

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 Non-biblical historical documents identify a ruler over Babylon between the reign of Belshazzar of the Babylonians and Cyrus the Persian.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?

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 names one of the three presidents/commissioners. What distinguished Daniel from everyone else?

What plans did Darius have for Daniel? Why?

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?

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

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

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.

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

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

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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?

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

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

How can we apply this lesson to our lives?

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?

What was the accusation made against Daniel?

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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?

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

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

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

Did Darius have hope for Daniel?

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?

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

What attitude did Daniel display toward the king?

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?

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?

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

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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?”