DANIEL

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Daniel 6:1–28

IT PLEASED DARIUS to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

6So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever! 7The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 9So King Darius put the decree in writing.

10Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?"

The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

13Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the
exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the
decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."
14When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was
determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sun-
down to save him.

15Then the men went as a group to the king and said to
him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the
Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can
be changed."

16So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and
threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May
your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

17A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the
den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with
the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be
changed. 18Then the king returned to his palace and spent the
night without eating and without any entertainment being
brought to him. And he could not sleep.

19At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to
the lions' den. 20When he came near the den, he called to
Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living
God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to
rescue you from the lions?"

21Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! 22My God sent his
angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not
hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I
ever done any wrong before you, O king."

23The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel
out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no
wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

24At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused
Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along
with their wives and children. And before they reached the
floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all
their bones.

25Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and
men of every language throughout the land:

"May you prosper greatly!

26"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people
must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.
27 He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions."

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

Original Meaning

DANIEL 6 BRINGS to a close the stories concerning Daniel's activities in the foreign court. He has not changed location; he is still in the city of Babylon. However, a new empire rules the roost as Persia has replaced Babylon. Belshazzar is dead and Darius the Mede is in control.

The identity of Darius the Mede is a vexing question. This commentary is not the place for an extended discussion,[1] but we will present the problem in its broad outlines. In brief, Cyrus was the king of Persia at the time of the fall of Babylon. No Darius is mentioned in the tablets from this time period. We begin by reminding the reader of the situation just a century ago with Belshazzar. At that time, no figure named Belshazzar was associated with the end of Babylonian history. Now, however, he is a well-documented person (see comments on ch. 5).

Darius is a well-known Persian royal name but not until long after the death of Cyrus and the rule of Cyrus's son Cambyses. Darius I (522–486 B.C.) was the king who instituted a system whereby his far-flung empire was ruled by twenty satraps. Because Darius I is associated with the institution of a new system of satrapies, many scholars feel that Daniel, writing later (see Introduction), confused Darius I with the conqueror of Babylon. However, this type of confusion seems extraordinary even at a remove of several centuries. It is more likely that Darius is a throne name for someone ruling in Babylon at the behest of Cyrus.

Recent scholars have attempted to associate Darius the Mede with particular individuals whom we know played important roles at the time Persia

1. For a detailed discussion of the issue and a presentation of the preferred solution, see R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 334–37.

incorporated Babylon into its empire. J. Whitcomb has argued that Darius the Mede is actually Gubaru, known from the Akkadian texts as governor of Babylon.[2] The eminent Assyriologist D. J. Wiseman, on the other hand, has argued that Darius the Mede is the Babylonian throne name of none other than Cyrus himself.[3] Perhaps the most persuasive of all attempts at identification is that of W. Shea: Darius the Mede is Gu/Ugbaru, the general to whom the Nabonidus Chronicle attributes the conquest of Babylon.[4] He would be ruling as a sub-king at the whim of the ultimate ruler, Cyrus himself.

Short of a document identifying one of these figures as Darius, we cannot be certain. The identification of Darius the Mede is an important problem for those of us who believe that Daniel gives us accurate historical information, but it does not affect our interpretation. Harmonizations are possible, as we have seen from the suggestions of Whitcomb, Wiseman, and Shea, but not provable. With this brief explanation for those who are troubled by the issue, we pass on now to a consideration of the content of the passage.

The story is easily identified as a court narrative of conflict.[5] The plot is propelled by the jealousy that Daniel's peers and subordinates in the Persian government feel toward his rapid rise to the top of the political hierarchy. They seek to undermine his position by pitting his loyalty to God over against his loyalty to the Persian government, which he serves. Boogaart is correct to see the conflict ultimately as one between two empires:

> On the one hand we have Darius, ruler of all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth (cf. verse 25) and enforcer of the law of the Medes and Persians. On the other hand we have the God of Daniel, working signs and wonders in heaven and on earth (cf. verse 27) and enforcer of Jewish law (cf. verse 5). The kingdoms overlap and the question of sovereignty has to be resolved.[6]

As the chapter explores this conflict, it again emphasizes the overarching theme of the whole book: *In spite of present appearances God is in control*. God will be victorious over the seemingly powerful forces ranged

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2. J. C Whitcomb, *Darius the Mede A Study in Historical Identification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

3. D. J. Wiseman, et al. *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale, 1965), 12–16.

4. W. H. Shea, "An Unrecognized Vassal King of Babylon in the Early Achaemenid Period," *AUSS* 9 (1971): 51–67, 99–128; 10 (1972): 88–117.

5. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 122; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 143.

6. T. A. Boogaart, "Daniel 6: A Tale of Two Empires," *The Reformed Review* 39–40 (1985–1987): 107.

against him and his people. Thus, this story, like those that preceded it, provides comfort for God's people, who find themselves in situations that seem beyond their control.

Daniel 6 finds its closest parallel with Daniel 3. Notice, though, a subtle difference that makes Daniel 6 more than a mere repetition. While the story of the three friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace shows how the faithful refuse to participate in idolatrous religious practices, the present chapter shows how they refuse to refrain from proper worship of God. Daniel is told not to pray to Yahweh, but he does so nonetheless. Daniel obeys God's law, not the immutable law of the Medes and Persians.

The chapter may be divided into four parts: (1) the plot against Daniel (6:1–9); (2) the trap and reluctant punishment (6:10–18); (3) Daniel's rescue and the accusers' demise (6:19–24); (4) Darius's decree (6:25–28).

The Plot Against Daniel (6:1–9)

THE STORY OPENS with the new king setting up his personal form of government for Babylonia. Over him is Cyrus, the king of Persia, so we are to understand this story as concerned only with Babylonia. While it is true that at a later date Darius will divide the entire empire into twenty satrapies, the present division involved much smaller units.[7] Darius thus pushes the governance of Babylonia in the direction of decentralization, which may help explain his later quick acceptance of the proposal to make him the chief mediator of prayer. In other words, this suggestion assures[8] him of his continued central place in the government while at the same time delegating authority to others.

By now, we are not surprised that Daniel distinguishes himself from all the other authorities whom Darius has placed in important positions throughout his kingdom. After all, we already know he is the wisest of the wise and the most capable of everyone in the land. The king's intention to promote him above everyone else is apparently leaked to the others, who for obviously selfish reasons want to block his swift rise. Unfortunately for them, Daniel's behavior conforms to his spotless reputation. They will have to manufacture a fault in his personality.

Their twisted minds come up with the ideal plan. They know that Daniel's religion is the fundamental guiding principle of his life. He would betray the king before he would betray his religion. Thus they lay their trap to trip him up.

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7. For evidence that "satrap" can be used on a smaller scale, see Collins, *Daniel*, 264, though Collins himself still believes there is a confusion here with the later Darius.

8. At least symbolically, since it lasts only thirty days.

Their approach to the king is a masterpiece of political deception to achieve their illicit ends. The Aramaic verb (*rgs*) behind the NIV translation "went as a group" (v. 6) is ambiguous as to their attitude. As Fewell explains, the word has a semantic range that moves from "the rather innocent connotation of 'in company,' to the idea of 'conspiracy,' to the notion of 'rage.'"[9] She rightly believes that all senses of the word echo in the context. She also describes how this verb's combination with the preposition *'al* can also be interpreted in different senses from the point of view of the king himself, who thinks they are making a fuss "over" him, or from the vantage point of the conspirators themselves, who are actually working "against" him.[10]

In any case, these "administrators and satraps" are clearly lying to the king, since they claim that the proposal they are presenting has been unanimously approved by all of his subordinates. Of course, Daniel, the king's favorite, does not even know about it.

The proposal itself is strange. It definitely appeals to the vanity of the king, especially if the king is feeling any insecurity about his popularity or power. Perhaps this explains his ready acceptance of such a bizarre suggestion. On the surface, it appears to suggest to the king that he be sole deity of the realm for thirty days. While it is easy to imagine someone's overweening pride allowing him to believe he is a god, it is hard to see someone putting such a short time period on his divinity.

Questions like this have led John Walton to make the plausible suggestion that the decree does not actually "deify the king but designates him as the only legitimate representative of deity for the stated time."[11] Whichever it is, Daniel will find himself in an impossible situation from a human point of view, for the decree may not be repealed according to the custom of the Persians and Medes.[12]

The Trap and Reluctant Punishment (6:10–18)

THE NARRATIVE NOW shifts scene. We move from the court to Daniel's home where he hears of the king's decree to forbid prayer toward anything or anyone but the king himself. His response is simple: He goes upstairs and prays with the windows open toward Jerusalem. There is no speech or inner turmoil

9. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 145.

10. Ibid., 146.

11. J. Walton, "The Decree of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6," *JETS* 31 (1988): 280.

12. The statement that the law of the Persians and Medes was unable to be repealed has been debated and discussed, but the same theme may be found in the book of Esther (1:19; 8:8) as well as the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (17.30). Further, paragraph 5 of Hammurapi's law code indicates that it was a crime for a judge to change his decision (cf. Hartman and DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, 199).

recorded in the narrative. The impression the narrative intends to impart is Daniel's unflinching obedience. He does not question, doubt, or worry; he acts. He does not bow toward Darius, but toward Jerusalem. Darius is neither the object nor the mediator of his prayers. That role is taken by Yahweh.

Why does Daniel bow toward Jerusalem? Essentially, his act is motivated by 1 Kings 8:35–36 (italics added):

> When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray *toward this place* and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

The context of these verses is Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. God had made his presence known in a special way in the temple. As Solomon made clear, the temple did not contain God, but was the place God himself chose as the place where his people would come to worship him.

Of course, at the time of Daniel's prayer the temple was in ruins. God had abandoned his earthly home (Ezek. 9–11) because of the presumption of the people (Jer. 7) and had allowed the Babylonians to tear down the temple (book of Lamentations). Nonetheless, Judeans in exile, such as Daniel, turned regularly to the city with longing in their hearts and hope for the future.

According to the passage, Daniel did this three times a day. This practice is not mandated anywhere in Scripture, but is perhaps suggested by passages such as Psalm 55:17:[13]

> Evening, morning and noon
> I cry out in distress,
> and he hears my voice.

The mention of the "three times a day" indicates that Daniel's prayer on this occasion is not stirred on by the decree; it is part of his regular habit. He is not flaunting his rebellion in the face of the king's orders; it is business as usual. Indeed, the description of his prayer is a statement that he is neither flaunting nor hiding his religious practice. After all, he is praying in an upper room, and with the windows open. He is not on public display, but neither is he hiding from determined spies.

And determined spies there were. The officials who precipitated the crisis see Daniel's actions and report them to the king (vv. 12, 15). As we have

13. Collins, *Daniel*, 268.

seen above (cf. comments on v. 6), the verb used is *rgš*, indicating not only that they act as a group but also with malicious intent. From their description, we learn something of the content of Daniel's prayer. He is "asking God for help" (v. 11). Likely, he is turning to God for aid because he anticipates trouble from the decree. As the story continues, we discover how God answers his prayer.

The conspirators present news of Daniel's actions craftily. They know where the king's sympathies lie, so before they accuse Daniel, they remind the king of his earlier decision and its binding character. They then confront the king with the news that indicts Daniel.

The king reacts with extreme dismay. The contrast with Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the three friends in Daniel 3 could not be stronger. While the latter responded with increasing anger to the friends' refusal to participate in the pagan rite, Darius wants to save the aged Judean counselor. However, he is trapped by his own unchangeable words and must carry out the punishment.

"So the king gave the order" (v. 16). As decreed, Daniel is thrown into the lions' den. No comparable form of punishment is known from the ancient Near East, but then powerful yet insecure nations from time immemorial have devised tortures and deaths with incredible imagination. The conception is simple enough: Develop a pit and put lions in it. The victim, in this case Daniel, could be thrown in; a stone blocked the point of entry, and the lions would be allowed to do their work. Since the punishment in this case is the execution of a royal decree, the king seals the entrance with his seal. This act does not lock the door as much as prevent tampering with it. If someone were to open the door before the next morning, it would be noticed because the seal would be broken.

The king's concern for Daniel continues through the night. He cannot eat or sleep. As he discovers the next morning to his surprise, his evening has been much more difficult than Daniel's!

Daniel's Rescue and the Accusers' Demise (6:19–24)

THE COMING DAWN finds Darius rushing to the lions' den in order to discover the fate of Daniel. Contrary to some interpreters,[14] Darius must have had at least a glimmer of hope that Daniel would survive the night. After all, he had commended Daniel into the hands of the prophet's God and called out to him the moment he reached the den.

Perhaps it is best to consider the lions' den a trial by ordeal rather than an execution per se. An execution, after all, would not have a time limit. The

14. Cf. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 150.

understanding of the scene as an ordeal also explains some of the language found in the chapter. What was an ordeal? An individual was subjected to an ordeal when he was suspected of a crime, but there was some uncertainty as to his guilt. Daniel's guilt in relationship to Darius's decree appears clear, but as he emerges from the den, he claims that the lions have not hurt him "because I was found innocent in [God's] sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king" (v. 22). Daniel's survival attests to his innocence.

Ordeals are broadly known in the ancient Near East.[15] They take many forms, but perhaps the most well known is the water ordeal. An individual suspected of a crime is thrown into a river. If he or she dies, they are guilty. But if they survive, they are innocent and set free. Biblical law contains only one possible instance of ordeal: the case of a woman suspected of adultery (Num. 5:11–31).[16]

The theology behind an ordeal is that God, who knows the heart in a way that human judges do not, will see the verdict through. Daniel's survival, then, is God's judgment of innocence on Daniel. In this judgment, Darius rejoices.

Daniel further attests to God's involvement in his survival when he informs Darius that during the night God sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions. The angel plays the same role as the "fourth man" in the blazing furnace in Daniel 3. Furthermore, just as the three friends do not even have the smell of smoke on their clothes as they are brought out of the furnace, so Daniel doesn't have a scratch on his body when he is lifted out of the den, even though he spent the night with lions.

But perhaps the lions weren't hungry that night. Or perhaps someone sympathetic to Daniel, say Darius, had had the lions fed to the full or even drugged beforehand. Any such doubts are dispelled in the following verses when Daniel's accusers and their families are thrown into the den. The viciousness and hunger of the lions are vividly displayed by the fact they were attacked and killed before "they reached the floor of the den" (v. 24).

The accusers set a trap for Daniel, but in the end they were caught in their own trap—and not only the accusers themselves, but also their families. Modern commentators, for obvious reasons, have felt uncomfortable imagining the prophet standing by as wives and children are thrown into the den. Moreover, even though it was the Persian king's decision (after all, those children might well grow up with ideas of revenge in mind), the narrator

15. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Judicial Ordeal in the Ancient Near East" (Ph.D. dissertation: New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1977).

16. Though it is possible to understand events like the Flood or the crossing of the Red Sea as an ordeal in which the innocent survive and the guilty are killed.

seems to have taken some pleasure in the scene. We must remember, however, that this scene is presented to a generation of God's people who felt helpless in the grips of their oppressors. Their own families were impotent in the face of exploitation and worse. They were daily being manipulated for purposes other than their own.

Darius's Decree (6:25–28)

THE PLOT OF Daniel 6 was set in motion by Darius's issuing a decree that prayers could only be directed toward himself either as a divine figure or, as is more likely, the only mediator with the divine realm. The chapter ends with a second decree, this time promoting Daniel's God throughout his vast empire.

Has the thirty-day period of the first decree passed? If not, how could that unchangeable law be changed and replaced with this one? We cannot answer that question with certainty since we do not know the timing. In any case, God takes the place of Darius, at Darius's own urging, at the end of the chapter. What a wonderful testimony to the people of God that God truly is in control in spite of present appearances!

Darius proclaims the God of Daniel "the living God." This indicates that he not only exists, but is active in the world. Certainly the prophet's rescue shows that in a dramatic fashion. God and his kingdom will never end, and he rescues his people in astounding ways. Specifically, his rescue of Daniel from the lions' den demonstrates that "he rescues and he saves" (v. 27).

After Darius's speech, the chapter, which brings to a close the court narrative part of the book, concludes with the narrative statement that "Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (v. 28). Indeed he did. He prospered throughout his entire lifetime in the court. Fewell summarizes his progression well:

> We have seen the Hebrew sage climb the political ladder from captive prisoner to initiate to sage (ch. 1) to chief sage (ch. 2) to administrator over the province of Babylon (chs. 2–3) to the king's personal adviser (ch. 4) to third ruler in the kingdom (ch. 5) to the prime minister that the king himself intends, at the beginning of ch. 6, to set over the entire kingdom and does implicitly set over the kingdom at the end of ch. 6.[17]

Though the story of Daniel's political career thus draws to a close, even more exciting material follows in the second half of the book.

17. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 154.

Bridging Contexts

DANIEL 6 IS the last of six historical narratives featuring Daniel in a foreign court. Thus, we have already had ample opportunity to spell out the hermeneutical principles that allow us to move from the original context of the story to a contemporary setting. We have argued as early as chapter 1[18] that the historical narrative of the Old Testament was written not simply for remembrance, but also to serve as a paradigm for future behavior. The narratives of Daniel, in particular, are shaped to serve as life examples for later generations of God's people.

We have also confronted the issue of bringing this Old Testament text to bear on a New Testament audience.[19] Acknowledging Christ's climactic role in the history of God's story of redemption leads modern interpreters to recognize the possibility of discontinuity as well as continuity between ourselves and the ancient audience. We have also seen how Jesus himself instructed his followers to read the Old Testament in the light of his coming (Luke 24:25–27, 44). We will keep these principles in mind as we work through the contents of chapter 6.

Basic truths repeated. Although I do not want to be overly repetitive, I must nonetheless point out that Daniel 6, like the preceding five chapters, illustrates the basic themes of the book of Daniel. Despite present appearances, God is indeed in control. Regardless of the fact that powerful political forces move against Daniel, God preserves him from their clutches. In spite of the fact that the law of the Medes and Persians has condemned him to death, God preserves his life. Regardless of the fact that the lions are hungry, God does not allow them to even scratch Daniel's skin. God indeed is in control!

But Daniel not only survives in spite of his faith; he prospers. At the beginning of the chapter, he already has a position of great importance in Darius's court. The plot against him was motivated by the other leaders' jealousy of his power. As the chapter ends, the narrator drives this point home with the comment: "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (6:28). What an example and encouragement to God's people, who later faced similar threats and challenges! The basic message of this chapter to later readers is simple: "Remain faithful! God will take care of you."

Of course, the threats and obstacles in life can be incredibly imposing. Daniel and his three friends have already testified to that truth. In Daniel 6, we have a story where the faith of Daniel alone is tested. In many ways, this chapter parallels Daniel 3, which recorded the depth of the three friends'

18. Cf. pp.57–61.
19. Cf. pp. 26–27.

faith, with no mention of Daniel. Here we have Daniel without the three friends. The text does not allow us any basis to speculate concerning the whereabouts or actions of the three friends here, any more than we could be certain about Daniel's absence from the earlier story.

The conflict of laws. The focus on Daniel, of course, results from the fact that he has drawn the envy of his colleagues because of his meteoric rise in Darius's estimation. They cannot find anything in his behavior or character to use in order to undermine his position, so they resort to framing him. They manipulate the king to create a law that they know Daniel will not keep. The law prohibits prayer to any god or human except Darius himself for a period of thirty days. Whether the law sets Darius on a divine pedestal or imagines him to be the conduit to the gods is irrelevant; in either case, the surface intention of the law is to create a means by which extreme loyalty to the king can be measured. The irony of the situation is that the administrators who urged the king to create this law were actually disloyal to Darius, working against his own desires and intentions, whereas Daniel, who finds himself under judgment of the law, is actually the most true of his subordinates.

Nonetheless, the law created by Darius became one of the "laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed" (v. 8). The irony here is that the law cannot even be repealed by the king himself! A law that has as its ostensible purpose the intention to set the king up as an ultimate authority actually imprisons him to its own authority.

Even more significantly, it brings the king and his law into a fundamental conflict with God and his law. Daniel knows that God's law requires that he pray to the ultimate authority of the universe, not to a human king. The basic tension in Daniel 6 is the conflict between God's law and the law of the Medes and Persians. Daniel must choose between the two laws, and he does not hesitate for a moment. He chooses to obey God's law.

Before continuing, we should note the difference between God's relationship with his law and Darius's relationship with his. The law in both cases reflects the will and desires of the one who creates the law. Darius's law reflects what he wants, and God's law reflects what God wants. We have seen, however, that Darius's law ultimately binds him to a course of action he did not want. When he saw the consequences of his actions, he would have loved to change his mind, but he could not. He was not above the law.

Is God above his law? This is a difficult question. In one sense, we want to say, yes. God is above everything. He is not bound by his own laws. He can do whatever he wants. However, to go down that road is misleading and wrong. As opposed to Darius's relationship to the law he creates, God's law is always the perfect expression of his character. The difference between Darius and God is that the latter knows himself perfectly and knows the

consequences of his acts and pronouncements perfectly. This is why the psalmist in Psalm 19:7–11 can speak of God's law in a way that would be illegitimate about any human law:

> The law of the LORD is perfect,
> reviving the soul.
> The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
> making wise the simple.
> The precepts of the LORD are right,
> giving joy to the heart.
> The commands of the LORD are radiant,
> giving light to the eyes.
> The fear of the LORD is pure,
> enduring forever.
> The ordinances of the LORD are sure
> and altogether righteous.
> They are more precious than gold,
> than much pure gold;
> they are sweeter than honey,
> than honey from the comb.
> By them is your servant warned;
> in keeping them there is great reward.

The cost of discipleship. Daniel kept the law of the Lord, but at first it did not seem like reward would be the result of his obedience. Darius, bound by his own law, threw him into the lions' den. Daniel's obedience flowed from his realization that he would sin if he did not practice his own religion. In this way, it is the flip side of Daniel 3, where the three friends illustrated the realization that they would sin if they participated in the false religious practices of their idolatrous oppressors. The two chapters together thus encourage later readers to avoid false religion and to pursue legitimate religion, no matter what the cost.

And the cost was great. Daniel does not articulate it as blatantly as the three friends in their speech before Nebuchadnezzar, but we are surely to understand Daniel's attitude to affirm the belief that "the God we serve is able to save us from it [the death penalty], and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods . . ." (3:17–18; or in the case of Daniel, he will not desist from worshiping his God). In a word, Daniel would rather be eaten by lions than stop praying to God.

Even so, notice the quiet faithfulness of Daniel. Here we revisit a theme encountered for the first time in chapter 1. Daniel does not grandstand for

the faith, but neither does he try to hide his love of the Lord. He did not go to the public square or the court to flaunt his rejection of Darius's decree; rather, he went as usual to his "upstairs room" (v. 10). Yet he did not close the windows so no one could observe his prayers. It may take some effort, like that exerted by the conspirators, but Daniel was not taking any extraordinary measures to hide his lack of compliance to Darius's decree. No, he will obey the law of God, not the law of the Medes and Persians with which it conflicts.

For his obedience, he is condemned to the lions' den. Again, Darius's law no longer reflects the king's will, but he has no other choice. In the world in which he lives and helped to create, not even the king can circumvent the law. He can hope, but he cannot stop the wheels that he set in motion.

God's redemptive power. In other words, Darius, the most powerful human being in the world, has no power to save Daniel. But Daniel's faith is founded on a person who is more powerful than the king, God himself. As events unfold, we observe another important biblical theme in operation: God overrules the evil intentions of human beings to bring about great salvation.

God is not only not bound by his own law as Darius is; he can deliver his people from the evil intentions of their enemies. We have seen this important redemptive principle at work frequently in previous Scripture, but I will only use one story to illustrate it. In previous chapters we had occasion to note similarities between Daniel and Joseph. As we read the Joseph story with this principle in mind, we see again and again how God delivered him from the evil intentions of human beings. Jealous brothers wanted him dead, so they threw him in a pit. God saved Joseph from death at that point when they saw an opportunity to turn their rage into a commercial venture by selling him into slavery to the Midianites. He ended up in Egypt, where he distinguished himself in the service of the high Egyptian official Potiphar.

There, however, he eventually ran into trouble because of the evil intentions of Potiphar's wife, who framed him for attempted rape. Joseph ended up in jail. This is where he met two other high Egyptian officials, the chief baker and the chief cupbearer, whose acquaintance ultimately brought him into contact with the pharaoh himself. His new high office placed him in a position from which he could save his family from certain death by starvation during an intense famine.

Joseph's was no ordinary family. It was the seed of the promise, the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. Joseph himself articulated the principle we are applying to the story in Daniel 6. After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers thought the time of their punishment for mistreating their now powerful brother had come. In response to their pleas for mercy, however, Joseph expressed his certainty concerning God's purposes in his suffering

over the years: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

In this story in Daniel, God overruled the evil intentions of the conspirators and the powerlessness of Darius in order to illustrate to countless generations of his people that he is able to save his people in the midst of the most dire circumstances. We must ask what we face that surpasses the danger Daniel faced. Moreover, as we will see, we have a much stronger basis for faith in the midst of suffering and the threat of death than Daniel did.

To take it one step further, just as God saves, he also judges. Daniel lived through the night with the hungry lions. But the next morning the conspirators meet the fate they had planned for Daniel. The lions weren't sleepy or full during the night, for the bodies of the enemies of God's people did not even hit the ground before they were gobbled up. Daniel 6 thus illustrates the principle expressed in Proverbs 28:10:[20]

> He who leads the upright along an evil path
> will fall into his own trap,
> but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.

Thus, Daniel 6 ends with Daniel alive and promoted and his enemies dead. To cap it all off, Darius celebrates Daniel's rescue by giving praise to an authority and a kingdom greater than his own. His decree in verses 26–27 is an implicit admission that his own power is limited, while the "living God" and his kingdom is above all.

IN DANIEL 6, God calls his followers to persist in faithfulness in spite of opposition and the threat of death. He shows himself able to take care of his people in the most dire of circumstances. Daniel, his faithful servant, not only survives the lion ordeal, but he prospers to the end in the foreign court. Hebrews 11:33–34 alludes to this episode as a prime example of faith and its results. Today, Daniel is presented to us as an example of faith under duress.

Further, though Daniel 6 is not cited, surely our chapter helped provide justification for the behavior of Peter and the other apostles in Acts 5. They had just been imprisoned on the charge of preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. What do they do immediately upon their release? They preach again. When confronted, they respond, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29). Whether it is the law of God versus the law of the Medes and Persians, or

20. See P. D. Miller Jr., *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1982).

versus the law of the Sanhedrin—or the law of the Romans, or the laws of the United States of America—God's faithful followers must always side with God's law.

Americans and most other Western Christians are spoiled, however. The democracies in which we live allow considerable room for the free exercise of religion. We may openly go to church, form our own schools, raise our children in our beliefs. If our religious conscience compels us, we can plead our case for noninvolvement in the military. We can openly protest trends in our society that are opposed to our religious values.

Private versus public situations. At times, however, Western Christians misapply the examples of Daniel and Peter. A prime example is the complaint about the lack of prayer in our public schools. Our present law prohibits a teacher from offering a prayer in our state-run schools. This bothers some Christians, who believe that Daniel 6 provides the motivation for objection. They argue that Daniel was told he could not pray, but he persisted in prayer. If we, then, are told we cannot pray, we must not cave in to the "law of the Medes and Persians." A similar kind of argument is presented in the analogous cases of Christmas displays on government property or the hanging of the Ten Commandments in a judge's courtroom.

But are these situations really analogous to Daniel 6? I suggest they are not. Daniel was not prohibited from praying in a certain location like the court; he was forbidden to pray to God at all, even in private! Indeed, it is preposterous to even imagine Daniel during his early years in Babylon insisting on prayer before the opening of his Akkadian class or the class on divination.

The confusion in the United States and probably other Western democracies arises because some Christians insist that their country is the modern equivalent of Israel. However, it cannot be urged too strongly that there are and can be no modern equivalents of Israel. There is no such thing as a "Christian nation," except in the sense of a nation where most of the inhabitants happen to be Christian at that particular historical moment.

In other words, the nation is not the church. The modern equivalent of Israel is not a political entity but rather the church. Christians should be working to keep prayer out of public schools, manger scenes off the front yard of city hall, and the Ten Commandments out of the local magistrates' offices. When the church has state backing, it grows complacent, or even worse, coercive in its witness. Indeed, study has shown that when the church gets an entrée into the power structures of the state (whether the government per se or public educational institutions), it has hurt, not helped, the cause of the kingdom. I believe we can see this in a country like Korea, where the church exercises enormous influence on the public sector and also has significant wealth and power. The power struggles within Korean ecclesiastical struc-

tures are notorious. No, the quiet faithfulness of Daniel in the privacy of his upper room has nothing to do with trying to practice public prayer in a state-run institution.

The modern parallels to Daniel 6 in Western democracies take place not in the arena of culture wars, but rather in more local situations. A librarian is fired because she refuses to work on a Sunday morning during worship services. A young teenager is told by his parents that he may not meet with the neighborhood church's youth group for prayer because they do not want him involved in "all that superstition." A wife is told that she can be a Christian, but must not act like it around the house. Where we today most often encounter conflict analogous to Daniel 6 is the law of God versus the law of an employer, a parent, a spouse.

Preparation and vigilance. Western Christians, however, must be vigilant. Their present freedom of religion could change over time. To be vigilant, however, does not mean to prepare for war or to fight for our rights. Again, the example of Daniel 6, as well as that of the disciples in the New Testament, not to speak of Jesus himself, is to prepare to risk all, even our lives. When Daniel heard about the law forbidding his prayer, he did not rally the troops for a strike or armed resistance, he prepared himself for death. The same may be said concerning the three friends in Daniel 3. Christians do not fight for their beliefs by assaulting or killing, but by dying.

The principle for this attitude comes from the Bible. We get stirring examples of this principle as it is worked on in the lives of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Peter, and many others in the pages of Scripture. But we also see examples today in the lives and deaths of our brothers and sisters who live in more coercive societies. Let me share with you the story of one of my students and his wife, Bob and Heidi Fu.

When Bob was a non-Christian, he was a leader in the protest in Tiananmen Square, which resulted in a massacre on June 4, 1989. After the protest, he became the object of intense scrutiny by the Public Security Bureau Police, but what really devastated him were betrayals by several of his colleagues. In his own words, Bob said he felt like "there was no hope, no future."

At this critical juncture in his life, one of his fellow students passed him the biography of Mr. Xi Xiong Mo, a former drug addict who converted to Christianity. Bob and his wife became Christians in that fateful year of 1989. God used them and others so that a number of his fellow students became Christians as well. Bob soon found he was again the object of the attention of the Communist Party, but now for a different reason—his Christian faith and ministry. He and his wife were both arrested in 1996 and spent two months in a Chinese jail, where they were viciously interrogated and lived in horrible conditions, but their faith grew strong.

They were suddenly released from prison, but told they could be reincarcerated at any time. Bob speculates they were released in order to see who else was in their movement. Around the same time, Heidi got pregnant without obtaining the necessary quota approval slip from the police. Rearrest and forced abortion were a real possibility in her life, so they fled from Beijing to Hong Kong and finally, after being interviewed on *ABC World News Tonight*, got the attention of influential people in the United States, resulting in permission to seek asylum here.[21]

Where did Daniel find the courage to face the lions' den? His courage came from his faith in "the living God." As we saw in the previous section, this God is a God who can overrule evil to bring about good, to bring salvation. Where did Bob and Heidi Fu and countless other Christians who have faced imprisonment and death for their faith find courage to persevere? They, and we, have an even stronger basis for our faith than Daniel. Why? Because since the time of Daniel, the hope of Israel has come. Jesus Christ himself has fulfilled the prophetic anticipation of a suffering and raised Savior. The Messiah is no longer a hope for the future, but a hope based on a past event. We do not look forward to the incarnation of God's Son, but we look back to the cross.

As we look back to the cross, we see that Jesus himself faced the same threat as Daniel in the lions' den. As early Christian art attests,[22] Daniel's emergence from the lions' den is typological of Jesus death and resurrection. Towner and Goldingay explain the comparison most clearly among modern commentators.[23] As Daniel was framed on a false charge by the Persian administrators, so Jesus was framed by the jealous religious leaders of his day. They reported to the Roman authorities that he was claiming political authority with the title "king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:11). Jesus, like Daniel, was arrested while at prayer in a private location, the Garden of Gethsemane. Pilate, like Darius, worked for his release. But in the end, both Daniel and Jesus are turned over to be executed. As Towner emphasizes, however, the big difference between the two is that Daniel emerges without a scratch, while Jesus dies. Yet that difference is what underlines the superiority of the reality to its foreshadow. Jesus dies, yet he emerges from the tomb!

We have noted how Daniel in the lions' den demonstrates God's ability to overrule the evil intentions of men and women in order to bring about something good. With Joseph, we observed that God overruled the evil

21. Taken from personal conversations with Bob Fu and an article summarizing Bob and Heidi's story in C. Jones, "House Church Leader Granted Asylum in the USA," *China Prayer Letter and Ministry Report* 144 (November-December 1997): 1–5.

22. Towner, *Daniel*, 85.

23. Towner, *Daniel*, 84–85; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 136.

intentions of those who persecuted him to bring about salvation. Peter understands the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of this principle when he preaches at Pentecost (Acts 2:22–24):

> Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Now we can see the power that allows us to risk all for our faith. Jesus has not only gone into the lions' den and emerged unscathed, but he has died and been raised again. And, as Paul reminds us, his death and resurrection are the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Because of Jesus, death cannot hold us either. "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:54–56).

Our faith gives us the courage to risk all, even death. Christians living in the West have not been tested to risk all. Often we act as if we are unwilling to risk anything. We need to pray for our brothers and sisters who today risk much, and we must ask the Lord to make us ready when our day of testing comes.

Our willingness to risk even our lives is what will turn the heads of the secular culture that surrounds us. Our complaints, our legislative efforts, our attempts to compel people to live according to our standards of morality will only close their ears. The power of quiet faithfulness is impressed upon us in the closing words of Darius in 6:26–27:

> For he is the living God
> and he endures forever;
> his kingdom will not be destroyed,
> his dominion will never end.
> He rescues and he saves;
> he performs signs and wonders
> in the heavens and on the earth.
> He has rescued Daniel
> from the power of the lions.