

Saved Through Troubles... again

It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps¹ over the kingdom, that they should be in charge of the whole kingdom, and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss. Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. (6:1-3)

First we watched Nebuchadnezzar accept Yahweh and be saved. Then we saw Belshazzar defiantly go down the tubes. The next *melek* in Daniel's story is Darius the Mede.²

We don't know how Darius found out about Daniel, or why he appointed him one of the top three commissioners in the kingdom. But, true to form, the Holy Spirit worked through him in an extraordinary way, and Daniel distinguished himself. Shortly Darius decided to make him the highest official in the kingdom.

If we think back to what's been happening all along, we know this isn't going to sit well with the Chaldeans. This Hebrew's been a thorn in their side for half a century. He and his buddies trumped them when Nebuchadnezzar had the dream about the statue, while the Hebrews were still underclassmen at Babylon U. Then the king made this *foreigner* their boss. They tried to get rid of Daniel's friends on the plain of Dura, and that plan fell through. They couldn't eliminate Daniel while Nebuchadnezzar lived, and Amel-Marduk probably kept him on because he did such a good job.

Somewhere down the line Daniel was retired, and the Chaldeans lost the need to scratch this itch. But suddenly he's back. He's got the new ruler's ear, but this king doesn't have any history with Daniel. Is this their chance?

But **the commissioners and satraps couldn't find any grounds to accuse Daniel of corruption since he was completely faithful** (6:4). So they decided that their only hope was to **use the law of his God against him** (6:5). It's *déjà vu* all over ... again. Daniel's friends had been sentenced to death because they wouldn't worship anyone other than Yahweh... What about Daniel...?

It's said that politics makes strange bedfellows. The Babylonian officials didn't like Darius any better than they liked Daniel. They were both foreigners. But it might just be possible to get Darius to do their dirty work for them, if they worked things just right. So they came up with a scheme that made *them* look like they were being more than loyal to the new regime. You may be forgiven if this takes you back to the Plain of Dura.

¹ A satrap is a lower level government official, roughly equivalent to a provincial governor.

² You will remember from the last chapter that we're not entirely sure who this was, but he may have been Cyrus' general Gobryas.

Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever! All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction. (6:6-9)

The Chaldeans were a cagey bunch. They knew who their adversaries were, and they set the perfect trap. Once Darius signed a decree, he couldn't reverse it. They knew this loyalty test would be a big ego boost for him. And they knew he probably wouldn't look for the hidden motive behind the request. All he'd see was a bunch of locals trying to make themselves look loyal so they'd be less likely to come under suspicion if there was any funny business later on. But the Chaldeans knew that Daniel **prayed to God three times a day with the windows of his house open (6:10).**

Darius signed the document. **As soon as Daniel knew about it, he got on his knees and prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem.** Daniel never had a thought of worshiping Darius or the gods of Babylon. Like his friends, he was so firmly connected to Yahweh that no other possibility came to his mind. He didn't lift up his eyes to the hills, because his help would come from the Lord (cf. Psa. 121:1-2). And if God didn't decide to rescue him, Daniel was confident that he would see his redeemer again (cf. Job 19:25-26).

On the Plain of Dura Daniel's buddies knew that fire would hurt, but it probably wouldn't last long, since the fire was so hot. But the lions were another story. Daniel knew the lions weren't fed very well, so they'd be a tad on the hungry side. That means those delicate dinner scenes from Animal Planet would be played out on Daniel's defenseless body. He'd probably seen it before, and couldn't possibly enjoy the thought of being on the wrong end of those teeth. I know I'd be having a crisis, but Daniel didn't waver one bit.

The plan was coming together. The **conspirators checked and found Daniel praying to Yahweh (6:11).** Evidence in hand, they **approached the king and reminded him of the decree (6:12).** **He agreed that it was the law of the Medes and Persians and could not be revoked.** Everything was in order. The Chaldeans were about to get their revenge. So they dropped their little surprise on the king.

The Jewish exile Daniel pays no attention to you or to the injunction you signed. Instead, he prays to his god three times a day (6:13). The plan was coming together. The Chaldeans seemed perfectly loyal, but their Jewish nemesis looked completely disloyal and would have to be executed. And it would be deliciously painful.

Darius was ticked. He knew he'd been tricked, but he couldn't do anything about it. His finest official was about to become a leonine *hors d'oeuvre*. **He spent the rest of the day trying to figure out how to rescue Daniel,** but it was useless (6:14).

The conspirators weren't about to let their victory slip away, so they **went to the king and reminded him that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed** (6:15). Reluctantly, **he gave the order and Daniel was thrown into the lions' den** (6:16). Before **the stone was put over the entrance to prevent Daniel's escape, Darius said, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you"** (6:16). This had to be wishful thinking on Darius' part, or he wouldn't have worried about Daniel. Darius wasn't a believer in Yahweh, or he wouldn't have signed the decree in the first place. He really expected to wake up the next day to see nothing left of Daniel but a blood spot on the floor.

Darius didn't get the chance to wake up, because **he never got to sleep. He spent the night fasting and sent the palace entertainers away. At dawn he rushed to the lions' den** (6:18-19). Not even waiting for the stone to be rolled away **he yelled, "Daniel, servant of the living god, has your god, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"** (6:20). What if Daniel was dead? Was Daniel's god really living and able to deliver him? Darius had to be worried, and couldn't be certain that what he just said was true. Calling Yahweh "the living god" was wishful thinking to him.

But Daniel really *was* alive! **He answered, "O King, live forever! My God sent his angels and shut the lions' mouths because I was innocent before him and committed no crime toward you"** (6:21-22). To say the least, **Darius was pleased. He gave orders to get Daniel out of the den. And Daniel was completely unhurt because he had trusted in Yahweh** (6:23).

If this was the end of the story, we'd be thrilled at God's power to deliver Daniel. If it went a step further and led to **a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel** (6:26) it would be *déjà vu* from chapter 3. After all, **Yahweh is the living God and lives forever. His Kingdom will not be destroyed. He will rule forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. He delivered Daniel from the lions** (6:26-27).

But this isn't the end. Darius was seriously angry at the **Chaldeans because they maliciously accused Daniel. He threw them, their children, and their wives into the lions' den. Before they hit the floor, the lions tore them to pieces and crushed their bones** (6:24). Daniel didn't have to ask for vengeance. God led Darius to take care of those wicked men. And by killing their families, Darius made sure nobody who held a grudge against Daniel was left alive.

Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian (6:28).

Context!

The story of Daniel in the Lions' Den may be the most famous story in the book. Every child hears it in church. But almost every adult forgets it when he reads the prophecies. And this brings us to a very big problem.

The very first thing any student of scripture has to figure out is, "What are we talking about?" The big word is "context." As one wag put it, "A text without its context is a pretext." Let's unpack that.

It's really easy to read a verse or two and try to make them mean something. If we forget the context, we might as well be reading a Tom Clancy novel. We'll misunderstand what's going on and come up with something that sounds good isolation,

but is completely removed from what God's talking about. Just to make this clear, let's jump ahead for a minute.

11:40-45 sounds like a great battle scene. It talks about chariots, horsemen, and ships. A number of countries get mentioned, and gold, silver, and precious things are thrown in for good measure. Some fall, and others are rescued. It's the stuff great military novels are written about. And that sort of interpretation completely ignores context.

The first six chapters, half of the book, are dedicated completely to the covenant. Nebuchadnezzar takes four chapters to accept the God of the covenant. Along the way, Yahweh's covenant-keeping servants are rewarded (chapters 1&2) and protected (chapters 3&6). Covenant breaking is punished (chapters 4&5), with one pagan king repenting and another dying for his rebellion. With all the covenant emphasis in the historical chapters, shouldn't we be looking for it in the prophetic chapters, too? Let's take a quick look.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue begins political, but ends with God, represented by a stone (2:34-35, 44-45), echoing language from twenty-one other Old Testament passages (cf. Deut 32:4, 15, 18). In the vision of the four beasts (chapter 7), the little horn, God's enemy (7:25), is the focus. The vision of the ram and the goat (chapter 8) uses sacrificial animals. The little horn character, again God's enemy, attacks God's sanctuary (8:11). The revelation in chapter 9 answers Daniel's prayer for God to vindicate His holy name as the God of the covenant (9:4, 17-19). The last prophecy is devoted to "the prince of the covenant" (11:22) and an evil king who "forsakes the holy covenant" (11:28-30) and "desecrates the sanctuary" (11:31).

Now, this isn't an exhaustive survey. That has to wait for the rest of this book. But I think it's pretty clear that the covenant theme runs through every part of Daniel. If we forget about the covenant for even one moment, we can lose track of what Daniel's talking about.

Let's put this in different words. The covenant is the framework for God's interaction with us. Yes, He's aware of politics. But that background is just that – background. It gives us visual mileposts so we can see how far we are down the road.

We have to be careful not to confuse the mileposts with the road. When we drive down the Interstate, there are mile markers. But we drive on the road, not on the signs beside it. And that's what's going on here.

God's purpose is to save us. The covenant is how He does it.³ And Daniel's story, closely tied to the covenant, is there to tell us the theme of the book. So as we move on to the prophecies, we know that they're about the covenant, too.

³ I'm not going to go into this in detail here. If you want to study the covenant in detail, I suggest *The Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson (P&R Publishing, 1980).