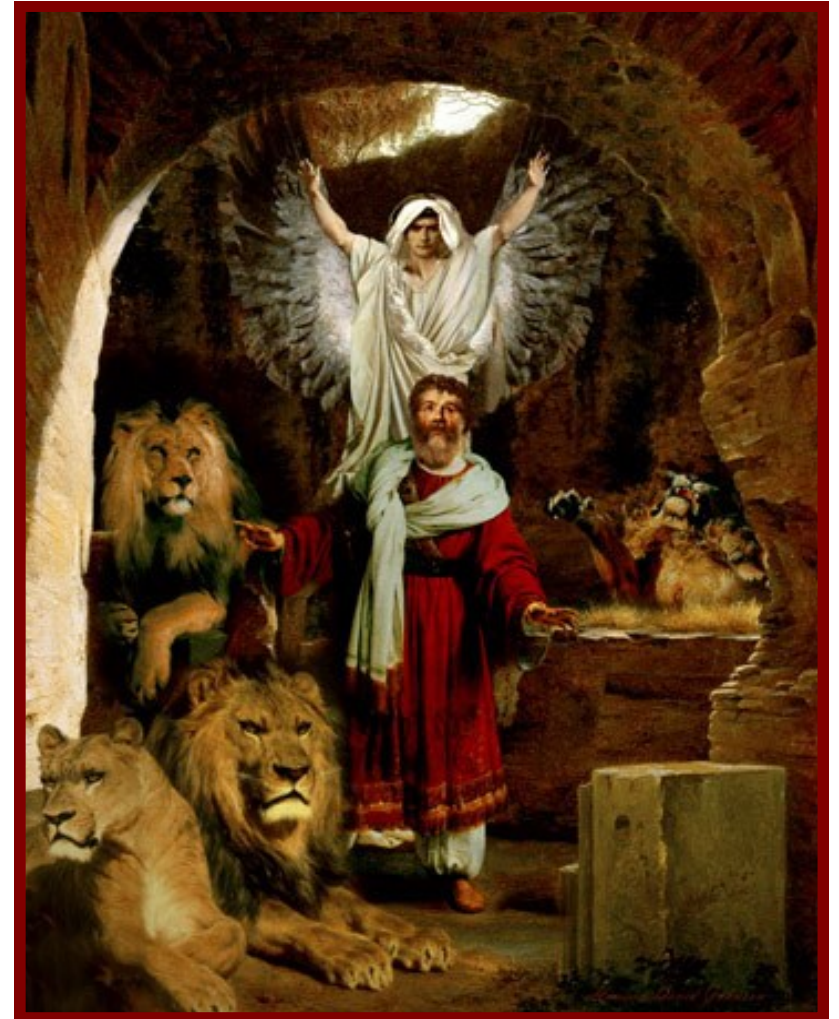


The Book of Daniel

Chapter 6



The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

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Verses 1 ff. *"It pleased Darius to appoint over his kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, that they might be throughout his whole kingdom; and over them there were three princes, of which Daniel was one."* Josephus, of whom we made mention above, in writing an account of this passage, put it this way: Now Darius who destroyed the empire of the Babylonians in cooperation with his relative, Cyrus, --- for they carried on the war as allies --- was sixty-two years of age at the time he captured Babylon. He was the son of Astyages, and was known to the Greeks by another name. Moreover he took away the prophet Daniel with him and took him to Media, and made him one of the three princes who were in charge of his whole kingdom. Hence we see that when Babylon was overthrown, Darius returned to his own kingdom in Media, and brought Daniel along with him in the same honorable capacity to which he had been promoted by Belshazzar. There is no doubt but what Darius had heard of the sign and portent which had come to Belshazzar, and also of the interpretation which Daniel had set forth, and how he had foretold the rule of the Medes and the Persians. And so no one should be troubled by the fact that Daniel is

Verse 21. *"O king, live forever!"* Daniel honors the one who accords honor to him, and prays for his eternal life.

Verse 22. *"My God sent His angel and shut up the lions' mouths, and they did me no harm. . ."* The fierceness of the lions was not altered, but their gaping jaws were closed by the angel, and also their voracious hunger, and that too for the reason that the prophet's good works had gone before him. And so his deliverance was not so much a matter of grace as of reward for his un-rightness. And these words might be uttered by every saint, for he has been snatched from the mouths of lions unseen and from the infernal pit, because he has trusted in his God.

Verses 25-27. *"Then king Darius wrote unto all the peoples, tribes and language-groups who dwelt in all the earth, saying: 'Your peace be multiplied! I have enacted a decree that in all my empire and kingdom men are to dread and tremble before the God of Daniel. For it is He who is the living God and the One who abides forever, and His rule shall not be overthrown, and His power shall eternally endure. It is He who is the Deliverer and Savior, who performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, and who has delivered Daniel from the pit of lions.'" Just as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's writing unto the language-groups and nations one authority has interpreted them to signify hostile powers, so also this same man interprets the action of Darius, on the ground that he summons them all to repentance. And he poses the question as to whether this will take place in this world or in the other world, or even after other worlds have intervened. We deem these speculations to be absurd and account them as empty fables, and make this single observation: that the reason why signs are performed amid barbarian peoples through the agency of God's servants is that the worship and religion of the only God may be proclaimed.*

Verse 28. *"Thereafter Daniel lived on until the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."* And so the statement which we read above at the end of the first vision, "And Daniel lived until the first year of King Cyrus," is not to be understood as defining the span of his life. In view of the fact that we read in the last vision: "In the third year of Cyrus, King of the Persians, a word was revealed to Daniel, whose surname was Belteshazzar"; this is what is meant, that up to the first year of King Cyrus, who destroyed the empire of the Chaldeans, Daniel continued in power in Chaldea, but was afterwards transferred to Media by Darius.

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says, "The God whom thou dost ever serve shall Himself deliver thee." He had heard, of course, that three youths who were of a lower rank than Daniel himself had triumphed over the flames of Babylon. He had heard that many secrets had been revealed to Daniel, and therefore regarded him highly, and held him, captive though he was, in the greatest honor.

Verse 17. *"A single stone was brought and placed over the opening of the pit, and the king sealed it with his ring..."* He sealed with his ring the rock by which the opening of the pit was shut up, so that the enemies of Daniel might not make any attempt to harm him. For he had entrusted him to the power of God, and although not worried about lions, he was fearful of men. He also sealed it with the ring of his nobles, in order to avoid all ground for suspicion so far as they were concerned.

Verse 18. *"And the king departed to his own house, and went to bed without partaking of supper. ..."* How sincere was the king's good will, when he would not touch food night or day or grant his eyelids sleep, but as long as the prophet was in danger he himself remained in a state of sympathetic suspense. But if a king who knew not God did such a thing for another man whose deliverance he desired, how much more ought we to implore God's mercy for our own sins with fasting's and watching's.

Verse 19. *"Then the king arose at the break of dawn and proceeded with haste to the pit of lions."* The term "pit" (*lacus*) implies a really deep depression, or dry cistern, in which the lions were fed. And so he proceeded hastily to the pit at the break of dawn, believing that Daniel was alive. But in Latin the word *lacus* is applied to a body of fresh water, such as Lake Benacus [the modern Garda] and Lake Larius [now Lake Como], and the rest of them. The Greeks call it *limne*, that is, "a body of standing water" (*stagnum*).

Verse 20. *"And approaching the pit, he called out to Daniel with a tear-choked voice and addressed him."* By his tears he showed his inner emotion, and forgetting his royal dignity, the conqueror ran to his captive, the master to his servant.

Verse 20b. *"O Daniel, servant of the living God..."* He calls Him the living God in order to distinguish Him from the gods of the Gentiles, who are but effigies of the dead.

"Dost thou deem that thy God, whom thou ever servest, has been able to deliver thee from the lions?" It was not that he had any doubts about the power of the God of whom he had previously affirmed, "Thy God, whom thou ever servest, will Himself deliver thee." But he phrased the sentence doubtfully in order that when Daniel [reading "Daniel" instead of the meaningless ablative "Daniele"] made his appearance unharmed, the king's anger at the princes might seem the more justified, in proportion to the incredibility of the event.

said in one place to have lived in Darius's reign, and in another place in the reign of Cyrus. The Septuagint rendered Darius by the name Artaxerxes. But as for the fact that a non-chronological order is followed, so that some history is narrated in the reign of Darius before material is given for Belshazzar's reign [cf. 7:1 and 8:1, which of course follow chap. 6], whereas we are subsequently to read that he was put to death by Darius, it seems to me that the anachronism results from the fact that the author has brought all the historical portions together in immediate sequence. Therefore it is at the close of the earlier vision that he had stated: "And Darius the Mede succeeded to the realm at the age of sixty-two." And so it was under this Darius who put Belshazzar to death that the events took place of which we are about to speak.

"Moreover the king was planning to set Daniel over the whole realm. Consequently the princes and satraps sought an opportunity to find out something against Daniel as touching the king..." Instead of "princes" ----the rendering used by Symmachus ---- Theodotion translated it as *taktikoi* ["military tacticians"], and Aquila as *synektikoi* ["liaison officers?"]. And when I inquired as to who these tacticians or liaison princes might be, I read it more clearly specified in the Septuagint, which renders: "...and the two men whom the king had appointed with Daniel, and also the one hundred twenty satraps." And so it was the fact that the king was planning to appoint Daniel as chief ruler even over the two princes who had been associated with him in a triumvirate that gave rise to the envy and intrigue. They sought an opportunity to find out something against Daniel as touching the king [literally: "from the side of the king," representing the Aramaic "*missad malkuta*" ----"from the side of the kingdom"]. And in this passage the Jews have ventured some such deduction as this: the *side* of the king is tantamount to the queen or his concubines and other wives who slept at his side. And so they were seeking for a pretext in things of this sort, to see whether they could accuse Daniel of wrong in his speech or touch or movements of his head or any of his sensory organs. But, say the Jews, they could find no cause for suspicion whatsoever. Since he was a eunuch, they could not even accuse him on the score of lewdness. This interpretation was made by those [Jews], who make a practice of fabricating long tales on the pretext of a single word. I myself would simply interpret this as meaning that they were unable to discover any pretext of accusation against him in any matter in which he had injured the king, for the simple reason that he was a faithful man and no suspicion of blame was discoverable in him. Instead of "suspicion" Theodotion and Aquila have rendered "offense" (*amblakema*), which is *essaitha* in the Chaldee. And when I asked a Jew for the meaning of this word, he replied that the basic significance of it was "snare," and we may render it as a "lure" or *sphalma*, that is, a "mistake." Furthermore Euripides in his "Medea" equates the word *amplakiai* ["offenses"] (spelling it with a *p* instead of a *b*) to *hamartiai*, that is to say, "sins."

Verse 5. *"Therefore those men said: 'We will not find any pretext against Daniel, except perhaps in the law of his God.'" Blessed indeed is a life so led that even enemies can find no cause for accusation, except perhaps in matter pertaining to God's law.*

Verse 6. *"Then the princes and satraps privily withdrew to the king and thus spoke to him."* It was well said that they privily withdrew [or "went surreptitiously"] for they did not come right out with what they were aiming at, but contrived their plot against a private enemy on the pretext of honoring the king.

Verse 8. *"Now therefore, O king, confirm the measure and write the decree so that it may not be altered, according to the custom established by the Medes and Persians."* It is perfectly evident, as we have remarked above, that there was only one kingdom of the Medes and Persians both, under the rule of Darius and Cyrus.

Verse 10. *"Now when Daniel learned of it, that is, of the law which had been enacted, he entered his house, and with the windows in his upper room opened up in the direction of Jerusalem, he continued to bow his knees three times a day and worshipped, and made confession before his God just as he was previously accustomed to do."* We must quickly draw from our memory and bring together from all of Holy Scripture all the passages where we have read of *domata*, which mean in Latin either "walled enclosures" (*menia*) or "beds" or "sun-terraces," and also the references to *anogaia*, that is, "upper rooms." For after all, our Lord celebrated the passover in an upper room (Matt. 14), and in the Acts of the Apostles the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty souls of believers while they were in an upper room (Acts 2). And so Daniel in this case, despising the king's commands and reposing his confidence in God, does not offer his prayers in some obscure spot, but in a lofty place, and opens up his windows towards Jerusalem, from whence he looked for the peace [of God]. He prays, moreover, according to God's behest, and also according to what Solomon had said when he admonished the people that they should pray in the direction of the Temple. Furthermore, there are three times in the day when we should bow our knees unto God, and the tradition of the Church understands them to be the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour [i.e., 9:00 A.M., 12:00 M., and 3:00 P.M.]. Lastly, it was at the third hour that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles (Acts 3) [misprint for Acts 2:15]. It was at the sixth hour that Peter, purposing to eat, ascended to the upper room for prayer (Acts 10). It was at the ninth hour that Peter and John were on their way to the Temple (Acts 3).

Verse 11. *"Those men, therefore, conducted an inquisitive search and discovered Daniel in prayer and making supplication unto his God."* From this passage we learn that we are not to expose ourselves rashly to danger, but so far as it lies in our power, we are to avoid the plots of our enemies. And so in Daniel's case, he did not contravene the king's authority in a public square or out in the street, but rather in a private place, in order that he might not neglect the commands of the one true God Almighty.

Verse 12. *"'Hast thou not ordained, O king, that any man who makes a request of any other person besides thee, whether god or man, shall be thrown into the lion-pit?' The king answered them, saying. ..."* They do not mention Daniel's name, so that when the king has made a general answer as to the order he gave, he may then be bound by his own word, and not deal with Daniel in any other fashion than he has stated.

"'What you have said is true, according to the decree of the Medes and Persians, which it is not lawful to violate.'" We repeatedly take note of every passage which speaks of the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, so that we may dispose of the knotty problem of why Daniel speaks of the kingdom in one place as being under Darius, and in another as being under Cyrus.

Verse 13. *"Then they answered before the king and said, 'Daniel, who is of the captivity of Judah, has paid no heed to thy law....'"* In order to magnify the dishonor involved in this contempt, they speak of the man who showed this contempt for the king's commands as a mere captive.

Verse 14. *"And when the king heard this statement, he became quite grieved and applied himself on Daniel's behalf that he might deliver him."* He realized that he had been tripped up by his own reply to their question, and also that envy was the motive of their plot. And so to avoid the appearance of acting against his own law, he wanted to deliver Daniel from danger by ingenuity and strategy rather than by exerting his royal authority. And so earnestly did he labor and strive that he would not accept any food, absolute monarch though he was, even until sunset. And as for the plotters, so firmly did they persist in their evil purpose that no consideration of the king's personal desire or of the damage he would sustain had any effect upon them.

Verse 15. *"But those men, understanding the king's intent, said to him: 'Be it known to thee, O king, that no law of the Medes and Persians, nor any decree which the king has enacted, is capable of alteration.'"* Just as the king understood that the princes were making their accusation out of motives of envy, so also they for their part understood what the king's purpose was, namely that he wished to rescue Daniel from imminent death. And so they allege that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, the commands of a king cannot be nullified.

Verse 16. *"Then the king gave order, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the pit of lions. And the king said to Daniel: 'Thy God whom thou dost ever serve will Himself deliver thee.'"* He gives way to the crowd and dares not to withhold from his plotting adversaries the death of his friend, and he commits to the power of God the purpose which he himself was unable to attain. Nor does he use the language of doubt, so as to say, "If He be able to deliver thee"; but rather he speaks with boldness and confidence and