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# Persecution by the Nations

## Daniel 6:1-28

**Introduction** The faithful pastors and Christians in our church in the Congo during the Simba uprisings in the 60's. Some lost their lives and were shot or hacked to death for their faith. Others, were protected by the miraculous power of God and were preserved alive.

We have here the last in our *TRILOGY OF KINGS*. Chapters four, five and six place three kings side-by-side with their responses to God highlighted. Through each, Daniel is the catalyst as a faithful man of God, serving his Sovereign even as he serves under a human king.

Nebuchadnezzar - Submits to the Lord God and is converted.

Belshazzar - Dishonors the Lord God and is condemned

Darius - Respects the Lord God and is commended.

**Correction** What a word from our previous chapter, "That very night..." Darius' army, knowing the futility of breaching the multi-layered defensive system of the city, simply diverted the Euphrates above the city. The quiet clink of sword and shield and armor was not heard as the invading army slipped in under the sluice gates moving along the river bed. The quiet assault began at the palace in the slumbering hours of darkest night. There, Belshazzar was slaughtered as he lay in a drunken stupor upon his bed.

Now Darius must organize his newly expanded kingdom. As he does so, Daniel emerges as having his confidence and trust.

### The Envious Plotters

(v.1-9)

Faithful service to God does not guarantee us ease and comfort. It may well invoke the jealousy, anger, and plotting of well-placed people powerful enough to do us harm.

### With their Provocation

(v.1-3)

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; <sup>2</sup> and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. <sup>3</sup> Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

The faithful prophet, honored and promoted, is on track to become the prime minister. In a career that had seen ascension under Nebuchadnezzar, obscurity under Belshazzar, now rises once again in the esteem and under the reign of Darius. His careful and considered wisdom brings prosperity to those who will listen. His godly character makes him trustworthy .

This favor bestowed upon Daniel provokes the envy and jealousy. From their perspective, these politicians are now going to have to answer to a religious zealot. That might not be so bad, but he is not even of their tribe, their people their god. He is a Jew, a worshipper of Yahweh.

In a similar way, Paul says that God has brought in the Gentiles into the New Covenant through the failure of the Jews and their resulting jealousy. The pursuit and acceptance of Gentiles into the kingdom is a great thing; imagine when God brings in the final Jewish remnant elected through grace.<sup>6</sup> (See Romans 11:7ff.)

### **In their Problem**

**(v.4-5)**

<sup>4</sup> Then the presidents 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."

But the plotters have a problem. There are no grounds for any charge against Daniel. In his public life, these politicians are stymied. There are no outstanding complaints against him. They can find neither commission of fault nor omission by error. He is faithful in the exercise of his responsibilities over the kingdom. Now, these are not people trying to investigate him from the outside. They are the people he oversees. They are in a sense, in his cabinet, in his chain-of-command. They are his "reports".

So they turn from his public life and seek fault in his private and religious life. They find him faithful there as well. But that very faithfulness makes him vulnerable to their laying an ambush for him. They can turn his faithfulness to God against him in such a way that the king will deal with him.

This was the problem for the plotters against our Lord. No matter what they tried, they could find no fault in Him. They could not entrap Him with their questions. They could find no sin in Him. Even at His trial, Pilate could find nothing to accuse Him of much less execute Him for. They finally had to lie and charge him with treason, with claiming to be the real king instead of Caesar.

### **By their Plan**

**(v.6-9)**

<sup>6</sup> Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! <sup>7</sup> All the presidents 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.

A plan is hatched designed to turn the faithful obedience of Daniel against him. As one commentator put it, "They knew that their only hope lay in employing Daniel's well-known spiritual strength as a political weakness, knowing that he would obey God rather than men (See Acts 4:19). This they did by turning the king's spiritual weakness into their own political strength (6-7)."<sup>7</sup> The politicians gather together and craft a piece of legislature to present for the king's signature. It is designed to appeal to his vanity yet would be short term. They substituted

the word “petition” for “prayer” so that it would not look as targeted as it was. Yet they wanted to ensure that once signed, there was no way to invalidate it or to grant exemptions so they had the law signed as a decree of the King as the law of the Medes and the Persians, which was irrevocable.

Watch how often through this text the phrase “by agreement” occurs. Here is a plan that is hatched, nurtured, guided and executed at every step by these governmental administrators. Step by step, they meet, discuss and decide together what to do. They present a unified, concentrated and powerful bloc of legislative and administrative power. This is the kind of opposition that believers sometimes face – elements within governments who plot and plan to use governmental authority and power to destroy believers. Unfortunately, all too often, like Darius, the leaders go along.

## **The Faithful Prophet**

**(v.10-13)**

How would we respond upon finding out that a private Christian discipline had been outlawed?

### **In his Prayers**

**(v.10)**

<sup>10</sup> 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.

Knowing what was at stake, Daniel pointedly and visibly continued his prayers. The author<sup>8</sup> here is portraying a single day. In the morning the decree is signed. At noon, Daniel goes home and as was his regular habit, knelt by a window to pray. Early afternoon, the politicians brought the charges with Darius laboring till the evening to get around his own decree. Daniel is thrown into the den of lions overnight and released the following morning.

Daniel seems to move with supreme confidence in God. I can see some agents of the pols hiding outside Daniel’s home. The decree has gone out. Saddened, yet faithful, he comes home, walks upstairs and kneels down by the window where his knees have worn the floor and prays to God. They have him. He did exactly what they thought he would. But, he is not intimidated by their plotting.

This raises a question: is Daniel sinning in continuing to pray when the Law says he cannot? No. This is an example of obeying God rather than man, of disobeying while in submission. Daniel’s choice to continue his praying within public view is not condemned in the Scripture. We should be careful either condemning him or assuming that we should not consider more strategic and discrete obedience. Since Daniel accepts the punishment with a quiet measure of confidence in God, he is in submission even while he continues to pray. However, the only case in which this is permitted is when an authority directly commands sin.

**Under his Prosecution****(v.11-13)**

<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."

Just as they had agreed, the plotters now prosecute Daniel under the new law. Having seen him pray to the Lord, they came to Darius. They reminded him of the law and the injunction. They remind him that the law is irrevocable. He has to enforce it. The king agrees.

Then they accuse Daniel. Now notice that they impute motive as well as make the accusation. Daniel, they say, has no regard, no respect for the king. This slave, this captive exile from Judah, who has been in your favor now throws it all back in your face. Three times a day, he makes his petition to his God instead of to you. With smiling faces and snarling hearts, "So what will you do about it, O king?"

**The Anguished Potentate****(v.14-24)**

Now, the king is faced with executing his favored courtier.

**In his Dilemma****(v.14-15)**

<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."

Darius is ensnared in the trap set for him. All day he seeks a way to avoid doing what his own law and the constitution require him to do. He is racing the clock. The Law of the Medes and Persians required him to enforce it before sundown. He is looking for a precedent or a loophole. But, alas, he cannot find a way around what he has decreed.

Defeated, he returns to his throne room. There sitting and standing around on the marbled floor, the politicians gather like mangy jackals. They can smell blood. Triumphant they howled, "You have to obey the law too – it is time to deal with Daniel."

**With his Decision****(v.16-18)**

<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.

Putting his hope in Daniel's God, Darius carries out the sentence. He is lowered into a pit or empty cistern where lions were kept caged. A cover is slid over the

opening and locked in place. Hot dripping wax is poured over the edge and runs out over the pavement. Into it is impressed the king's seal. No escape. No rescue. No way out without being exposed.

I was struck by the following insight, "Contrary to a common assumption, there are very few dramatic miracles in the OT. Here, as in the only other concentrated periods of miracles in the OT (the days of the exodus and entry into Canaan and the time of Elijah and Elisha and the establishment of their prophetic ministry), the miraculous occurs at crisis points in the kingdom of God. The miracles in Daniel, as elsewhere, are not merely 'contrary to nature' or 'above nature'. They are primarily 'contrary to evil' and the powers of darkness. They are expressions of 'the powers of the coming age' when all evil will be vanquished."<sup>9</sup> By faith, Daniel then is delivered by the power of God, the power of the age which is yet to come. That power bringing God's kingdom into existence intrudes into time and space gathering and guarding the people of God down through the ages.

What an amazing contrast between Daniel and Darius. Darius can return to his bed and chambers, but there tosses and turns. He does not turn on the TV. No book or game or even concubine can hold his attention. He turns away from food and drink. From sundown to sunrise, he frets, little black thoughts scurrying about like a disturbed anthill.

But Daniel stands serenely in the center of God's providence and protection. Powerful jaws drool as mighty hands clamp them shut. Baleful golden eyes gaze upon the wizened old prophet and the shining presence standing by his side. All night long Daniel waits quietly for morning's light. The pit is dimly lit as the heavenly guardian stands near. Around and around pace the hungry lions while growls of respect for the Creator come to succor and deliver His faithful prophet.

### **Upon his Deliverance**

**(v.19-23)**

<sup>19</sup> 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.

Morning breaks over the Babylon's ramparts. The king rushes to the courtyard. He can't bear to open and see. Calling out in anguish, he inquires as to whether Daniel's God has delivered him. His heart leaps with gladness as he hears the calm, strong voice floating up from the pit. Safe in the center of God's will, a faithful and righteous man who has done no wrong is now vindicated by the protecting power and presence of God.

He is drawn up from the pit, unmarked by tooth or claw. No harm on him at all because he had trusted in God. Now listen. Both Daniel and Jeremiah have a commended faith. But one safely spends the night with lions and the other is sawn asunder for the proclamation of the Word. Listen to Hebrews 11:32-12:2:

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. 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. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

<sup>12:1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

### **By his Denunciation**

**(v.24)**

<sup>24</sup> 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.

At the king's word, the politicians and their families are rounded up. They are charged with malicious slander and false accusations. The Persian law required the death of those who were entrusted with such responsibility. The law also required the death of their families. The point of this is to remind all who oppose God and seek harm to his people and his servants face grave consequences.

Whether this is just or fair is not the point here. It is intended to shock. One hundred and twenty families are herded into the courtyard. They are bound, man, woman, children. Imagine the horror of the men whose long plot to ensnare one holy man has now led to the death of their families. They are dumped into the pit. Horrible are their screams as the lions roar in savage hunger.

### **The Grand Proclamation**

**(v.25-28)**

With a heart grateful for Daniel's deliverance, the king sets his hand to pen and writes a letter.

### **In its Declaration**

**(v.25-26a)**

<sup>25</sup> 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,

Like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius sends a proclamation to the entire world declaring the mighty works of God and calling on them to worship Him. He does not own this God as his own for he is still the God of Daniel. But he calls on all to tremble and to fear before such a God.

## Upon its Doctrine

(v.26b-27)

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 heaven and on earth,  
 he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

The Holy Spirit through Daniel is linking the two declarations by the Gentile kings in order to illuminate several important truths:

- God's eternal existence is the single most important fact in all the universe. All through the Bible this is simply declared to be so. No proof is offered. Man is not in a position to decide whether or not God exists. All creation simply must acknowledge Him.
- God's kingdom expansion is a core theme in redemptive history. With ever increasing clarity and detail, from the dim beginnings in family and clan, through the shadows of Israel's kingdom, to the gospel realities unfolding in Word and deed through Jesus and the Apostles and the extension of the kingdom into every people group until the final battle and victory, the Bible builds in its majestic sweep. So we pray, "Your kingdom come" until it does.
- God cannot be effectively opposed; He simply executes what His will has chosen and His wisdom decreed. This gives such great assurance and hope when the days seem ever darker.
- God's kingdom message is one of redemption and deliverance. The kingdom is a salvation deliverance from the thralldom to Satan, from bondage to sin, from beclouding ignorance and befouling guilt. It lifts us to live in this world as kingdom people whose citizenship is in heaven from whom one day our great king will come to overwhelming gladness of his people.
- God's kingdom mission calls for the humbling of the pride of man and the elevation of the glory of God. It will cause the bowing of believing hearts. It will grant grace to be humbled and will grant grace to the humble. This all comes as the greatness, the weightiness, the brightness of the glory of God is magnified in our eyes.
- God's kingdom power is projected through what He has spoken and sends His servants to say. The kingdom is not one of earthly powers. It is not extended by governmental legislation or funding. It is a kingdom whose servants are born, made alive by the Word and Spirit. It is one whose boundaries expand wherever His Word goes and His people preach and His Spirit quickens the spiritually dead with resurrection life.

**With its Direction****(v.28)**

<sup>28</sup> So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

So, it is a prophet who prospers and does well in the times of the Gentiles. From his capture under Nebuchadnezzar to his faithfulness in the service of pagan kings and to his sovereign God, Daniel models the role of a herald during exile. With great spiritual wisdom and insight, with clear and courageous words, with faith and obedience, his purity, praying and preaching endures.

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**Reflect and Respond**

How do we please and glorify God when we are being sinned against?

- We show that Christ is our one supreme joy; not comfort, not safety, not security, not vindication.
- We commit our souls to one who will judge justly.
- We pray more that God will grant exactly the grace we need to reflect who He is and what He is like.
- We examine ourselves, our hearts, attitudes, affections and actions for any remain sin.
- We do not seek revenge. We do not strike back with our mouths or fists.
- We gather with God's people so that we will be edified, encouraged and exhorted to greater acts of love, mercy and compassion.

When persecution and suffering come, God will be our all in all. By faith, He will deliver us. He may deliver us to suffering. He may deliver us in suffering. Or He may bring us home to Himself through it. In all cases, faith that endures to the end will be commended.

May God's kingdom come. May His kingdom come in our hearts as we bow to Him in humble faith and repentance. May His kingdom come in our churches as we do His will here on earth with the same passion, energy and glad hearts as it is done in heaven. May His kingdom come as the gospel goes to all the people groups. May His kingdom come in the bright day of His own personal appearing in glory.



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## Notes

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## End Notes

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<sup>6</sup> The following is not intentionally alluding to Daniel 6, but is using a similar motif.

<sup>11</sup> So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! <sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? <sup>16</sup> If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. (Romans 5:11-16)

<sup>7</sup>D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, Rev. Ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd Ed. / Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Da 6:1.

<sup>8</sup> It is helpful to note that some of the book of Daniel is written by a scribe who probably served under Daniel, some of the book is written by Daniel himself. The voice changes from “Daniel, he” to “I, Daniel” signaling change in authorship at that point.

<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, Da 6:10.