

# The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.  
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.  
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.  
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

## **Daniel In The Lions' Den**

**February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Daniel 6**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Daniel 6; that's on page 743 in your pew Bibles. This is the last of the court stories in the Book of Daniel. Next week we'll begin to look at a series of visions that Daniel had that speak to God's immediate and far future plans for the redemption of his people – but this week we are looking at the well-known story of Daniel in the Lion's den. The plot of the story is reasonably easy to follow; we have a recurring conflict, a courageous response, a divine intervention, a complete reversal and a declaration of praise. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

### **A Recurring Conflict**

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom;<sup>2</sup> and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss.

Now we should pause here and address the issue of the mysterious identity of Darius the Mede. Who is this guy? We know for a fact that Cyrus was King of the Persians at the time of Babylon's collapse and defeat so who is Darius? Liberal scholars often point out that there is no mention of

this Darius the Mede outside the Bible and that this therefore proves that this story was written hundreds of years after the actual events described. But we remember from last week that for thousands of years there was no mention of King Belshazzar outside the Bible – until 1854 when all the sudden there was. You see, we construct history out of shards of pottery dug out of the ground and inscriptions off of long toppled monuments and we don't always have all the pieces of the puzzle before we publish our books and make our bold declarations. So sometimes, it is best to wait. More puzzle pieces will be discovered and the picture will get clearer and clearer.

For now there are two pretty decent theories as to the possible identity of this character. Some scholars believe that Darius the Mede was in fact the general who actually took possession of Babylon on behalf of Cyrus and who reigned briefly as a governor until the newly conquered territories could be re-organized for central oversight.

That's one theory.

D.J. Wiseman - the world famous Assyriologist – has another theory that I think makes even more sense. He thinks that Darius the Mede was another name for Cyrus the Persian. He thinks that the last verse of chapter 6 is not referring to two people at all but rather to two names of one person and that may be so. There are plenty of kings in the ancient world who have multiple names and multiple titles and some of those titles may have been used more frequently in one part of the empire than in another. So that may be it as well.

The good news is that we're still digging history out of the ground and the even better news is, that the identity of Darius the Mede does not in any way affect our interpretation of this story.

Whoever he was – he was clearly in man charge in Babylon and he was clearly impressed with the man we know as Daniel. We jump back into the story at verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup> Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was

found in him. <sup>5</sup> Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”

By the way, let’s just pause here and notice that there are GOOD REASONS and BAD REASONS to be hated by your unbelieving neighbours. As Christians we should aspire to be like Daniel in the sense that the only complaint the people had against him was in the matter of his allegiance to the Lord. They didn’t hate him because he was a loudmouth jerk; they didn’t hate him because he was a bully; they didn’t hate him because he was weird – they hated him because he was singular in his devotion to the Lord.

That’s a good reason to be hated.

The Apostle Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 2:20. He says:

“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure; this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.” (1 Peter 2:20 ESV)

So before you use the story of Daniel to fortify you in a season of suffering you better make sure that you are suffering for the same reasons that Daniel suffered. If you are the author of your own OSTRACISM then this story is really not the story for you. This story is for people whose allegiance to God and whose uncompromising character has incited the hostility and jealousy of their neighbours.

We jump back into the story at verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup> All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup> Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” <sup>9</sup> Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. (Daniel 6:1–9 ESV)

Now, of course, King Darius had no idea what was going on here. It was fairly standard for some sort of loyalty test like this to be used to identify people whose commitment to the new regime was somewhat suspect. Darius did not realize that this test had been engineered by his officials specifically to isolate Daniel.

You see, Daniel had conflicting loyalties. Old Testament scholar T.A. Boogaart explains the situation this way. He says:

“On the one hand we have Darius, ruler of all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth and enforcer of the law of the Medes and Persians. On the other hand we have the God of Daniel, working signs and wonders in heaven and on earth and enforcer of Jewish law. The kingdoms overlap and the question of sovereignty has to be resolved.”<sup>1</sup>

Who is your ULTIMATE MASTER? That is the question that had to be resolved. Daniel understood that very well. We pick up the story at verse 10:

### **A Courageous Response**

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. <sup>11</sup> Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. <sup>12</sup> Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” <sup>13</sup> Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

<sup>14</sup> Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. <sup>15</sup> Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

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<sup>1</sup> T.A. Boogaart, *Daniel 6: A Tale Of Two Empires* in *The Reformed Review* 39-40 (1985-1987): 107 as cited in Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in *The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 158.

<sup>16</sup> Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” <sup>17</sup> And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. <sup>18</sup> Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. (Daniel 6:10–18 ESV)

Daniel has stood his ground. He did not pretend to be other than he was. He went home and threw open the windows of his upper chamber and prayed to the Lord – as was his habit. Daniel was not the sort of man to lower his flag at the first sign of trouble<sup>2</sup>. He had lived too long and seen too much of God for that. He took a stand – and he paid the price. Against the king’s wishes he was thrown alive into the lions’ den.

The story continues at verse 19:

### **A Divine Intervention**

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup> As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” <sup>23</sup> Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. (Daniel 6:19–23 ESV)

The similarities between this story and the story recorded in Daniel 3 are fairly numerous. In both stories it is the conflicting loyalty of the Jewish men that gets them into trouble. In both cases, they are rescued from their execution by an angel of the Lord. And in both cases their rescue makes a profound impact on their pagan king.

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<sup>2</sup> As per Porteous cited in Hill page 122.

We hear about that now in verse 24:

### **A Complete Reversal**

And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. (Daniel 6:24 ESV)

This verse is one of the most gruesome verses in the entire Bible, isn't it? We should be careful to note that there is no indication in the text as to how Daniel – or how God for that matter – felt about the king's actions. The Bible just says: "This is what happened".

In a sense this is no more than what the Bible predicts will happen whenever evil people commit slander and plan disaster for other people.

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling. (Proverbs 26:27 ESV)

God has designed the cosmos to punish liars and plotters – that is woven into the code of the moral universe. That's good to know.

The story concludes in verses 25-28:

### **A Declaration Of Praise**

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you.

<sup>26</sup> I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.

<sup>27</sup> He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

<sup>28</sup> So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Daniel 6:25–28 ESV)

As I said, many scholars think that this last verse in chapter 6 is intended to clarify that Darius the Mede is Cyrus the Persian. The Aramaic phrase used here could equally be translated: “Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, namely, Cyrus the Persian” and many scholars understand it as such. And history does record that Cyrus the Persian was strangely disposed toward the Jewish people. He was the king who set them free from and who contributed generously to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In terms of the chronology of the biblical narrative, the next story after Daniel 6 is actually Ezra 1 and it begins with these remarkable words:

<sup>1</sup> In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

<sup>2</sup> “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:1–4 ESV)

So apparently, in large part due to this strange incident, Cyrus started taking orders from the one true God. “The LORD, the God of heaven, has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.”

Are you seeing that?

That’s how this story ends – and that explains to a great extent, why this story has been preserved in Holy Scripture. Tremper Longman III says here:

“This historical narrative of the Old Testament was written not simply for remembrance, but also to serve as a paradigm for future behaviour. The narratives of Daniel, in particular, are shaped to serve as life examples for later generations of God’s people.”<sup>3</sup>

So we’re supposed to remember this story – but more than that, we are supposed to be instructed by this story. This is history that teaches. These are examples that just might save your life. These

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<sup>3</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 165.

stories were written down and preserved for people like us – people trying to be faithful to God in a foreign land.

I think there are at least 4 lessons and reminders that we need to be careful to see. The first one is this:

### **Instruction And Encouragement For Exiles**

#### **1. Never forget that the Seed and the serpent are perpetually at war**

As I just said, these stories have been “shaped to serve as life examples for later generations of God’s people.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible is telling us that as long as we IDENTIFY with God’s people and with God’s plan of redemption we will suffer the slings and arrows of our adversary. This is one of the oldest promise in the bible. In Genesis 3:15 God said to the devil:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

God declared a perpetual state of war between his people and the devil. God knew that the devil would never give up – so he promised that he would never let us give up either. He would always give us the strength to fight and to endure until finally, our redeemer would come – the child born to the woman, who would crush the head of our adversary at some considerable cost to himself.

That war is on-going.

Jesus told his disciples:

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 ESV)

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<sup>4</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 165.



So, Jesus says, “you’re going to win, but you’re going to have to fight”. The Apostle Paul said the same thing. He said:

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12 ESV)

Brothers and sisters, if you identify with God; if you refuse to go along with the culture in their head long plunge into death and ruin – you will be persecuted. ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE WILL BE PERSECUTED – that message is found on almost every page of the Bible – Old Testament and New. And that leads us to our second important lesson:

## **2. Never forget that God’s people do not wage war according to the flesh**

Daniel knew that he was in a fight – but Daniel also knew that he could not fight like a person of the world. Let me quote Tremper Longman one more time, he says:

“When Daniel heard about the law forbidding his prayer, he did not rally the troops for a strike or armed resistance, he prepared himself for death. The same may be said concerning the three friends in Daniel 3. Christians do not fight for their beliefs by assaulting or killing, but by dying.”<sup>5</sup>

Let me repeat that:

Christians do not fight for their beliefs by assaulting or killing, but by dying.

We see the exact same approach in the Apostles in the Book of Acts. The Apostles were imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and then an angel of the Lord set them free – sound familiar? Probably the same angel. The angel of prison reform and rescue or something – so the angel sets them free AND THEY GO RIGHT BACK TO PREACHING!!

Do you remember that?

And then they got hauled back into court again. Acts 5:40-42 says:

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<sup>5</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 171.

“when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. <sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, **they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.**” (Acts 5:40–42 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

That’s our warfare!

The devil takes his best shot and we just keep on teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus!

That’s what we do.

We don’t go to war – we go to work!

We are subject to the government UNTIL the government tells us to do something that God forbids us to do – and then we don’t fight – we just do like Daniel. We go home, throw open the windows and CARRY ON. And we absorb the consequences and trust that God will be glorified through the process.

That’s not unreasonable – that’s faith – and that leads us our third lesson, which is obviously related; we must:

### **3. Never forget that God is Sovereign over even the plots and schemes of our enemy**

See, that’s the reason we don’t have to fight back – because we know that God is able to thwart and exploit the schemes of our enemy – he is able to bring good out of evil.

Peter talks about this in Acts 2:22-24 in his sermon on Pentecost, he says:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified

and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Acts 2:22–24 ESV)

Are seeing that?

You crucified Jesus! Lawless men tried to dig a pit for the Holy One Of God – what were you thinking? And yet, in a glorious twist of Providence all you ended up doing was facilitating the God’s glorious plan of redemption – isn’t that beautiful?

And isn’t that exactly what happened in this story? Wicked men dug a pit for brother Daniel. Wicked men meant to throw him down – and yet - in an absolutely MARVELOUS TWIST OF PROVIDENCE – it was that act that led eventually to the Persian King being so impacted by the power and reality of God that he ended up issuing a proclamation privileging the worship of Yahweh and funding the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem – that’s a pretty remarkable turn-around!!

Our God knows how to do that!!

He didn’t need Daniel’s violent intervention anymore than Jesus needed Peter to cut off the ear of Malchus in the Garden of Gethsamane. He was working a plan the whole time. He was going to turn the evil plans of wicked men into a great and glorious work of redemption.

That’s who God is – that’s how God works! We see that in the Bible but we see it also in the way that God moves and works still today.

You’ve no doubt heard about the horrific persecution happening right now in communist China. For years Christianity was tolerated there – the government was suspicious of it and tried to regulate it – but did not attempt to outright obliterate it – until now. In the last two years China has waged all-out war on the church of Jesus Christ. Churches have been bulldozed. Pastors have been disappeared. Wicked PLOTS have been conceived by wicked men.

Ha!

He who sits in the heavens LAUGHS!

I just received a report from a missionary that many of you know and support who is working in the region. I can't tell you who for reasons of confidentiality, but he wrote in his report that people in China are coming to Christ right now at a rate that surpasses anything seen in the last 20 years. He says that: "The government's plan to crush the Church has backfired on them. Because of the restrictions and persecution, the Church is now growing faster than before."<sup>6</sup>

You see that friends? Same God today as back in the Book of Acts. Same God today as back in the Book of Daniel. God knows how to thwart and even exploit the plots and schemes of our enemy – hallelujah!

The final lesson in this story is perhaps the most important. We must never forget that God is able to rescue his people from hell and death.

#### **4. Never forget that God is able to rescue his people from hell and death**

Most of the commentators are eager to remind us here that not every faithful person was delivered from danger the way that Daniel and his 3 companions were. Of course we don't need the commentators to remind us of that. In Hebrews chapter 11 – the same chapter that tells us to look to the example of Daniel also tells us that:

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. (Hebrews 11:35–37 ESV)

So not everybody received the same kind of rescue – but these stories are in the Bible because they demonstrate God's mastery over matters of life and death.

Old Testament scholar Joyce Baldwin puts it this way. She says:

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<sup>6</sup> Confidential report. **Do not put on PowerPoint.**

“The period of persecution was only just beginning for God’s people in the sixth century BC and deliverances from death had a symbolic significance beyond the actual event.”<sup>7</sup>

So again – this is history that teaches. Daniel being rescued from the Lion’s den IS A SYMBOL of our release from death and hell. And by the way, the early Christians understood it as such. It was an encouraging example to the Jews in the Old Testament but it was AN ANTICIPATION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD LIVING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST.

They noticed many similarities between this story about Daniel and the life and death of Jesus. Jesus too was seemingly caught in a trap that was laid by jealous men. Jesus too was wrongly convicted. Pilate too – just like Darius – was forced into passing a death sentence upon an innocent man. And just as Daniel was lowered into the lion’s den so did Jesus descend unto the dead. And in the same way that a stone was rolled over the mouth of Daniel’s den – so too was a stone rolled over the mouth of Jesus’ tomb.

The comparisons are fairly obvious.

And the point is marvellously clear.

God is Sovereign over life and death.

He knows how to TRIP the devil’s snares.

He knows how to rescue his people from the lion’s den.

And therefore, as David said in Psalm 37:

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.” (Psalm 37:5–6 ESV)

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<sup>7</sup>Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 141.

There is light and justice on the other side of death and disaster for all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

That's the truth. That's a promise you can hold on to come hell or high water – because this is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God. Let's pray together.