

## UNIT 1: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Lesson 13

May 31, 2026

# In the Lions' Den:

**When faithfulness to God is challenged, we must remain steadfast.**

## THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Daniel 6 describes an event that encapsulates Daniel's calling and experience through the first six chapters. This lesson reveals Daniel holding fast to a humble faith, even as God blessed him in dramatic ways. Daniel becomes the focus of an evil conspiracy that turns his faithfulness into an excuse for others to persecute him. Yet, the prophet refused to compromise, even to the point of death. In the end, God delivered Daniel, and the pagan leader exalted Daniel's God. Daniel is a model for Christians today. God calls us to humility and faithfulness, through which we testify to a fallen world that the Lord we serve is the one and only true God.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Daniel 5:30 marks a pivotal moment in history with the death of Belshazzar and the rise of Cyrus, the Persian king, signaling the transition from the Babylonian Empire to the Medo-Persian Empire on October 12, 539 BC. Shortly after this conquest, the events of Daniel 6 unfolded as the new administration took shape. During this period, some Jewish exiles, led by Zerubbabel, began returning to Jerusalem to rebuild their homeland. Meanwhile, Daniel, now over eighty years old, continued to play a significant role within the shifting political landscape, demonstrating steadfast faith amid monumental changes in global power dynamics.

## THE LESSON OUTLINE

### 1. A CONSPIRACY AGAINST DANIEL: Daniel 6:1-9.

- A. Daniel Is Above Reproach, (1-5)
- B. Evil Men Set Daniel Up, (6-9)

### 2. DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS INVITES A CHALLENGE: Daniel 6:10-18.

- A. Daniel Refuses To Compromise, (10-15)
- B. Daniel Enters the Lions' Den, (16-18)

### 3. GOD DELIVERS AND IS REVERED: Daniel 6:19-28.

- A. God Protects Daniel, (19-23)
- B. Darius Recognizes the True God, (24-28)

## DISCUSSING THE LESSON

### 1. A CONSPIRACY AGAINST DANIEL: Daniel 6:1-9.

#### A. Daniel Is Above Reproach, Daniel 6:1-5.

Daniel 6 opens with Darius the Mede being introduced as the leader of the Medo-Persian government in Babylon, possibly serving as a governor under King Cyrus, who ruled the expansive Persian Empire. Some scholars suggest that “Darius” might have been an alternate name for Cyrus. To administer the kingdom effectively, Darius appointed 120 satraps to oversee smaller territories and three administrators to supervise them. Among these administrators was Daniel, whose reputation preceded him due to his involvement in interpreting the writing on the wall (5:13-29). Daniel quickly distinguished himself through his exceptional qualities and divine favor, earning recognition for his ability to communicate with God. His competence and integrity prompted Darius to consider placing him in charge of the entire administration over Babylon (6:3), which is a testament to his leadership abilities.

However, Daniel’s rise to prominence triggered jealousy and resentment among the other administrators and satraps, leading to subversive opposition. Unable to find fault in Daniel’s professional conduct or character, they sought to exploit his unwavering devotion to his God. Recognizing Daniel’s steadfast worship of the God of the Hebrews, they devised a plan to entrap him by creating circumstances that would force him to choose between his commitment to God and compliance with royal decrees (vv. 4-5). Two observations emerge from this account: Daniel openly practiced his faith without compromise, and his reputation as a devout follower of God was widely acknowledged. This transparency in his beliefs became the focal point of his adversaries’ scheme, demonstrating both his integrity and the challenges of remaining steadfast in faith under scrutiny.

#### B. Evil Men Set Daniel Up, Daniel 6:6-9.

Verses 6-7 record that these evil officials became conspirators, contriving a plot against Daniel, then appearing together before Daniel to set it into motion. Following the customary greeting, they offered what seems to be an odd proposal “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” (v. 7). “Any ...man” is a reference to pagan priests, who would offer prayers to the gods on behalf of the people. This proposal stipulated that all prayers were to be made through Darius. This was not a suggestion that Darius set himself up as a god, but that Darius would be the sole priest in Babylon for the next thirty days. Nobody could pray to any god except through him.

The rationale behind this decree was likely to create a situation where the now-conquered Babylonians would demonstrate their loyalty to Persia, thereby contributing to the unity of the kingdom. Darius would serve as a mediator for the gods of all the nations that were now subject to him. Furthermore, a horrific and gruesome fate would await anyone who defied this decree – they would be torn to pieces by lions. The Persians were known for extreme forms of execution, and historical records indicate that they kept caged lions for this purpose. The officials insisted that the king put the decree into writing and declare it could not be repealed,

probably to ensure that it was officially enacted before he realized their plot. They were successful in persuading Darius to sign the decree (vv. 8-9).

Daniel 6:1-9 presents a relatable situation where envy or ambition drives actions that harm others – be it workplaces, friendships, families, or even church communities. This passage invites introspection: Are we guilty of similar conduct? If so, there’s a chance to mend our actions and embrace kindness instead. When confronted with such behavior, respond carefully, relying on wisdom and grace to handle the matter while upholding integrity and showing compassion toward those involved.

## **2. DANIEL’S FAITHFULNESS INVITES A CHALLENGE: Daniel 6:10-18.**

### **A. Daniel Refuses to Compromise, Daniel 6:10-15.**

Daniel’s response to Darius is a powerful example of uncompromising faith. First, Daniel had a regular practice in which he opened the window of his residence, which faced Jerusalem, and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God three times a day (v. 10). Jerusalem had been the location of the temple and Daniel’s three prayers, directed toward Jerusalem, followed (and even exceeded) the instructions of Psalm 55:17 and 1 Kings 8:35, 38. Daniel continued this practice despite knowing of the decree. He did not increase his visibility or frequency in prayer to draw attention to himself or highlight his defiance of Darius, nor did he hide himself to pray. He continued to practice his faith as he had been doing, without fail.

Meanwhile, the conspirators, knowing Daniel’s devotion, spied on him and reported to Darius what Daniel was doing (Daniel 6:12-13), portraying Daniel in the most unfavorable manner possible. Daniel was not one of them, but “of the children of the captivity of Judah” (v. 13). They claimed that Daniel was disrespecting Darius himself, not just his decree. Darius was unhappy about this turn of events (vv. 14-15). He realized that the decree was not an attempt to honor him, but an envy-driven conspiracy designed to eliminate a rival. Darius valued Daniel because he was determined to find a way to spare him from execution. However, as Daniel’s jealous rivals pointed out, Darius had made a binding order based on the authority of the Persian government. It could not be revoked. Daniel would have to face the lions’ den.

### **B. Daniel Enters the Lion’s Den, Daniel 6:16-18.**

Even as Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, Darius further revealed his compassion and concern for Daniel. He said, “Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee” (v. 16). Daniel had obviously gained the respect of Persian officials, just as he had the Babylonian officials before them, and God’s favor continued to rest upon him (see 1:9, 17). Also, the reputation of Daniel’s God as one who saves and performs miracles had endured. Nonetheless, Daniel found himself hopelessly trapped in a den of lions.

A large stone was placed over the door and sealed by the signet ring of the king and his officials (6:17). Soft clay was attached to the chains or ropes securing the stone, and the emblem on the surface of their rings were pressed into it. No one would dare break the king’s seal. There was no possibility of escape or rescue for Daniel. With Daniel secured in the den, the king retired to the palace for the evening, yet Darius was clearly troubled (v. 18). He could not

sleep and was not interested in distraction from any form of entertainment. He even refused to eat. Obviously, Darius held Daniel in high regard, whether it be because of his skills, his charisma, or his faith. Perhaps it was all three.

Daniel 6:16-18 demonstrates how an unbelieving world can perceive God's presence and favor upon His people. Jesus affirmed this, explaining that the world will know we are His people by our love for one another (John 13:34-35). Christians are different and unique from the world. When we practice our faith, in big and small ways, our Lord is revealed in our actions, words, and attitudes. Take time this week to evaluate how you can be a witness to the reality of Christ.

### **3. GOD DELIVERS AND IS REVERED: Daniel 6:29-28.**

#### **A. God Protects Daniel, Daniel 6:19-23.**

Verse 19 says, "The king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions." While Darius' urgency certainly reflected his care for Daniel, there was another reason for the rush. In the ancient world, it was often the case, as it was here, that if a person punished with this kind of torture survived until morning, he would be pardoned. Upon arriving at the den of lions, Darius' words are telling: "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" (v. 20). Darius not only recognized the reality of Daniel's God but also wondered if his God had delivered him. This should not be taken to mean that Darius became a believer in or the follower of God, since the ancients recognized the existence of many gods. Instead, it showed a respect for both Daniel and his faith.

Daniel responded to the king's cry with the customary greeting one would give a king, that he would "live forever," or "have a long life" (v. 21). These words no doubt brought great joy to Darius. Daniel then explained what happened: God had sent "his angel" to close the mouths of the lions (v. 22). While some see this angel as part of the "angelic host" of Heaven, many scholars see something similar in this passage to what was recorded in Daniel 3:24-27: The "angel" was a divine being and therefore, perhaps a preincarnate appearance of Christ. Furthermore, this being was visible to Daniel, providing comfort and assurance in a terrifying situation.

Upon hearing Daniel's testimony, Darius joyfully had Daniel removed from the den and examined. Not one wound was found on him "because he [Daniel] believed in his God" (v. 23). Be careful not to miss a key word in this verse: Daniel trusted in *his* God. Once again, circumstances in the Book of Daniel caused the God of the Hebrews to be spotlighted and contrasted with pagan gods. Once again, the living God was shown for who He is – almighty, sovereign, and high above all powers, including the gods of the conquering nations.

#### **B. Darius Recognizes the True God, Daniel 6:24-28.**

With Daniel vindicated, Darius executed capital judgment upon those who had falsely accused Daniel, which included their families. This was in keeping with the Persian custom for

families of those guilty of capital crimes, as a means of deterring revenge (v. 24). In Aramaic, the term translated “accused” may also be translated “devoured” or “destroyed,” an apt description of the harm caused by false accusations. While Daniel had broken Darius’ decree, the decree itself was a conspiracy to falsely accuse Daniel of disloyalty, as well as to deceive Darius into thinking all his advisors agreed on the law, when Daniel certainly had not (v. 7).

Just as Nebuchadnezzar had done decades earlier, Darius made a public proclamation to glorify the one true God of the Hebrews. Several vital insights by Darius are seen in this decree: First, God has an everlasting kingdom (unlike the kingdoms of this world). Second, God rescues His people. Third, God does supernatural wonders, Fourth, God’s unlimited and unsurpassed power transcends the natural world and is effective in the heavenly realm (vv. 25-27). Keep in mind that this miracle took place near the time when the exiles were beginning to return to the Promised Land. Therefore, it served as a reminder that God was with His people, despite the dangerous human powers all around them. Furthermore, God continued to bless Daniel, showing him favor throughout the reign of King Cyrus (v 28). Only three years into Cyrus’ reign, God gave Daniel some of the most important prophecies in human history (chapters 10 through 12). Truly, God preserved Daniel to fulfill His plans for his life and prophetic ministry.

Daniel 6:28 serves as a fitting conclusion to the preceding chapters, showcasing God’s constant presence in Daniel’s life. From the beginning, we see how God uniquely equipped Daniel for His divine purposes, and those plans continued to unfold as the years went by. In the same way, God has a plan for each of us, even if it may seem small or hidden at times. Like Daniel, God calls us to remain faithful and steadfast in His ways, trusting Him through life’s challenges so His purposes can thrive in us.

### **CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP**

As Christians, we live in a world that is often hostile toward our Christian convictions. Still, as we follow Christ, we can walk in alignment with His will through prayer and His Word.

### **MINISTRY IN ACTION**

Pray for the persecuted church around the world, asking the Lord to grant strength and deliverance to those suffering for Christ. Commit to praying for them regularly.

## Additional Stories About Daniel the Prophet

**In the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Book of Daniel**, there are additional stories about the wisdom of Daniel not found in our English Bibles. The Septuagint was the Bible (Old Testament) used by Jesus and His Disciples, and the early Christians, and is still used by 300 million Orthodox Christians. The following stories are found in The Orthodox Study Bible (SAAS).

**Living in Babylon was a wealthy Jewish man named Jehoiakim**, whose wife Susanna was “a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord” (v. 2).

**Two men who lusted after Susanna** made advances to persuade her to engage in sexual intercourse with them, but she emphatically rejected them. Angered by this, the two men conspired together to force Susanna to be intimate with them. They threatened to falsely accuse her of adultery with a young man if she would not consent to their evil desire.

**Susanna steadfastly refused to sin**, so the two conspirators accused her of committing adultery with a young man, and they succeeded in obtaining a death sentence against her. But she earnestly prayed for God to deliver her, and God sent Daniel to defend her. Daniel demanded that the two accusers be examined separately. Separated from one another, their testimony did not agree, proving them to be liars. Susanna was freed, and her two accusers were executed.

**There was a large serpent that** the people of Babylon worshiped as a god. They believed no one could kill the serpent. “The king said to Daniel ... ‘Look, he lives, he eats, and he drinks – you cannot say he is not a living god. Therefore, worship him’” (12:24). But Daniel replied that he would worship only his own God. He said he would kill the serpent and sought and gained permission from the king to try to kill it, and thus to prove it was no god.

“Then Daniel took pitch, tar, and hair; these he boiled together and made cakes, and put them in the mouth of the serpent. The serpent ate them and burst open. Then Daniel said, “Behold the things you have been worshipping”” (v. 27).

## WORKSHEET

### The Cost of Faith in Sudan

**Similar to the situation in Daniel 6, those who follow God in Sudan are under intense pressure to abandon all religious expressions.**

“There is a growing fear among the South Sudanese Christians, so they remain indoors in order to avoid being arrested.”

That is how one church leader described the atmosphere in Khartoum after five South Sudanese Christians were arrested during a funeral prayer gathering on August 16, 2025.

What was meant to be a quiet moment of mourning in El Haj Yousif, a neighborhood in North Khartoum, quickly turned into a scene of fear. Among those arrested was Pastor Peter Perpeny, a well-known leader with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. He and a small group of Christians were gathered for a burial service, but by the end of the meeting, the pastor and four others were in handcuffs. The group was taken to Omdurman Prison, where they remained uncertain about what would come next.

For the Christian community in Khartoum, many of whom are refugees or migrants from South Sudan, the arrests have sent shockwaves. Gatherings that once offered comfort to the community are now dangerous. People are avoiding church services, prayer meetings, and even leaving home as fear grows.

“People are afraid to leave their houses,” a church leader said. “They know they could be picked up at any time, not for anything they have done, but because of who they are. Church used to be a safe place. Now, even gathering to pray feels like a risk.”

With Sudan ranked number 5 on the 2025 Open Doors World Watch List of countries where Christians face extreme persecution, many in the Christian community remain cautious and concerned for their safety.

Hostility is coming not only from authorities but also from online extremists, who have been calling for South Sudanese Christians to be arrested. Muslim extremists have taken to social media, urging officials to arrest South Sudanese Christians.

In Sudan today, choosing to worship publicly has become a risk. For many, faith is no longer simply a personal conviction; it has become a binding rule. Back in Khartoum, Pastor Perpeny’s congregation gathers quietly, if at all. Some pray in private; others wait in silence. And yet, even behind closed doors, they continue to pray – International Christian Concern (October 20, 2025)