

## **ENVY IS A BONE CANCER!**

**Today's Text: Daniel Chap. 6**

**Extracts:**

**The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "... My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me..." So *Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed 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 [Dan. 6: 20-24]***

*Jack was the group managing director of a multinational company in Lagos (Nigeria) and Frank was the divisional head of a subsidiary of the said company that was based in the eastern part of the country. Each time that Jack attended the group board meetings in Europe, he heard commendable things being said about Frank by overseas officials that had visited his plant. Fearing that Frank could become a threat to his own position, Jack began a programme of undermining his records and achievements. He denied Frank opportunities to visit the head office in London and sent him to challenging assignments locally. He even instigated Frank's secretary to file a sexual harassment case against him. However, on investigation, it was discovered that the allegation was false and the woman confessed (with corroboration) that Jack had been behind her misdeed. The company forced Jack to resign and Frank was appointed to take his place!*

*Jack suffered from an 'ailment' called envy which has been defined as "an emotion that occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it." <sup>1</sup>The word of God has defined envy as "rottenness to the bones" [Prov. 14: 30]. Bone marrow produces red blood cells that carry oxygen to all the parts of the body to remain alive. Therefore, if the bone is rotten, it cannot produce life-giving oxygen and the body dies. So, envy is a bone cancer!*

*Unfortunately, most of us practise envy. Can we afford to continue without hurting our physical and spiritual health? How can we escape this life-threatening cancer? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.*

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<sup>1</sup> Parrott, W.E. & Smith, R.H. (1993), "Distinguishing the experiences of envy and jealousy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64; pp. 906-920.

## 1. Envy can make us behave funny!

Think of people you thought were close friends when you were both on the struggling side of the fence. You played together, laughed together, cried together and cared together. Then, they had an earlier break and went ahead of you at school or in their professions. You continued to be happy for them. They continued to support you in your hour of need. Then, later, according to God's plan for your life, you began to reach their social levels and to even overtake them. Suddenly, you would notice some cold shoulders from them. There was no quarrel. Yet, you would begin to hear derogatory things that they were saying about you behind your back. That is envy at work. You have it towards others just as others do towards you! However, since it is a deadly sin, we need to understand what it is and how to deal with it. Today's Bible text, the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Daniel, illustrates the structure and consequences of envy.

## 2. Background: Principles and Practice of Envy!

You will recall that the night before he was slain, the last Chaldean king of Babylon, Belshazzar, had promoted Daniel to the third highest position in the kingdom for interpreting for him the handwriting on the wall [**Dan. 5: 29-30**]. Darius, his successor and first Median king of Babylon, retained Daniel's position and rank (as head of the three governors), under whom he appointed one hundred and twenty satraps over the whole kingdom [**Dan. 5: 31- Dan. 6: 1-2**]. Much more, because the king saw "an excellent spirit" in Daniel, he "gave thought to setting him over the whole realm" [v. 3]. That was what triggered the spirit of envy in his colleagues, the other two governors and the satraps under them. Let us call envious people "enviers."

The envy played itself out as follows:

### a) *Daniel's offence was his excellence!*

What was Daniel's offence? We are told that the enviers "sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but *they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him*" [**Dan. 6: 4**]. Therefore, his only fault was that he was better than the rest of them!

*There is hardly anybody who is envious of those that are inferior to them. Instead, we envy those that we perceive are superior to us, even when such people do not consider themselves so! They remind us of our shortcomings. For example, they may have attained the same status with us at a younger age or with fewer years of work experience. They may have produced better results with fewer resources. They may have a bigger congregation even when they used to be our assistants before they branched out. Their children are doing better than ours even when ours*

had a head start. In all such cases, the objects of our envy have not done anything wrong at all or against us. It is just that their success magnifies our “failures.” For example, just because the women sang and danced in praise of David for his valour, saying, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” king Saul was “very angry, and the saying displeased him.” He added, “Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” and from that day on, he envied David [**1 Sam. 18: 6-9**].

b) *The enviers attacked Daniel at his strongest point!*

The governors and satraps said, “We shall not find any charge against this Daniel *unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God*” [**Dan. 6: 5**]. Daniel’s success with the Babylonian kings had been due to his faith in the true God. That was the point that those that envied him planned to attack. What poor military strategists they were! You attack your enemies at their weakest point, not their strongest. In Daniel’s case, it was not just his natural talents or professional skills but his faith. Therefore, the enviers were doomed to fail even before they began their attack. The enviers met and worked out a wicked plan. They asked the new king to “make a *firm decree*, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O King, shall be cast into the den of lions” [**vv. 6-7**].

A firm decree was one that could not be changed in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians [**v. 8**]. As a new king trying to establish control over a vast and turbulent kingdom, would you not consider their request supportive of your best interest? In like manner, those who consider you their object of envy would find a very defensible principle to use to put you in trouble. For example, a big debate in Nigeria right now is the allegation that the Attorney-General (AG) in the new government of President Yar’Adua (who came to power in May 2007) is using the “rule of law” principle to slow down the anti-corruption drive of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as a way of getting at that Commission’s Chairman who has earned international recognition that overshadows that of his boss, the AG.

Daniel did not have any sleepless nights over the decree. He simply kept doing what he had always done, that is, “in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down, three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, *as was his custom since early days*.” The enviers saw this and reported it to the king who had no choice but to throw Daniel into the den of hungry lions [**vv. 10- 16**]. Those who envy you may fight dirty but you should keep to the only weapons that you have, namely, total reliance on God.

c) *But the enviers were attacking the apple of God’s eye!*

God says to His faithful messengers, “He who touches you touches the apple of (My) eye, for *surely* I will shake My hand against them” [**Zech. 2: 8**]. The apple of the eye is that dark part of your eye surrounded by white. You will not let anything come near your eye, not to talk of the apple, before you firmly shut it. The enviers’ attack on Daniel amounted to their trying to touch the apple of God’s eye. When He shut His eye, the mouths of the hungry lions were shut and could not hurt Daniel [**Dan. 6: 22**]!

Do you know how many lions’ mouths that God shuts in your favour each new day simply because you dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under His shadow? Enviars have fired at you arrows by day and pestilence by night but they cannot come near you. God sends His angels to keep watch over you. As a result, you are able to tread upon lions, no matter how ferocious or hungry they may be, and their young ones you are able to trample under your feet [**Ps. 91: 1, 5-6, 11-13**]!

All that night that Daniel was in the lion’s den, the king could not eat or sleep. Very early in the morning, he hastened to the den and called out with a lamenting voice to Daniel, saying, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Daniel replied, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him, and also, O King, I have done no wrong before you.” King Darius was so glad. He commanded that Daniel be taken out of the den. We are told, “no injury *whatever* was found on him *because he believed in his God*” [**Dan. 6: 19-23**].

Daniel’s true worship had shone throughout the kingdom and even the new king knew of it. What is your testimony? Are you faithful or do you worship Him deceitfully just merely to curry human commendations? On the day of reckoning, when the wicked world throws you into the lions’ den, only your relationship with God can speak for you! As He has assured the faithful, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” [**Ps. 50: 15**].

d) *The enviers destroyed themselves and their families*

For misleading the king to sign an irrevocable decree, he commanded that all the false accusers, with their wives and children, be cast into the lions’ den, and “the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den” [**Dan. 6: 24**].

Those who dig a pit shall themselves fall into it [**Prov. 26: 27**]. Out of envy, Haman built gallows where he had hoped to hang Mordecai. In the

end, it was Haman himself that was hanged there [Esth. 7: 10]. Miriam envied her brother, Moses' superior spiritual standing with God, saying, "Has the Lord in deed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" Immediately, God struck her with leprosy and she had to stay outside the camp for seven days until she was healed [Num.12: 2, 9-15].

Terrible things do happen to those enviers who try to hurt true believers but we hardly relate effect to cause. The gap of achievement may widen, thereby exacerbating the envy. The enviers may grow worse and suffer serious set backs in health or material blessings or spiritual standing. Rather than turn the searchlight on themselves, enviers may call their situation the work of witchcraft or sorcery that you have directed at them! If you worship in the same church with them, you will suddenly begin to hear fervent petitions to God to rebuke satanic forces in their midst! Envy is in deed a bone cancer!

e) *God was glorified*

King Darius did not stop at releasing Daniel and casting his enemies into the lions' den. He also made a decree to "all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth" as follows [Dan. 6: 26]:

*In every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end*

God rescued Daniel for His own glory. Daniel outlived his adversaries and prospered during the reigns of Darius the Mede and Cyrus, the Persian [v. 28]. In like manner, your ability to continue to defeat enviers that want to hurt you depends on the extent you continue to give thanks and glory to God for His mercies that endure forever.

### 3. Conclusion: Plot for your salvation, not destruction!

We learn the following principles from the forgoing story:

- Envy is a problem for all of us, as long as there are people that we use to measure our success or progress in life. However, we are all also objects of envy because we are always in the centre of the world. Just as we are looking ahead and besides us for people to use as success benchmarks, there are people *behind* us who look at us the same way. Therefore, *the only benchmark we can look up to without being frustrated is Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith* [Heb. 12: 2]

- Jesus our role model has said, “If you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” [Lk 16: 12]. In other words, you should *rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep* [Rom. 12: 15]. But, if you rejoice over other people’s setback or plot to hurt others for their success, why do you expect God to give you your own? As you sow, so shall you reap [Gal. 6: 7]. If you throw perfume against the wind, you will gladly wait to take the aroma in. But if you throw filth at it, you are the first to run to avoid the stench!
- If you are an envier, *become transformed by renewing your mind* away from worldly values, “that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” [Rom. 12: 2]. Gideon had thought that he was nobody when he looked at the oppression of the Midianites against the children of Israel. But God saw him as a man of valour. When Gideon conformed to God’s will for him, he destroyed thousands of the enemy and set his people free with only three hundred men [Judg. Chaps. 6-8]!
- If you find yourself the object of envy, do like David who “behaved very wisely *in all his ways*, and the Lord was with him” [1 Sam. 18: 14]. As a result, he cultivated a life-long friendship with Jonathan, the heir apparent to Saul’s throne, who never ever felt threatened by the fact that David was going to be king in his own place [1 Sam. 20: 30-34].

When the bone can no longer produce red blood cells, the body loses oxygen and dies. Envy is rottenness to the bones. Rotten bones cannot produce red blood cells. Therefore, envy is a bone cancer. Kill it before it kills you!

**Related Topic**

“Admiration or Envy?”

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