

Rubens' painting of Daniel in the lions' den is wrong in several ways.

First, Daniel appears to be young and afraid rather than a mature, fearless prophet. Second, the Lord had sent an angel to close the mouths of the lions (6:22), but in the painting the mouths of several lions are open. We do not know how the angel closed their mouths, but it was probably through fear. They would have been terrified of the angel, much like the soldiers on guard at the tomb in Matthew 28:4 who became like dead men. They probably would have been trying to hide in the far corners of the den. Third, Rubens painted many male lions along with a few females. If that had been the case, the competitive male lions would have fought and killed one another. Many lionesses make much more sense.



How were lions viewed in Babylon?

The Babylonians, the Persians, and other ancient people used the lion to represent great strength, and they associated such with their gods such as the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. So it was a powerful cultural statement with deep meaning for King Darius to write of the God of Daniel as the living God who had delivered the prophet from the power of the lion (6:25-27). Several of the points in the worksheet for this study concern this topic.

How is the lions' den story like the resurrection of Jesus?

A stone was placed over the entrance, and the stone was sealed (6:17). Darius thought of the prophet as dead (6:18-20). So Daniel's survival and coming out of the den was joyous (6:23) like Jesus' resurrection. Also, Daniel's innocence (6:22) parallels Jesus' sinless perfection to some extent. Best of all, Daniel's preservation was such a great testimony that the king became a believer in Daniel's God (6:25-27). It was a sign to Darius, much like the resurrection is the greatest sign of Jesus' divinity to us.

Why doesn't the story end with the deliverance of Daniel?

There is much in Daniel, as in the rest of the Bible, about the judgement of the wicked. So the gruesome deaths of those who had opposed Daniel and tricked the king is reported as well (6:24). The hungry lions were easily able to overcome Daniel's enemies, even though they were a large group. There was no deliverance for any of them.

What is the application?

The lions were instruments of intimidation, much like the fiery furnace in chapter three, but believers are not to be intimidated by the power of the opposition. (See 1 Peter 5:8.) The lions were weak compared to the God of Daniel (Daniel 6:27). The Lord was able to deliver his servant, and he is able to deliver us as well, according to his will (3:17-18).