

## Daniel's Protection

by the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

*"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me"* (Daniel 6:22).

When the Lord sent out the eleven disciples some time after the events of Easter morning, He said to them "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). It was really this same promise that was in Daniel's heart in our lesson. Daniel knew that the Lord would watch over him and protect him, and bring him to a happy end, no matter what happened. The Lord made many promises like this to Jacob, Abraham, Joshua, David and others. He told the children of Israel that they would be His special people, "a holy people to the Lord your God...a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6). Daniel trusted in the Lord because he believed these promises.

A large part of what it meant to them to be a special treasure was that Jehovah would give them success, protect them from harm, and help them against their enemies, which He did do. But actually the Lord watches over *everyone*, and these promises apply to everyone who follows Him. Yet it is important that people understand what these promises really mean.

Our topic today is how the Lord protects every person and what that protection means. Bad things do happen and they happen to good people as well as bad, so the Divine protection does not mean immunity from bodily harm. But Divine protection is a very real thing, and it needs to be understood. We read, "If the Lord did not protect each person moment by moment, and in every shortest instant, they would immediately perish" (*Arcana Coelestia* 59:2).

What is this protection? People tend to think of the Lord's protection in the same way that it happened with Daniel—that no physical harm will come to people who are protected by the Lord. Even when they know better, people's first thoughts about protection often have to do with their physical safety, their finances, their health, and the well-being of their loved ones. Providence, however, is not as concerned with physical as with spiritual well-being: "The Divine Providence looks to eternal things and to temporal things only so far as they agree with eternal things" (*Divine Providence* 214).

If things go well for a person on the natural plane, this could be either good or bad for him spiritually. We read that, "Honors and possessions are blessings and they are curses" (*Divine Providence* 217). That is, they are blessings if they are means to uses and the expression of love to the neighbor, and curses if they promote the love of self and the world. It is easy to see that worldly success has the potential to ruin a person spiritually, yet few people see natural failures and hardships as a blessing.

The Lord's goal is always to have people live in such a way as to promote both their spiritual and natural well-being. The teaching is that "Temporal things and eternal things are separated by people in this world, but they are joined by the Lord" (*Divine Providence* 218). That is, people tend to want natural blessings without seeing them as being connected to spiritual ones, but the Lord works to provide both—spiritual peace as the basis and cause of natural peace.

The Israelites' understanding of the Lord's blessings and promises to them was purely natural. But the meaning of this miraculous protection, in stories such as that of Daniel in the lions' den, actually has to do with the Lord's protection from spiritual "lions" not natural ones. Sadly, the children of Israel seemed to have willfully misunderstood the nature of their covenant with the Lord, believing not that He would protect them if they obeyed Him, but simply that He would protect them because they were His special people. They did not obey Him, but they still expected Him to take care of them. They believed that the Lord would preserve them from their enemies, and they hated prophets like Jeremiah for saying otherwise. Jeremiah said:

*Do not trust in these lying words saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these....' Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? (Jeremiah 7:4,9,10).*

In a sense the Lord cannot protect those who do not keep His commandments we read, "The Lord cannot protect people, unless they acknowledge the Divine, and live a life of faith and charity. For otherwise they avert themselves from the Lord, and turn themselves to the infernal spirits" (*Heaven and Hell* 577:3).

Whether we turn to the Lord or not, however, He does take care of us. He takes care of us whether we obey Him or not. This care, however, is not necessarily what we would like it to be. As the prophet Amos said to those who wished that the day of the Lord would arrive—the time when the Lord would save His people—"Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18). For we read:

*The Divine Providence never acts in accordance with the will's love in people, but constantly against. For because of hereditary evil people are always panting for the lowest hell. But the Lord by His Providence is constantly leading and drawing them away from it (Divine Providence 183).*

The idea that the Lord is against us can seem like a strange one. Yet everyone knows that it is not always good for people to get what they want. The Divine protection often involves thwarting our desires. If we could clearly see the Lord working with us at those times, it might seem to us that He was not protecting us, but causing us harm. Fortunately, we do not see Him working, nor do we see the angels who participate in this work.

The Lord leads and protects people in this world through angels who are with them at all times. Our lesson from *Arcana Coelestia* 5992 described how these angels work to protect and lead every person on earth:

- a. They notice the direction in which a person's delights turn, and modify and bend them.
- b. They act gently.
- c. When evil spirits infuse evils and falsities, they instill truths and goods.
- d. They moderate affections.
- e. They notice any new influences on a person.
- f. They call forth the forms of good and truth with a person and set them opposite the

evils and falsities.

- g. The person is therefore in the middle and free to choose.

Notice that in this list no mention is made of preventing harmful events, or of making good ones happen. "Watching over a person" means simply dealing with the things that affect their minds and hearts. This may seem less complete than the kind of protection most people would like to have. But the Lord really does protect every person in this way through these angels and good spirits. The protection works for the person's long run benefit, and yet it leaves the person in freedom. Several things are said to affect how that protection is received, especially an understanding of the truth and a life of good. "Good and its affection does not protect itself; but it is defended by truth and its understanding" (*Apocalypse Explained* 1121). And, "Those in innocence are the safest of all... All in heaven are kept safe by the Lord through states of innocence" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3519:4,5)

The Lord protects and guides every person because He loves everyone. But His protection of us does not mean that sad and unfortunate things will not happen. The Lord's protection of our church organization does not mean that it will always act wisely or prosper. Just as the Israelites tended to believe that they were special and therefore invulnerable, church organizations can also tend to believe this. One of the worst aspects of this belief is that when things do not go well for the organization people can lose faith in the cause itself.

The people did not love Jeremiah and the other prophets when they prophesied doom. But the prophecies served a great use later on, because they explained to the people how there could be a God who watched over them, even though He apparently did not help them. The prophecies explained that the help was there but that they did not take it. They also explain to us that the help is on a deeper level. The Lord does not always seem to help us on the natural plane. But His guidance does mean that whatever happens on the natural plane can be a means to lead toward good.

Daniel saw the Lord's blessings in physical terms, but it is obvious from the way he lived that physical blessings were not important to him. He obeyed the Lord even when he was threatened with death. And the Lord was with him wherever he went. We read:

*"And God will be with you" means the Lord's Divine Providence...for when the Lord is with someone He leads them and makes provision so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful may bring them what is good. This is Divine Providence (Arcana Coelestia 6303).*

Let us realize that the Lord loves us and is constantly protecting us. May we also realize that we are not special or blessed in any natural sense because of possessing the truths of the Church or because we have made a commitment to it. Sad and joyful things can happen to us and to the organizations that we love, just as they can anywhere in the world. But if we truly love the things of heaven more than worldly things, if we pray to the Lord as our help, then worldly setbacks will not be so troubling, and our hearts will be full of a joy that is immune from harm. If the Lord is with us, everything that happens can be a means of leading to what is good and happy. This happiness is what the Church is all about, and no protection in the world is more powerful. *Amen.*

Lessons: Daniel 6:1-24; *Arcana Coelestia* 5992

## *Arcana Coelestia 5992*

[1] The Lord leads and also protects a person through angels. Their function is to impart charity and faith, to notice the direction in which the person's delights turn, and to modify and bend those delights towards what is good, so far as they can do so in the person's freedom. The angels are forbidden to act in any violent manner and thereby crush a person's evil desires and false assumptions. They must act gently. Their function is also to control evil spirits who come from hell, which is done in countless ways, of which let only the following be mentioned here: When evil spirits infuse evils and falsities the angels instill truths and goods, which—even if they are not accepted—serve to temper what the former infuse. Spirits from hell are constantly on the attack, and angels provide protection; and this is a proper state of order.

[2] In particular the angels moderate affections, since they constitute a person's life and also his freedom. The angels also notice any influence on a person from hells which are now open but were not previously so, which happens when a person goes off into some new evil. To the extent that the person allows, the angels close those hells. They also remove any spirits who may be trying to come out from there. They also dispel any strange and new influences which can produce evil effects.

[3] In particular the angels call forth the forms of good and truth residing with a person and set them opposite the evils and falsities activated by the evil spirits. As a result the person is in the middle and is not conscious of the evil or of the good; and being in the middle he is in freedom to turn toward one or toward the other. Angels from the Lord employ means like these to lead and protect a person, doing so every instant and fraction of an instant. For if the angels were to let up merely for a single moment the person would be plunged into evil from which after that he cannot possibly be brought out. The angels are motivated to do all this by a love they receive from the Lord, for nothing gives them greater delight and happiness than to remove evils from a person and lead him to heaven. This is their joy. Scarcely anyone believes the Lord has that kind of concern for a person, a constant concern lasting from the very beginning of a person's existence to the final moment of his life, and for evermore after that.