

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-17 God's Law: Personal Responsibility for Guilt

Two thieves stood before a judge, having been found guilty of robbing a store. The thieves were brothers. The older brother, Michael, had been a thief for many years. His younger brother had just recently begun to follow in Michael's footsteps. Together they had plotted to rob the store. Sitting in the courtroom that day was both the owner of the store and the father of the two thieves.

The judge looked about the room and then down on the two thieves. "Michael, you have been found guilty of robbing this store owner. It is not your first offense. Therefore, I sentence you to seven years in prison." The judge then looked at the younger brother. "This is your first offense, but you must pay for your crime. Therefore, I sentence you to one year in prison. Now, does anyone have anything to say before I close this trial?"

Michael suddenly looked up at the judge and said, "Your honor, this is not my younger brother's fault. I led him astray. Please let him go and I will serve an extra year to pay for his crime."

The judge looked at Michael and shook his head. "Although this is very honorable of you to offer to serve the sentence of your brother, the law will not allow this. Each person who is found guilty must pay for their own crime."

Suddenly the storeowner had something to say. "Your honor, if you send them both to prison, who will pay me back for what has been stolen? Since these two sons cannot do it, then you should make their father pay back what was stolen from me!"

The judge looked sternly at the store owner. "While I sympathize with you for your loss, what you are asking for is not legal or ethical. The law holds the individual accountable for their crimes—not their family or community." And with that he struck his desk with his gavel and closed the case.

This concept of each person's being responsible for their own sin is first mentioned in the Law of Moses. Thousands of years ago Moses wrote, "Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin." (Deut 24:16). At the time this was written, things were very different. Entire families had sometimes been put to death for something the father had done.

Now the King of Babylon had defeated the people of Israel and Judah. He had all of the educated youth led off into captivity to Babylon. Among the young men was Daniel, who loved God with all of his heart. God's favor was upon Daniel and soon he was elevated as one of the advisors to the king. But the kingdom was conquered by the Medes and Persians. Darius the Mede became the new king of the land.

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps, to be over the whole kingdom. Over these were three governors, one of whom was Daniel. Daniel distinguished himself above the other governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. The king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. This made the governors and satraps very jealous and they sought to find some charge against Daniel. They could find no charge or fault, however, because he was faithful. Then 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." Knowing that Daniel prayed three times a day, they decided upon a trap (Dan 6:1-5).

So, these governors and satraps went before the king, and said to him: "King Darius, live forever! We have consulted together to establish a royal statute, that whoever petitions any god or man, except you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians." King Darius liked this idea and signed the written decree. These men were very wicked. They knew the law of the Medes and Persians. Once the king signed a law into existence, it could not be revoked or altered in anyway. Not even the king could change the law. They had set the trap, and patiently waited for Daniel to break the law.

Now when Daniel heard that the law was signed, he went home. In his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he got down on his knees three times that day. He prayed and gave thanks to his God, as had been his custom since childhood.

The wicked men were hiding, waiting to catch Daniel praying. When they saw him praying, they ran and spoke to the king. "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 and said, "The decree stands—according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked."

"Then O King, you should know that Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, pays no attention to you or to the decree you put into writing. He still prays to his God three times a day."

When the king heard these words, he was greatly distressed. He was determined to rescue Daniel. He labored till sunset to save him. Then these men approached the king, and said, "Remember, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

So, the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the den of lions. The king spoke to Daniel, "May your God, whom you constantly serve, rescue you!" Then a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

Now the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. No musicians were brought before him, and he could not sleep. Then the king arose very early in the morning and ran to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a sad voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and he shut the lions’ mouths. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty” (Dan 6:7-22).

Now the king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. When he was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions—them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.

This story demonstrates the importance of each person being held accountable for their own actions. It was God who ordained that each person would be responsible for their own guilt. This was not the common practice of the time. Kings, like the one in the story of Daniel and the lion’s den, often punished entire families for the crimes of a parent. This idea of forcing families to make restitution for the crimes of a family member continued all through history into modern times. But this is of God. Each man is responsible for his own sin.

This lesson is **important** because it shows that God holds each person accountable for their own sins, and not the sins of others.

The **main truth** of this lesson is important because it teaches that the individual rather than the family, group, or tribe, is the one who is accountable for their own guilt.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What did the Law of Moses teach in regard to guilt of the individual? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said, “Each person shall die for his own sin,” you are correct.
2. What happened to the men who tried to trap and kill Daniel in a lion’s den? [Pause]
A. If you said that these men were thrown into the lion’s den and were devoured before reaching the floor, you are correct.
3. Who does God hold accountable for their sins? [Pause]
A. If you said that God holds each person accountable for their own sins, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch it at least three more times until you can tell the story of Daniel and the lion’s den. Then find a few friends and tell them this story. Discuss with them the concept that God holds each person accountable for their own sins.