

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **The Exiled Prophet, Part 7: The Mouths of Lions (Daniel 6)**

Welcome back to our study on the book of Daniel. In our last teaching, we covered Daniel chapter 5, where Daniel interpreted the writing that God wrote on a wall in king Belshazzar’s palace. The writing declared that Babylon would be conquered by the armies of the Medes and Persians. That very night, Belshazzar was killed, Babylon was conquered, and Darius the Mede became the city’s new ruler.

In this teaching, we’re going to cover Daniel chapter 6. In chapter 6, the new king Darius begins to arrange his kingdom. The king finds Daniel to have an “excellent spirit,” so he wants to promote Daniel to a very high position. The other Babylonian officials do not like Daniel, so they persuade the king to pass a law prohibiting prayer for thirty days. Daniel immediately violates this law, and so he is punished by being thrown into a pit with lions. However, God protects Daniel from the lions, and he is released unharmed. King Darius then feeds the officials who accused Daniel to the same lions, and issues a decree honoring Daniel and Daniel’s god.

Before we get into the text of chapter 6, there was a major event that happened at the end of chapter 5: the Medes and Persians conquered the city of Babylon. So, how did that happen? Who are these Medes and Persians? And who is this new king, Darius?

The history surrounding the capture of Babylon is fascinating, and it corresponds to a number of interesting prophecies. We’ll describe it briefly here. As we mentioned in the last teaching, both Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied that Babylon would be conquered by the Medes (Isaiah 13:17-19; Jeremiah 51:11, 28-29). After Cyrus II became the king of Persia, he conquered the Medes, but then, he combined the armies of the Medes and Persians, and they attacked Babylon together. They surrounded the city, and used an ingenious tactic to capture it. Babylon was well protected, because it was surrounded by thick walls, but the Euphrates river ran under the walls and right through the middle of the city. The Persians dug channels which diverted the river’s water away from the city. Once the river became shallow enough to walk through, the Persian army just walked along the river bed under the walls, and right into the city. They marched up to the palace, killed king Belshazzar (Daniel 5:30), and claimed

ownership of Babylon without having to fight much at all (Herodotus, *Histories* 1:190–191; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.1-30).

As the historian Herodotus wrote:

...the Persians came upon them unexpectedly...those Babylonians who dwelt in the middle did not know that they had been captured; but as they chanced to be holding a festival, they went on dancing and rejoicing during this time until they learnt the truth only too well. Babylon then had thus been taken for the first time.

- Herodotus, *Histories* 1:191, translated by G.C. Macaulay (www.gutenberg.org)

So, who were these conquerors? The Persians (also known as the *Achaemenid Empire*) originally lived in what today is southwestern Iran (Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: from 550 BC to 650 AD*, translated by Azizeh Azodi [London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996] p. 8). Persian religion placed great emphasis on maintaining covenants and honoring one's word (William W. Malandra, *Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings From the Avesta and Achaemenid Inscriptions* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983] pp. 56, 61). The Persian government was well-organized, and usually treated the people that they conquered with leniency. For example, when the Persians captured Babylon, they did so with a minimum of bloodshed, and they let the Babylonians maintain their temples and most of their religious practices (*Cyrus Cylinder*, www.britishmuseum.org). They also maintained the Aramaic language, which the Babylonians were already using (Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: from 550 BC to 650 AD*, translated by Azizeh Azodi [London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996] p. 7). They would later allow the captive Jews to go free, and to build a new temple in Jerusalem.

As for the Medes, we don't have much historical information about them, but we know that they lived in the mountains of northwestern Iran. The Medes were Babylon's allies back in the days of Nebuchadnezzar's father, and at that time they helped Babylon to overthrow the Assyrians (ABC 3, Fall of Nineveh Chronicle) and become established as the world superpower. However, about sixty years later, they helped Cyrus conquer the Babylonian empire that they had once helped to create.

So, then, who was Darius? All we really know is that he was a Mede (Daniel 5:31); other than that, we do not have any historical information about him. Some think that Darius may have been a Median general named Gobryas before he became king (Ted Noel, *A Primer on the Book of Daniel* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009], pp. 55-56, 58; R. D. Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel* [New York: Putnam, 1917] p. 128), while others think that he may have been king Cyrus himself (John F. Walvoord, *Daniel*, edited by Charles H. Dyer & Philip E. Rawley (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012) pp. 219-220), but neither of those ideas can be proven. While we don't know much about the king, the things that we know about Medo-Persian government and culture will have an effect on the king's actions in Daniel chapter 6.

Now that we have some of the historical background, let's get into the text of chapter 6.

### **Daniel 6:1-3**

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, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. 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.

Darius recognizes Daniel's 'excellent spirit,' just like king Nebuchadnezzar once did. The king wants to have the best possible rulership over his new kingdom, so he wishes to give Daniel great power and authority. However, as so often happens, politics gets in the way of righteous rulership:

#### **Daniel 6:4-5**

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. 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."

These other officials want Daniel's position for themselves. They try to dig up some dirt on Daniel to use against him, but are unable to. This is quite remarkable, because Daniel has been a court official in Babylon for about 50 years by this time. So, during Daniel's half-century career in public service, he hasn't done anything bad that can be used against him. However, just like the envious officials in chapter 3, these officials see a "weakness" in Daniel that they can exploit: he is devoted to God, and will obey God before anyone else. So, they devise a plan:

#### **Daniel 6:6-9**

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

This is quite the clever plan. Darius is a brand new foreign king; he doesn't want anybody stirring up trouble, trying to "take back" the city in the name of Babylon. This law against praying could help to keep people loyal to the new king during this transitional time. Furthermore, it will only last for thirty days, so it doesn't appear overly strict or tyrannical. It just looks like a common-sense bit of insurance to protect the new king from disloyal citizens. The king never imagined that this law would punish a man who was faithful and honest, and would serve the king well. Daniel knew what these court officials were up to, but he also knew that God was protecting him, so he went about his usual business:

#### **Daniel 6:10-13**

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

So, the court officials catch Daniel violating their new law, and report his misconduct to the king. This law "cannot be revoked" (v. 12). This feature of Medio-Persian law is different from Babylonian law.

Nebuchadnezzar, back in chapter 2, issued an order to kill all of his wise men (Daniel 2:12), but after Daniel successfully interpreted his dream, that order was not carried out (Daniel 2:24). So, it appears that Babylonian kings could revoke their own orders. However, the orders of Mede and Persian kings were irrevocable (See Esther 8:5-11, where the Persian king's decree that the Jews were to be destroyed could not be revoked), so the king cannot change the law in order to save Daniel. This rule against revoking laws might seem strange at first, but it has a certain logic to it. Having laws that cannot be revoked means that people can rely upon the law as a consistent standard. If a law is in place, it is not going to suddenly change overnight; when the king gives a new order, the people can trust that he means what he says, and that obeying that order will keep them out of trouble. This also ensures that the law is applied equally to all people; the king cannot impose a law that penalizes people, but then later make exceptions for his friends. Making the laws irrevocable is a way of reducing corruption, of making the government more predictable and potentially making everything more fair. However, the scheming court officials find a way to turn this intent on its head, and they use the law to punish an innocent man and advance their own corrupt interests.

Now that these officials have reported Daniel for the grave crime of praying, the king realizes what they are up to. He knows that Daniel should not be punished, but because he cannot revoke his order, there is nothing he can do:

#### **Daniel 6:14-15**

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. 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."

So, now, the king must abide by the law of the land. His hand has been forced, and so he gives Daniel over for punishment:

#### **Daniel 6:16-18**

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

This king has not known Daniel for long; it doesn't seem like they have had enough time together to become close friends. So why would king Darius be so distraught over this situation, losing sleep and refusing to eat? Well, there are several reasons for him to be upset. On a moral level, the king knows that Daniel is a good man, and he doesn't want innocent blood on his hands. However, on a political level, the king recognizes that Daniel is competent, honest, and will serve him well, while the other officials are devious backstabbers. Who would the king rather have in his government? People like Daniel, who are faithful and willing to serve, or people who are willing to destroy the king's faithful servants in order to advance their own careers? Any wise king would rather have Daniel. But now, Daniel is being removed from the government, and these treacherous officials are being promoted. This situation is not just bad for the king's conscience, but it is bad for his kingdom. So, after a sleepless night, the king is quite relieved to discover that Daniel has survived his punishment:

#### **Daniel 6:19-23**

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. 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?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! 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.” 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.

When it mentions that “no kind of harm was found” on Daniel, this is reminiscent of chapter 3, where the faithful men who were thrown into the furnace didn’t even smell like the fire (Daniel 3:27). In contrast, here is what happened to the unfaithful men who had accused Daniel:

#### **Daniel 6:24**

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.

The lions did not touch Daniel; God protected him because he was “found blameless” (v. 22). However, these corrupt officials were devoured immediately. As the Proverb says:

#### **Proverbs 21:7-8**

The violence of the wicked will sweep them away, because they refuse to do what is just. The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is upright.

The officials’ bones being broken reminds us of a prophecy that Balaam made. While speaking of Israel, he said this:

#### **Numbers 24:8-9**

God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you.

So, God saved Daniel from unjust punishment, and brought just punishment upon his enemies. God’s actions in this situation make perfect sense. But what was the king’s justification for throwing the malicious accusers to the lions? We just mentioned that the king could not change laws once they were made; that’s why he could not change the law in order to save Daniel. So then, how can he now change the law in order to condemn these corrupt officials?

Once again, history provides a solid explanation for this. The king was not changing the law at all by executing these officials. As it turns out, Babylonian law already had a precedent for doing this kind of thing. In Babylon, if a man was given a death penalty for his crime, but then survived his own execution, this was taken to be a supernatural sign that the man had been falsely accused. If this happened, if the accused man did not die, then the person who accused him was given the death penalty instead. Here is an example of a Babylonian law that used this standard:

If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall

be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.

- *Hammurabi Code 2*, translated by L. W. King (avalon.law.yale.edu)

The fact that Daniel survived was considered evidence that he was innocent. So, then, in the eyes of Babylonian law, the men who accused him must have been false witnesses. The king wasn't changing the law by throwing the corrupt officials to the lions; he was enforcing a Babylonian law that already existed.

### **Daniel 6:25-27**

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

Darius here issues a decree, similar to Nebuchadnezzar's decree at the end of chapter 4, glorifying God and telling of his great deed.

As we mentioned in the last teaching, there is a 'chiastic structure' in this part of the book of Daniel, where certain chapters have similar stories and themes. Chapters 4 and 5 formed the center of that structure, and they both had stories about kings who exalted themselves above God, and were then humbled. Here, in chapter 6, we have similar themes to chapter 3, where a king issues a law that requires God's faithful people to choose between obeying their king, and obeying God. When the faithful people choose to obey God, God protects them from the king's punishment; in Daniel 3, that punishment was being thrown into a fiery furnace; here in chapter 6, the punishment is being thrown into a den of lions. In both cases, the faithful people end up better off than they were before. As the final verse in chapter 6 says:

### **Daniel 6:28**

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

## **Lessons for Us**

The lessons of chapter 6 are very similar to the lessons of chapter 3. We should obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), and God will protect us and be with us even when we are persecuted (Isaiah 43:1-2; 1 Peter 3:13-14). One difference between the two chapters is that in Daniel 3, the king was trying to force Daniel's friends to dishonor God. Here in Daniel 6, the king is prohibiting Daniel from honoring God. In both cases, God defended the people who honored him. So, God is on our side, whether we are refusing to do things that are immoral, or insisting on doing things that are moral. As David wrote:

### **Psalms 37:23-28**

The steps of a man are established by the LORD [YHWH], when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD [YHWH] upholds his hand. I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. For the LORD [YHWH] loves justice; he will not

forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

Even if honoring God gets us thrown to the lions, he will not abandon us. God has our back; he has called us to an 'eternal glory,' and he didn't call us just to forsake us later. We can trust and rely on him. As Peter wrote:

**1 Peter 5:6-10**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

In the next teaching in this series, we will examine chapter 7 of the book of Daniel. We hope to see you there.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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