

AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY

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34). He was assassinated (559-555 BC). 55 BC), reigned for a short time and replaced Nabonidus. Though Nabonidus is referred to as the king of Babylon, Daniel refers to him as the king of the Medes and Persians – of which he could be called

for thirteen of the kings of Babylon, whom he lived at Teima in the desert. Daniel refers to him as the king of the Medes and Persians – of which he could be called

Africa often turn to him for help. These

answered. Suddenly a verdict on the king was given, he could not deny it and his point that his

(5:6). He hurried in. Nebuchadnezzar in his dream called Belshazzar (5:8-9).

5:10-17 Reward Rejected

Hearing the uproar, the king's mother came in (5:10). (She is referred to as *the queen*, but must have been the queen mother as Belshazzar's wife was already present at the party – 5:2-3). She spoke calmly and reminded her son about Daniel's incredible feat in the days of Nebuchadnezzar (5:11-12). The king listened to her and immediately summoned Daniel, asking him to interpret the writing on the wall (5:13-15). If Daniel was successful, he was promised money, fame and a position next in rank to the king himself (5:16; see comments on 5:1-2).

Many ministers of the gospel in nation after nation in Africa have sold their birthrights and compromised the truth for luxury or position. But Daniel rejected the king's offer in no uncertain terms (5:17). Nevertheless, he was prepared to read and interpret the writing.

5:18-24 Like Father, Like Son

Before interpreting the inscription, Daniel reminded his terrified audience of how Nebuchadnezzar had been deposed and disgraced for seven years – a fact known by every member of the royal family – until he bowed down to the Most High God (5:18-21). He then went to the heart of the problem, saying: *But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this* (5:22). He denounced Belshazzar's blasphemy and folly. *You have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven* (5:23), meaning that the king was on a collision course with the Lord God who held his life in his hand.

A popular song in Nigeria has a similar theme. It sings of a recent head of state who arbitrarily abused power and defied every constituted authority at home and internationally. But when God said 'Enough!' his military might could not avert his death.

5:25-31 Message of Judgment

God's memo to Belshazzar read: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN*. *Mene*, repeated twice for emphasis, means 'numbered'. God was telling Belshazzar: 'Your time is up!' The word *tekel* means 'weighed', and has a secondary meaning of 'found too light'. God has found Belshazzar to be too light morally and spiritually (5:27). The word *parsin* means 'broken' or 'divided', and has a plural ending to indicate the plural nature of the conquering power: *Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians* (5:28).

Some have asked: 'Why Medes and Persians?' when the Persians were the stronger in this coalition? The answer may lie in Daniel's knowledge of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah many years before (Isa 13:17-22; 21:1-10; Jer 51:33-58). Daniel would have remembered his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, where the golden head was succeeded by the chest and arms of silver (2:32, 39).

Belshazzar carried out his promise of honouring and rewarding Daniel and proclaimed him the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Apparently he was not expecting an immediate fulfilment of the message. Many people in our day make the same mistake. But *that very night Belshazzar ... was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two* (5:30-31).

6:1-28 Persecution of Righteous Daniel

'All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Tim 3:12) and Daniel was no exception. 'No servant is greater than his master,' says Jesus, 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (John 15:20). Unfortunately we are bombarded by an unbiblical painless (or pay-less) theology that wants a crown without a cross. Yet the importance of persecution is attested by the amount of space given to it in both the Old and the New Testaments and in this book of Daniel.

6:1-3 Daniel's Position Under a New Regime

Darius the Mede took over from the slain Belshazzar. Yet the problem is that there is no record of any king of Babylon with this name, and there seems to be confusion in Daniel's record between Darius and Cyrus (1:21; 6:28). Evangelical scholars offer three possible solutions: a) Darius is another name for Cyrus the Persian; b) Darius was actually Cambyses, the son of Cyrus; and c) Darius is another name for Gubaru, the governor Cyrus appointed over Babylon immediately after the fall of the city.

The last explanation enjoys the most support. The language of 5:31 and 9:1 supports the interpretation that Darius was a sub-king under Cyrus. He is described as 'ruler over the Babylonian kingdom' (that is, of Babylonia – 9:1), whereas Cyrus is referred to as *king of Persia* (that is, of the empire – 10:1). Just as Belshazzar was co-regent with Nabonidus, his father, so Darius the Mede was co-regent with Cyrus the Persian, the senior partner in the coalition.

Darius had vast administrative ability. He rejected the despotic rule of the Babylonians and introduced a system based on power sharing. His reason for doing this was primarily economic: *so that the king might not suffer loss* (6:2). He appointed 120 district assistants under three provincial governors, one of whom was Daniel. By this time Daniel was over eighty-four years of age, with over sixty years of public service behind him. His knowledge of Babylon and his record of integrity meant that it did not take long for Darius to notice him. As a result he *planned to set him over the whole kingdom* (6:3). 'Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men' (Prov 22:29).

Daniel was a statesman who served three different regimes with integrity. We should seek to emulate his

qualities as we strive to be salt and light in our generation. Someone has said: 'Christians should be so "Daniel-good" that they cannot be ignored'.

6:4-9 Plot Against Daniel

Daniel's favour with the king aroused the jealousy of his fellow officials, men who were probably much younger and anxious to get ahead. What started as jealousy turned into envy; envy turned into racial hatred (see the label in 6:13); and hatred turned into a plot.

Daniel could not be credibly accused of corruption (6:4). But his virtue made him vulnerable, for it meant that his enemies could predict how he would react in certain circumstances. So they decided to use *the law of his God* to entrap him (6:5). They must have been thinking of the second commandment (Exod 20:4). Daniel had not been a secret disciple of Yahweh. His enemies knew that he would not bow down to anyone other than his God.

Drawing on the prevailing notion of the divinity of kings, the conspirators asked the unsuspecting king to sign an edict declaring that he was to be the sole being to be prayed to (6:6-8). The king might have asked, 'Why limit the decree to the next thirty days?' But he did not. The decree flattered his vanity. It was another case of a man wanting to be a god.

6:10-11 Daniel's Prayer

Despite the administrators' claim that this was a unanimous decision (6:7), Daniel had obviously not been present when the conspiracy was planned or when the decree was presented to the king. As soon as he learned of it, he must have known what was going on. He now faced not a choice but a challenge to his faith. If it had been merely a choice, he could have resolved it by choosing not to pray at all. Since the decree did not command anyone to pray, not praying would not have constituted an offence.

What did it mean to pray to the king? He may have been expected to have an image representing Darius or to call out the name of Darius (see also 1 Kgs 18:26-29). More likely, to judge by Daniel's behaviour, he may have been meant to face towards the king's palace when praying (as Muslims must face Mecca). Daniel's response is clear. He prays three times daily with his windows opened towards Jerusalem (6:10). The practice of praying towards Jerusalem had been adopted by David, the man after God's own heart (Pss 5:7; 28:2), and his son, Solomon, had institutionalized it (1 Kgs 8:33, 35, 38, 44, 48; 2 Chr 6:34-39). The prophet Jeremiah had encouraged the exiles to seek the Lord (Jer 29:1, 12). Centralized temple worship had become so vital to the Jews that many years later they would totally miss the point when Jesus said, 'destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days' (John 2:19-21; see also John 4:21-24).

Daniel faced the challenge as courageously as his companions had done in chapter 3. He openly prayed to Yahweh, as he had always done. His consistency and faithfulness are a challenge to all believers, and particularly to busy Christian professionals of the dot-com generation. The secret of Daniel's strength was his prayer in his room!

6:12-13, 15 Prosecution of Daniel

Daniel's enemies lost no time in reporting his behaviour. Cleverly, they did not immediately mention his name. Instead, they asked the king to confirm that he meant what he had said (6:12). Once they had an affirmative answer to this question, they proceeded to disclose that Daniel was not obeying the law. The king was very distressed when he heard this and did his best to protect Daniel (6:14). So the conspirators came to him a third time to remind him that his decree could not be changed (6:15). Darius' inability to reverse the decree has been used by some to support the argument that he was a subordinate king to Cyrus.

6:14, 16-17 Predicament of King Darius

When the king learned that he had been tricked, he was not angry with Daniel but with himself. Having tried all he could do within the law to rescue Daniel and failed, he reluctantly gave the order for Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den (6:16). (Unlike the Babylonians, the Persians were Zoroastrians by religion. Because they regarded fire as sacred they would not use it to execute offenders.)

Saying farewell to Daniel, the king prayed, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!' (6:16). Was this merely a wish by a frustrated pagan king? Given Daniel's influence on the king (shown by his behaviour - 6:18), it seems likely that it was a genuine prayer. Daniel had made a deep impact on the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar, and also, it appears, on Darius.

Then Daniel was lowered into the den, which was probably a deep pit with a cover over it. Once the cover was in place, the king sealed it with his signet ring and those of his nobles to ensure that it was not opened (6:17).

6:18-23 Protection of Daniel

That night the king fasted: he had no food, no music, no entertainment, and no sleep (6:18). He may well have prayed all night, for what else explains his rush to the den early in the morning to see whether Daniel was still alive (6:19).

At the den he calls out to Daniel, addressing him as a *servant of the living God* (6:20). He recognizes that Daniel continually serves his God, and that God is 'living' as opposed to 'dead' idols. It is also clear that he had at least some expectation that Daniel would be delivered (6:20). He was overjoyed when Daniel responded (6:23).

Daniel had not detected him (6:23) (Heb 11:33).

6:24 Punishment

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Daniel had no doubt that it was the Lord who had pro-
tected him (6:22). His heroic faith is commended in the NT
(Heb 11:33).

6:24 Punishment of Daniel's Detractors

Daniel had taught Nebuchadnezzar that his God is a God
of justice (4:27). Darius learned the same lesson. He thus
punished those who had conspired against Daniel, ordering
that they and their wives and children be thrown into the
lions' den (6:24a). As the proverb says *Eniti o ba da eru, ni
eru nto* [Yoruba - Nigeria: 'Ashes follow the one who throws
them into the air']. The text does not say how many people
were executed. Given their immediate destruction (6:24b),
it is likely that it was just the ringleaders rather than all
120 assistants plus the other two governors and their wives
and children. Their deaths show that Daniel did not survive
merely because the lions were not hungry, but because of
God's miraculous intervention.

6:25-28 Prosperity of Daniel

Greatly impressed, Darius issued a decree that people eve-
rywhere in his kingdom *must fear and reverence the God of
Daniel* (6:26). This was tantamount to legalizing the wor-
ship of Yahweh. He described Daniel's God in terms almost
identical to those used by Nebuchadnezzar after his deliver-
ance (4:34-37). The similarity of the two decrees has led to
suggestions that Daniel may have drafted both.

Daniel did not merely triumph over persecution, he
prospered. Not only did he enjoy material success, but he
must have rejoiced at seeing the fear of God take root in the
hearts of pagan kings. In a foreign land, Daniel made his
God known, feared and worshipped. Yahweh became known
as *the God of Daniel* (6:26). We Christians face a similar
challenge in Africa. We need to show that there is a differ-
ence between our God (Jesus Christ) and all other gods.

Daniel's other cause for joy is hinted at in the closing
words of the chapter, with its reference to *the reign of Cyrus*

CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS

Many Christians will not participate in politics, claiming that
'drinking and driving don't mix, and neither do religion and
politics'. They regard politics as a dirty game that Christians
should avoid. This attitude is rooted in our colonial history and
in a failure to distinguish between party politics and political
participation. Political participation includes exercising
one's rights to vote and be voted for, speaking out against
any wrongdoing by those in power and holding leaders
accountable for their actions. Such behaviour has deep roots
in the communal orientation of traditional African society,
where decision making was based on democratic principles
that formed the basis for community relations. That tradition
fits well with current Western democratic values.

While Christians tend to avoid political participation,
Muslims understand its importance. Consequently they
control political power in many African states, even those
where they are a minority. Unlike Christians, they do not
believe in the separation of church and state because it
encourages secularism.

Jesus, too, did not separate religion and politics. In his
mission statement in Luke 4:18-19 he declared that his
ministry was to those suffering various forms of bondage
and oppression, including economic oppression (poverty),
physical oppression (diseases and disabilities), political
oppression (injustice and oppressive rule) and demonic
oppression (various forms of occult practices). These same
evils plague Africa today.

Other biblical examples of political participation include
Joseph in Egypt, who saved many from hunger and starvation
(Gen 41); Amos, who warned the political leaders of his time
against injustice (Amos 4, 7) and Daniel and his three friends,
who changed the political equation in Persia (Dan 3, 5, 6).

Nehemiah, too, made a personal sacrifice in order to serve
his people (Neh 1-2, 5). In the NT, Paul refused to give up
his rights as a citizen when the political authorities put him
in prison and flogged him without giving him a proper trial
(Acts 16:37-38; 22:25).

Throughout history, the common people have turned
to the church in times of need. It has followed Christ in
recognizing their suffering and giving them a voice to speak
out against injustice and oppression. Moral bankruptcy,
corruption, poverty, disease and ignorance: all clearly call
for Christian participation in politics. Some African Christian
leaders have responded to the call. Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam of
Nigeria led protests to Queen Elizabeth II of England during
the Nigerian Civil War. President Matthew Kereku of Benin
convened a reconciliation conference to apologize to African
Americans for the role of African leaders in the nineteenth-
century slave trade. Archbishop Desmond Tutu played
a strong role in liberating South Africa from the apartheid
regime and continues to work for reconciliation.

Other Christian leaders such as former president Frederick
Chiluba of Zambia and President Olusegun Obasanjo of
Nigeria have, however, disappointed their fellow Christians
by their actions or lack of action regarding corruption in high
places. One reason for their failure may be that they lacked
support from fellow Christians and were thus exposed to the
corrupting influence of non-Christians.

African Christians need to understand that the destinies of
their nations rest on their political participation. As the Bible
says, 'When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when
the wicked rule, the people groan' (Prov 29:2). Good people
can enjoy life when the righteous are in authority, but people
will always suffer under wicked regimes.

James B. Kantiok

the Persian (6:28). After praying for that day for some seventy years, Daniel must have witnessed the emancipation of his people from captivity by the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1-4; Dan 1:21).

7:1-28 Kingdoms in Conflict: The Four Beasts

So far, the book of Daniel has been mainly historical and written in the third person; from here on, it is written in the first person and is mainly prophetic. Whereas Daniel has been interpreting others' dreams, from now on an angel is interpreting his visions. The focus also shifts from Gentile world powers to Israel and how it will be affected by world history.

Altogether Daniel was given four visions (chs. 7, 8, 9, and 10–12) over a period of about sixteen years in his old age (552–536 BC). The first two were given during the reign of Belshazzar (7:1 and 8:1) while the last two came after the fall of Babylon (9:1 and 10:1). Chronologically, chapters 7 and 8 should thus come before chapter 5. All the visions portray the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom on earth against the background of seemingly hopeless struggles.

When he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's first dream (ch. 2), Daniel was about 21 years old. He was in his early seventies when he received the vision described in this chapter. Yet despite the fifty-year gap, these two dream-visions communicate essentially the same message. Both describe four great world empires between the sixth century BC and the climax of world history when Jesus Christ returns and God's eternal kingdom is inaugurated on earth.

7:1-8 Sequence of World Empires

Daniel received this vision *in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon* (7:1). This was a worrying period for the citizens of Babylon and their foreign captives. The Babylonian Empire had declined steeply, and Nabonidus, though a competent leader, did not live in Babylon (see comments on 5:1-2). God saw fit to reassure his people that he was still in charge and that they had not been forgotten, even though Daniel himself found his visions deeply disturbing (7:15, 28).

In his vision, Daniel saw *the four winds of heaven*, representing the four cardinal points of the compass, and thus the whole world, stirring up the Mediterranean Sea, which here symbolizes the sea of humanity (Isa 17:12, 13; 21:1; 57:20; Rev 17:15). The stress on 'of heaven' implies that supernatural forces are using natural means to stir up turmoil among nations.

Then four great beasts appear in succession, each different from the others in appearance and behaviour. The first beast was like a lion with eagle's wings (7:4). Elsewhere, Nebuchadnezzar is likened to a lion in strength (Jer 4:7; 5:6) and an eagle in swiftness and agility (Jer 48:40; 49:22;

Ezek 17). Daniel had identified him as the head of gold representing the Babylonian kingdom (2:38), and here the lion-like beast also represents Babylon. The changes that this beast undergoes symbolize the king's humiliating insanity and his eventual salvation – when he was given *the heart of a man* (7:4). In the African context, when a ruler misbehaves he is called a beast '*eranko*', but when he does right, they call him an angel '*malaika*'.

The second beast was like a bear, a beast second only to the lion in its strength and fierceness, as was the Medo-Persian Empire that succeeded the Babylonian Empire in history (Isa 13:17-18). The two sides of this bear were clearly different, with one stronger than the other, just as the Persians under Cyrus were the stronger party in the coalition with the Medes. (These two parties are also represented by the two arms on the statue in chapter 2 and the two horns of the ram in chapter 8). The three ribs in the bear's mouth and the message to *get up and eat your fill of flesh* (7:5) reflect the Medo-Persian conquest of an empire extending from the Indus River in the east to Egypt and the Aegean sea in the west.

The third beast was like a leopard with four bird-like wings and four heads (7:6). Leopards are characterized by agility, speed and an appetite for blood, and the fact that this one has wings means that it can act exceptionally fast. This third beast has been identified as the Grecian Empire that succeeded the Medo-Persian one. Under Alexander the Great, the borders of Greece were rapidly enlarged. The four heads symbolize the four generals who divided Alexander's realm after his death.

The fourth beast is given more extensive coverage than all the other beasts combined (7:7-8, 11, 19-25). It is not compared to any animal but is said to be *terrifying and frightening and very powerful* (7:7). With its iron teeth, it *crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left*. Amazingly, it *had ten horns*. Suddenly an eleventh horn sprang up among the ten, and though it was smaller than they were, it uprooted three of them. It had eyes like a man and *a mouth that spoke boastfully* (7:8). Everything about this beast inspired fear.

Daniel was so disturbed by the entire vision, and especially by the fourth beast, that he asked for help in interpreting it (7:15-16; 19-20).

Since the fourth beast emerged after the third, and since the Grecian Empire was conquered by the Romans, this fourth beast must symbolize the Roman Empire, which was ruthless in its destruction of previous civilizations and peoples. It killed thousands and sold many more into slavery. Rome had little interest in raising those it conquered to any higher level of development, just as the fourth beast trampled its victims underfoot (7:7). Sadly, within living memory, some colonial powers have treated their colonies similarly.

The ten horns represent the ten kingdoms that will arise during the final act of the end-time (2 Thess 2).

7:9-14 Sovereign

Suddenly the sovereign being, from war to a celestial Father and his Son (7:9) and Days' refers to this chapter (7:13-14). 'the high and low' Where his age and his hair sprout thrones, probably Days is the judgment and is compared to the wicked, especially the antichrist, the judgment he the case later (Rev 19:11-13).

Immediately 'like a son of man' this term to refer to this son of man away (7:13-14). *ple, nations, and not pass away, a destroyed* (see also Rev 19:11-13).

7:15-20, 23-24

Troubled by the vision (probably the antichrist) of what was great beasts as for but the fifth kingdom of the sea are those brought to serve him (7:17-18 and 7:25, each success).

Scripture reveals by faith in Jesus