

Research on: Daniel in the Lion's Den

Daniel 6:1, 2 (to :), 4-7, 9, 11, 13, 15 Know, 16, 19-23, 25, 26, 28

The book of Daniel arose out of a crisis among the Jews, and part of its continued appeal is that it still speaks to those that appear to be in crisis today. The questions Daniel addresses in the book are: How does one remain faithful to God in the midst of severe challenges? Is compromise ever justified?

“The vision of a divine purpose gives Daniel the basis for hope and an authority for his plea to have courage. God is not a mere tribal deity vindicating His own people. There is the implication that Israel has a world mission. It has a moral plan. It was righteousness which at the end of the day should stand as power. Every act and every policy had to face the strict examination of God . . .” (IB 6.356).

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom;

2 And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first:

Daniel has been appointed an administrator – a high official position under the Persian ruler Darius. “Verses two and three mention 120 satrapies and over them three sarkin, a Persian term meaning ‘chief minister’ Daniel was appointed one of these sarkin” (NIB 7.88).

4 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 him.

The word fault in Hebrew is shechath (Strong 7844) which means “corruption.”

“The other two sarkin, presumably Persians, conspired with the heads of the satraps against Daniel, thus indicating a sense of tension between the Jewish exiles and the Persian nationals” (NIB 7.88).

The favor of the king uncovered the jealousy of the other officials, and, consequently, court intrigue follows. They conspire against Daniel.

5 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.

Since the court officials could not find any fault with Daniel’s “official” life, they turn to his personal worship and his obedience to the law of his God.

“The last phrase in this verse, the basis of their proposed accusation against Daniel, raises an issue that has not arisen yet in the entire book: the matter of the law of the Jews. The mention of the ‘law’ of God was not mentioned even in chap. 3, where one might have expected it. A reference to the Jewishness of Daniel by specifically mentioning the laws/traditions of the Jews lends weight to arguments for the significance of ethnic tensions as an important part of the traditions in Daniel” (NIB 7.89).

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

“The Aramaic term *hargisu*, used to describe the group of conspirators who approach the king has engendered considerable discussion. Did they ‘come in a throng’ in a raucous mass gathering? The eighteenth-century Quaker Bible translator Anthony Purver rendered it: ‘they crowded in to the king,’ which captures the image suggested by the term, which includes the satraps as well as the two other Persian officials” (NIB 7.88).

7 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.

9 Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

10 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.

Daniel does not hide the fact that he is openly defying the king’s decree. The decree makes no difference to his pattern of prayer.

“If we would live true to our heritage as [children] of God, there is no way other than keeping close to the Father. That means living in His presence and taking the time to listen to His voice. It is a great mistake to think that we can drift along and then be ready to meet the crisis when it comes” (IB 6.439).

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

12 Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree;

13 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.

15 . . . Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which

the king establisheth may be changed.

“The counselors repeat the decree that the king had ordered, almost to entrap the king by means of his answer that the law cannot be changed. Daniel is then charged in words that echo his status and the status of the Jews throughout the book of Daniel: ‘Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah.’ Daniel, the foreigner, the defeated, the mere Jew is accused before the king. As in chap. 3, the mixed implication is clear: The foreigner whom the king had trusted has betrayed him by defying his order. Yet, Darius is troubled by the scenario. . . . Darius ‘set his mind to deliver Daniel’ (author’s trans.) and made efforts to release him – presumably trying to determine a legally acceptable way to set Daniel free” (NIB 7.92).

But Darius’ own laws have tied his hands. The law he has just signed cannot be changed.

16 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.

“There does not need to be a trial to determine the guilt of the accused, because he clearly confesses. Both the king and Daniel know that he is guilty, and he is thus immediately sentenced to his fate” (NIB 7.92).

“ . . . Daniel’s destruction by lions, . . . will serve as an example to other would-be dissidents. The hope – indeed, the calculation – is that word will spread quickly among the masses about the fate of any who disobey the will of the state” (NIB 7.92).

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. As soon as it is light, the king rushes to the den to see what had happened.

20 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?

Think of the tone of his voice – the anguish he might have felt!

21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

From the darkness of the pit, think of the tone of Daniel’s voice! Would it have been said in calmness, gentleness, love, and respect?

22 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.

“The grounds for Daniel’s deliverance are two: (a) he was ‘clean,’ i.e., legally innocent and so blameless before God; and (b) he had committed no ‘crime’ against the king. His loyalty to God had not suffered from any remissness that would have made him blameworthy, nor his loyalty to the king from any evil deed or wrongdoing” (IB 6.446).

23 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.

“The phrase [‘the king exceeding glad’] expresses the opposite of ‘much distressed’ in vs. 14. At the king’s command, the seals are broken, the stone removed, and Daniel taken up (probably by a rope). Then it was seen that ‘no harm was found on him.’ The parallel is of course with the three confessors who came out unharmed from the kiln . . .” (IB 6.446).

25 Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

26 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.

“Just as Nebuchadrezzar in ch. 3 was moved by the miracle to make a decree in which he acknowledged the greatness of the God of the Jews and called on all his subjects to respect him, so Darius moved by this miracle does the same. Indeed, the details of his decree follow closely the pattern of 3:29 ff., using words and phrases already met with in 2:44; 4:1-3; 5:19” (IB 6.447). There’s a well-known painting of Daniel facing the window while lions lurk behind him. Painted by an English artist in 1890, it’s titled, “Daniel’s Answer to the King.” It hung in Mary Baker Eddy’s Pleasant View and Chestnut Hill homes.

Sources:

The Interpreter’s Bible. Ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al. 12 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1953.

The New Interpreter’s Bible. Ed. Leander E. Keck. Vol. 7. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

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Abbreviation key:

IB = The Interpreter’s Bible

NIB = The New Interpreter’s Bible