cancer specialist. The appointment clerk checked her schedule and offered us an appointment with this surgeon only five days from that date. Many times over the last seven years I have asked myself many questions. Why would I be singled out for such special blessing? Other godly, faithful men have faced the same diagnosis and eventually died from the disease. I was spared, and I certainly make no claim of greater faith than they.

We often think of Daniel's night in the lion's den, huddled in a corner of the den and frightened. As I study this lesson, I more view the lions huddled in fear in the corner and Daniel commanding the room without fear. Lions are ferocious, fearless beasts, but, confronted with an angel of God, they would cower as frightened little kittens.

Do not ignore the specific point made in the concluding sentence, "...because he believed in his God." God responded to Daniel's strong belief in his God. God's intervention was not the result of some duplicitous "secret will" decree. God responded to His believing child. How strong would our belief be in such a case? How strong is it when we face the modern lions in our lives? "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9:24)

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