

The Book of Daniel

Chapter Six



A new empire and a new king, yet the same problem exists. Men want to elevate themselves above God. Chapter 6 of Daniel records the famous account of Daniel in the Lion's Den. We are again provided with a wonderful example of godly character and the ability of God to miraculously protect His people to the glory of His name. This is the last purely historical chapter of Daniel. The remaining five chapters will deal primarily with prophecy.

6:1-3 – Under New Management

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel [was] first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit [was] in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.."

Who is Darius?

Much scholarly debate has occurred on this question and it remains up in the air. The Bible is the only piece of ancient literature that specifically mentions Darius the Mede. Non-biblical historical documents identify a ruler over Babylon between the reign of Belshazzar of the Babylonians and Cyrus the Persian. However, the name differs from Darius. Some theorize that Darius the Mede was another name for Cyrus the Persian. That is possible, as some kings ruled under more than one name as a way to unite a diverse empire. It is more likely that historical records of Darius the Medes' rule or of his aliases have not yet been found. God's Word has remained steadfast despite the ever-changing waves of criticism. Historical research has provided no good reason to doubt the existence of Darius.

We do know that several events of Biblical importance occurred during Darius' reign. Not only does Daniel face the lion's den and receive words of prophecy, but the events of the book of Ezra, which recounts the rebuilding of the temple, also occurred.

A new management style

Whenever new management takes over a company, there is typically a reorganization that takes place. The Medo-Persian Empire was no different. They set up a new government hierarchy that was evidently made up of some non Medo-Persians, including Daniel. This was not uncommon for the Medo-Persian Empire. Part of their strength came from the respect they paid to local leaders and traditions when they conquered a territory.

The new governance structure was made up of 120 princes/satraps with three presidents/commissioners over them. What was the king's purpose in setting things up this way?

The king knew that he could not sufficiently oversee the administration of such a vast empire. By creating these layers of "management", he simplified his task and ensured that no detail would be left unattended.

Back to the head of the class

It is amazing that Daniel survived the fall of the Babylonian Empire, as we saw Belshazzar make him third in command in the kingdom prior to his death. Not only did he survive, but he thrived again under Darius, being named one of the three presidents/commissioners. What distinguished Daniel from everyone else?

One did not rise to such a preeminent position under Darius without being exceedingly bright and gifted. It was not these characteristics, however, that earned Daniel such respect. Rather, it was the quality of his character. He was a gifted, diligent, and honest administrator that showed forth the light of a godly character.

What plans did Darius have for Daniel? Why?

Darius planned to exalt Daniel to a position over the entire empire. Remember that Darius' purpose in setting up the government in this manner was to protect his interests. In Daniel, he found not only a capable leader, but someone he could trust. This was an invaluable combination.

6:4-9 – The Art of Politics

"Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he [was] faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in

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him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find [it] against him concerning the law of his God. Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that 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. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree."

A political plan

It is common in government for someone nominated to a prominent position to be thoroughly examined by a committee before they are confirmed to the position. A good example is the recent (at the time of this writing) nomination and confirmation of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. His past record was scoured by members of both parties to determine his fitness, he was verbally examined before a Senate subcommittee and eventually confirmed by the whole Senate. What we see happening here in Daniel is much different. The other presidents and princes aren't checking out his history to make sure he is fit for the position that Darius was creating for him. What was their motivation?

They were extremely jealous of Daniel. They were looking for some misdeed from his past to discredit him in the eyes of Darius. If they could find one issue, they could blow it out of proportion and try to ruin his credibility. This is a common practice in partisan politics.

What dirt did they dig up on Daniel? How does Daniel demonstrate the principles of Titus 2:6-8?

They couldn't find any example of unfaithfulness (where he didn't keep his word or honor a friend), nor examples of poor judgment. These were the qualities that were most important to Darius and the motivation for Daniel's anticipated promotion. Daniel is the perfect example of Titus 2:6-8, which speaks of the character that a man should have. Titus 2:8 says that those who are against us, in this case the princes and presidents, should have nothing evil to say about us.

What was their Plan B? How does this exemplify 1 Peter 3:16-17?

Besides his good character, the only thing that separated Daniel from them was his strict adherence to the Word of God. These men were not Jewish, but were pagans that worshipped an assortment of false gods from different religious systems. It was clear that God was the focal point of Daniel's life. If they couldn't find cause, they would create cause by tricking the King into outlawing Daniel's worship. 1 Peter 3:16-17 states that it is better for us to suffer for doing good than doing bad.

The bait and switch

The presidents and princes knew that Darius favored Daniel and would not knowingly implement a law that would jeopardize his position, much less his life. What two things did they do to trick Darius into signing the new law? See Proverbs 29:5 for the principle that the presidents and princes applied in this situation.

First, they lied to him. They told Darius that all the presidents and princes worked together to propose a law to outlaw prayer to any god other than Darius for thirty days. Daniel had no part in this plan. Second, they diverted Darius' attention from considering the potential effects this law would have through flattery. Not only did they flatter him with their tone, but the legislation itself was a boost to his ego.

What characteristic of Medo-Persian law did they remind Darius of before he signed the law into effect?

The law of the Medes and Persians does not change. Once Darius signed the decree, he could not change his mind. He would not be able to save Daniel, even if he wanted to, after the decree was signed.

What was the penalty for violating the new law? Why did they craft it this way?

The penalty for praying to any God beside King Darius was to be thrown into the den of lions. This meant certain death, barring Divine intervention. The presidents and princes knew that Daniel's devotion to God in no way hindered his service to Darius. Rather, it enabled Daniel to maintain his excellent character and provided a source of spiritual wisdom that was above theirs. The only way they could surpass Daniel was for Daniel to be taken out of the picture.

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6:10-13 – An Unflinching Resolve

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask [a petition] of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing [is] true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which [is] of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.."

Learning from Daniel's prayer practices

What do we learn about Daniel's prayer habits from this passage?

He was a man committed to communicating with God. He reserved three times a day to open his window, towards Jerusalem, the city of God's people, kneeled, and prayed. In addition to asking of God, he gave glory and thanksgiving to God for His wonderful provision.

Why did Daniel pray toward Jerusalem? See 1 Kings 8:44-53.

When Solomon built the temple, he dedicated it with this prayer from 1 Kings. In the prayer, he asked that whenever God's people sinned or sought Him out at that temple, or even prayed toward Jerusalem and the temple, that God would hear and deliver his people. Specifically, in verses 46 - 50, Solomon prays that when God's people are taken captive to a strange line (like Daniel) that the Lord would hear them and deliver them.

Did the decree alter any of Daniel's prayer habits? Why or why not? See Matthew 10:28.

Daniel did not change a thing he did after the decree. He still opened his windows, making his prayer somewhat public or at least obvious to anyone wanting to spy on him. Some might argue that he could have prayed with his windows closed or even prayed in his bed while others might think him to be asleep. Daniel, however, was not going to alter his obedience to God because he was afraid of what men might do. He cared more about God and his people than he did about the response of man.

How can we apply this lesson to our lives?

The Lord desires complete possession of our life. As we yield more and more of our life to Him, our speech and actions will reveal our devotion. Not as putting on a show before men, but as part of our lifestyle that is consistent whether or not men see us. We should not alter this because we stand before men that do not believe in our God or His ways. One example from my life is the phrase, "Lord willing". The Scriptures teach in James 4:13-15 that our attempt to make plans should always be conditioned with the phrase, "If the Lord will..." This shouldn't apply only when we are in front of other Christians but we should use this phrase whenever we make plans with anyone. It still applies right? I have often been tempted and failed to utter this important phrase when I'm around non-believers. This should not be so.

The trap is sprung

The KJV describes the coming of the presidents and princes as, "these men assembled". However, a more literal translation of the original Aramaic states, "they came thronging" or "they came in a great tumult". Make no mistake, the sole purpose of this legislation was to trap Daniel. Once the legislation was signed by the King and Daniel knew of it, all they had to do was catch him in the act. They came running together to catch him, have him arrested, and brought before the king. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that are an abomination to God. Which of these principles did the presidents and princes violate?

One could make a case that they were in violation of ALL these principles. The sin was initiated by their pride (haughty eyes). They lied to Darius about the intention of the law (a lying tongue). They were seeking to have Daniel killed (hands that shed innocent blood). They devised a wicked scheme (a heart that devises wicked plans). They ran to Daniel's house to catch him in the act of praying (feet that run rapidly to evil). They lied about Daniel's consent to the law (a false witness who utters lies). Finally, they were causing strife among the presidents and princes by turning them against Daniel (one who spreads strife among brothers).

What was the accusation made against Daniel?

He did not regard the king or the king's law. They were trying to paint Daniel as a seditionist.

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6:14-18 – Into the Lion's Den

"Then the king, when he heard [these] words, was sore displeased with himself, and set [his] heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians [is], That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast [him] into the den of lions. [Now] the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him."

How would you describe the Darius' feelings for Daniel?

He thought very highly of Daniel and apparently had great affection for him. So much so, in fact, that Darius worked all day to try and find a loophole that would keep Daniel from the lion's den.

How did Daniel come to have such favor with the king? See Exodus 11:3.

As we walk obediently toward God, His light will radiate from our lives. Some reject this light and hate us the more. The Lord, however, can soften the heart of the hardest man and grant us favor in their sight to preserve us for the task that is ahead. Obviously, the Lord had given Daniel such favor in the heart of Darius.

What became clear to Darius about the intention of the new law?

The insistence of the presidents and princes on Daniel's destruction made it very clear that they had devised this legislation to remove Daniel from the King's favor.

How did Darius feel about himself? How do we know?

Darius was ashamed of himself. He had just gone from the heights of pride due to the law requiring men to pray to him to the pit of despair, realizing that their reverence was not real and that he had been fooled into signing a death warrant for his best president. We see him fasting and sleepless, despising his foolish actions and hoping that Daniel would be spared.

Did Darius have hope for Daniel?

Yes. Darius told Daniel that his God would deliver him from the lions. In fact, we see him run to the lion's den the next morning to see his fate. Obviously, he had some hope of Daniel's survival.

Some might wonder why Daniel was thrown into a lion's den rather than into the fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Medo-Persians were worshippers of Zoroaster and fire was sacred to them. Therefore, they used an alternate means for their executions. The lion's den was just what it sounds like, a cavern in which lions were kept for the purpose of painfully devouring those that were found worthy of death. It was likely a pit of some sort that neither the lions nor a man could escape from, with a heavy stone over the entrance to insure that no one could get out or go in to rescue someone. By placing the seal of the king and his lords upon the stone, no man would dare move it for fear of retribution. Daniel's death was to be relatively quick and painful.



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6:19-23 – An Angelic Intervention

“Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: [and] the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.”

As Darius ran to the lion's den at sunrise, he called out to Daniel in a tired and mournful voice after having spent a sleepless night fasting. In looking at Darius' cry to Daniel, what did he recognize about Daniel's devotion to his God and about the character of God?

Daniel faith was such that he did not falter in his devotion to God, even when it endangered his life. Darius also recognized that Daniel served, “the living God”. He had some faith in the Lord's power to save Daniel. He knew that Daniel's God was more than a dumb idol.

How was Daniel counted innocent by God after he broke the law of the land?

By obeying God, Daniel neither sinned against God or against the King. He had broken the king's law, but because the King's law was contrary to God's law, Daniel neither sinned against God or the lawgiver by breaking it.

What attitude did Daniel display toward the king?

Instead of being angry with the king for falling for such a foolish trick and having his life placed in jeopardy, Daniel remained reverent in his behavior. This gives us a glimpse at why he was so highly valued by Darius.

6:24 – Justice is Served

“And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast [them] into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.”

Why would the king have the men that accused Daniel and their families killed?

He knew he could no longer trust these men, nor could they be expected to serve under Daniel. He had their families killed with them in order to prevent vengeance by the children and to send a very clear statement to everyone in his kingdom that he would not tolerate such behavior.

6:25-28 – “Here ye, Here ye”

“Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he [is] the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom [that] which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion [shall be even] unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

The letter written by Darius is reminiscent of the letter Nebuchadnezzar wrote in Chapter 4, after his conversion. One primary difference is that Darius appears to remain unconverted, referring to the Lord as the God of Daniel rather than his God. What is the essential message Darius conveyed in this letter?

All men under Darius' dominion should reverence Daniel's God because He is different and distinct from all other gods. God's dominion is everlasting and dominant over the empires of men. He demonstrated His power by delivering Daniel from the lions. The decree and seal of the Medo Persian empire and the forces of nature meant nothing to Him.

What was the end result of the plot by the presidents and princes to kill Daniel?

God was glorified throughout the kingdom and Daniel was rescued and promoted during the reign of both Darius and Cyrus.

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Summary

The consistent theme throughout the first six chapters of Daniel is the sovereignty of God over the affairs and dominions of men. He preserved His own in the most desperate of circumstances. He accomplished His will, despite the resistance of powerful men and their empires. He also humbled the proudest hearts and brought judgment upon the wicked. He is God. Who is like Him in heaven or in earth that we may compare Him to?

The historical foundation of the first six chapters of Daniel lays a solid footing for the prophecy which is yet to come. We've seen objective proof that God is in control over the hearts and lives of men, from the least (a captive boy named Daniel) to the greatest (King Nebuchadnezzar). He is also sovereign over all kingdoms, controlling their rising and falling. As we read the prophecy of the remaining five chapters, our faith should be strong in the ability of God to bring to pass all that He has set forth.

Numbers 23:19 – “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”