

Daniel 6:1-28

LORD of All

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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."

⁶ Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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." ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. ¹² 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." ¹³ 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."

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ 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!" ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Then the king

went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ 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?" ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² 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." ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. ²⁶ 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.*

²⁷ *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."*

²⁸ *So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. – Daniel 6:1-28 ESV*

This chapter contains one of the Bible's most familiar and beloved stories. For centuries, it has been a staple of Sunday School classes, and Daniel's daring exploits have been used to inspire young children to stand up for their faith against all odds. Among Christians, the phrase "Daniel in the Lion's Den" conjures up visions of living an uncompromised and faith-filled life even in the face of life-threatening opposition.

But there is far more to the story than the simple tale of a faithful man willing to face death rather than compromise his religious convictions. The story's placement in the narrative is important and is probably not in chronological order. It comes immediately after the stories of Belshazzar's death and Nebuchadnezzar's humbling by the hand of God. It is intended to continue the theme of God's sovereignty over the kings and nations of the world. Daniel is the common thread that ties all these stories together. This Hebrew exile has the unique privilege

and responsibility of acting as God's mouthpiece to some of the most powerful men who ruled over one of the most dominant nations on Earth. Daniel is featured prominently in each of these stories but he was never intended to be the lead actor in the dramas they unfold.

As chapter six begins, the reader is presented with the name of yet another ruler. Since chapter four ended with Belshazzar's death, it would be easy to assume that the story picks up with his replacement. The opening verses state, "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one" (Daniel 6:1-2 ESV). To the modern reader, this opening line seems rather black and white; a new king named Darius took over for the recently deceased Belshazzar. But there is a problem. No extra-biblical sources have been found that corroborate the existence of a king named Darius who ruled over the kingdom of Babylon or the Medo-Persian empire.

There has been much debate about who this individual was, with some suggesting that Darius was just another name for Cyrus, who ruled the Medo-Persian Empire. Others have speculated that it was Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, who served as his father's co-regent over the kingdom of Babylon and later inherited the throne. A third option is that Darius was an individual named Gubaru, an official in Cyrus' administration, whom the king appointed as ruler over Babylon immediately after its capture by the Medo-Persian forces.

The simplest solution to this problem may lie in the meaning of the name "Darius." Of Aramaic origin, Darius translates as "lord" and was likely a title rather than a proper name. It seems that the author purposefully chose to leave out the name of the king involved in the story. He also provides scant details to help determine the date of the events recorded in this chapter. It is as if Darius was intended to represent all the "lords" who ruled over the kingdom of Babylon and its successor, the Medo-Persian empire.

Darius is not the point of the story any more than Daniel is. But the title "lord" takes on important significance as the story unfolds. Whoever this man was, he had power and authority. He ruled over a nation that had proven its dominance by conquering a great part of the geographical landscape of that day. This Darius commanded fear and respect from his citizens and wielded his power with the aid of his royal officials. As his empire grew, he divided it into 120 provinces and put them under the care of his hand-picked officials. Daniel was included in this list of "satraps" or governors.

But before long, Daniel "proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers" (Daniel 6:3 NLT). Daniel's superior leadership skills led the king to consider plans "to place him over the entire empire" (Daniel 6:3 NLT). News of Daniel's pending promotion soon reached his 119 peers, and they were far from pleased. They immediately set out to scuttle the king's plan and end any chance of Daniel "lording" over them.

Their plan was simple but deadly and was designed to appeal to the king's pride and vanity. They recommended that Darius issue a decree that would require every citizen in the nation to cease worship of any other deity except him for a period of 30 days.

“Long live King Darius! We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you...” – Daniel 6:6-7 NLT

They recommended an official edict that would place Darius as “lord” over all other gods, including the God of Daniel. This was a calculated and callous plan designed to do one thing: Prevent Daniel’s promotion by ending his life. But they failed to realize that their ingenuous plan to elevate their “lord” was going to end up offending the LORD Most High. They were out to eliminate Daniel at all costs, and their efforts would prove costly. It should not be overlooked that their recommended punishment for violating the edict involved death by the “king” of beasts.

“...whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.” – Daniel 6:7 ESV

Darius the “lord” liked what he heard and willingly signed the document they had pre-prepared. Unknowingly, Darius had sealed Daniel’s fate and set in motion a chain of events that would prove who was “Lord” of all.

As the 119 satraps expected, Daniel chose to violate the king’s edict. He refused to stop praying to his God and was caught in the act by his enemies. They took the matter to the king and the news of Daniel’s actions left the “lord” in a conundrum. What was he to do? He thought highly of Daniel, but he also had a reputation to maintain. After all, he was “lord” over the kingdom of Babylon, and he expected his citizens to treat him with the respect and honor he deserved.

But Darius was torn and spent the rest of the day trying to come up with a way to save Daniel’s life. But the “lord” was powerless to overturn his own edict because he was bound by “the law of the Medes and the Persians” (Daniel 6:15 NLT). This meant that he lacked the power to change the law he had decreed. There was nothing Darius could do. The matter was out of his hands and Daniel’s fate was sealed. Or was it?

As the story goes, Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den and miraculously survived. His life was spared but not by Darius the “lord.” Another LORD intervened and proved Himself greater than Darius and the law of the Medes and the Persians. This LORD didn’t answer to man-made edicts. As a result, Daniel exited the lions’ den unscathed and announced, “Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty” (Daniel 6:21-22 NLT).

This miraculous event led the joyous king to issue another proclamation.

“I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.

*For he is the living God,
and he will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his rule will never end.
He rescues and saves his people;
he performs miraculous signs and wonders
in the heavens and on earth.
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.” – Daniel 6:26-27 NLT*

The “lord” had learned an invaluable lesson. He could issue decrees. He could demand that every knee bow and every tongue confess him as “lord” but he was nothing compared to Daniel’s LORD.

Once again, God proved Himself superior to the kings of the world. Whoever Darius was, he was nothing compared to Yahweh. And while Daniel displayed great faith and fearlessness in the face of opposition, the real hero of the story is the LORD Most High, the living God whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

