

## Chapter 6 - The Lion's Den

### The Plot Against Daniel

*6 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 2 and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.*

This chapter following immediately after Chapter 5 was possibly not separate in the original writing. No other place, frankly, makes sense for this chapter to fit as this is clearly a reorganization of the kingdom. There would be no other time when this was something important to mention.

The discussion about Darius and Cyrus being the same person has been included in the last chapter, so for clarity I will refer throughout this chapter to 'Darius'.

When a land was conquered, this type of reorganization was necessary, and we find here a clear replacement of the existing power structure. As is done with Daniel here, these usually drew from the existing people in power as they were relatable to the populace, however they also had to be, or at least appear to be, loyal to the new regime. Daniel would have had no problem in appearing loyal.

In this case, Darius appoints 120 local governors or 'satraps' who would generally be in charge of a city and the land around it, to administer the conquered kingdom. Over these were 3 more senior officials, one of whom was Daniel himself. This is no doubt because his quick elevation in the previous chapter has made him a good candidate for such political leadership. He was outside the existing structure, is a foreigner but has been recognised and rewarded by the existing leadership to be put in a very high position. For a conquering power, this is a perfect candidate for high office.

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Daniel obviously did a good job and was being considered for higher office. Daniel's concern would have been for his people, and if he can promote their welfare by managing the kingdom well, he would have seen that as his duty. Furthermore, a number of those who were appointed would no doubt have been devoted to the previous king. They would either have not done a good job or would have been openly disloyal. For someone like Daniel, whose personal and political aims are met through simply being a good member of the court, he must have shined in comparison through little effort of his own.

*4 So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."*

These men were jealous. That is not surprising; a stranger in a strange land being promoted over natives, an extremely natural response is to be jealous of him. Given the time and the nature of politics, trying to remove him for their own power play is also a rather natural response. We see this today too.

The conclusion of this cabal of conspirators was to find something against him "concerning the law of his God". This makes clear that Daniel's purpose in life was entirely to advocate for his people and his God. If they are using that as their target, it must be the thing he is known for and the thing that he is most proud of.

*6 So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.*

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The group of governors and such come to the King and ask to make him the sole arbitrator of all requests, both human and divine. They want the king to make a decree that is unalterable that for a period of time even the Gods are not to be consulted before the king.

This is hyperbole. It is in no way a possible thing that could be done nor a thing that a King would agree too.

Let's imagine the situation. You go to a shop to buy a loaf of bread. You would not be able to ask the baker if they have any wholegrain in the back, and the baker would not be able to ask for the money; he would have to ask the king to demand the money from you. If you walked out and stole the loaf, the baker could not ask the police forces to arrest you, he would have to ask the king to instruct them to.

This is hyperbole, plain and simple, and has obviously been simplified to this during the history of this text.

What it should read is that nothing can be asked, of God or man, that the King did not appoint to be in the position to ask. In other words, that the king appointed or sanctioned. This makes much more sense and would be much more acceptable to the King and his court. It does, however, raise the question of why these governors thought the sacrifice was worth the loss of their own culture.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Chaldeans were a culture all unto themselves, zealously and fiercely defended from all encroachment. Yet here, the leaders of that culture seem comfortable sacrificing it for a period of time in order to defeat a rival they are jealous of. It is certainly possible that Darius' had sanctioned the Babylonian primary religion, as was the custom in that time, but YHWH worship was competitively minor and therefore would not have the same, automatic, approval. This, according to the text, is exactly what the conspirators are attempting to exploit.

For Darius, this decree would have been a no-brainer. The subjugated people have asked to leave their own culture behind, and instead exclusively participate in Median and Persian ways for a period of time. This type of cultural indoctrination is a gift to a conqueror who wants to push their culture on those now under its charge. There would

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be almost no reason to oppose such a decree; although one thinks he must have been suspicious about the request. It must have been phrased as some kind of cultural exchange, indicating that the Babylonians intended to learn from the Persians in order to find common ground and later integrate the systems together. This is not recorded, but any emperor who is approached with such a request most certainly would have raised an eyebrow.

Very importantly, the Median and Persian law had a curious caveat, mentioned here. “[T]he law of the Medes and Persians... does not alter.” This is further referenced in Esther 8:8 as “*whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.*” Reading this in today’s context makes relating to both of these verses extremely difficult as we will read them as absolutely unchangeable, no matter how big or small. What we need to remember is that laws, at this time, made by Kings were extremely high-level laws and it was left to much more lowly and local officials to dispense rights and justice. A law given by the King, for example, would be for all troops that owed him allegiance were to assemble at a particular place, or for the coinage across the empire to be defined. Even things like punishing crimes were not done on such a high level.

To this end, this decree is something that would be on the King’s level. He is asked to certify that the worship of all other Gods and that all officials not appointed by him, be rejected for 30 days on pain of death. As he is clearly trying to oversee the integration into his own empire, this is reasonable and something that he would feel important enough to put his signature too.

What is more, it should be noted here that the decree is clearly time-related. It is not permanent; it is for a period of time. Such a decree would not be unreasonably made irrevocable, as the King has established a timeframe within which the matter would be resolved. If the King was declaring war, that war was as long as the war was going on. Declaring peace does not revoke the war declaration; it nullifies it.

## Daniel in the Lions' Den

*10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*

*11 Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.*

It is not that Daniel doesn't care about dying or any of that sort of thing, Daniel is making a stand. He clearly knows about the law; he was probably there when it was signed. He was probably one of the advisors advocating that the King consider certain aspects when he did put it in writing. But now that it was the law, Daniel had to choose which way he would go.

Our impression here of Daniel standing at his window, loudly yelling his invocations to YHWH is not entirely accurate here. Daniel opens his window but prays on his knees. He is not ashamed but is also not going to be offensively bold in his custom. He is simply doing things as he had done "[since early days](#)." He was not about to change his habit for the jealous people that were trying to get him in trouble.

To some eyes, this will appear that Daniel is less trusting of God, not being so aggressively bold, but in reality this displays the absolute trust he has in Him. If YHWH wanted the fight here, people would see and report it, as indeed was done. If he did not, YHWH could simply put a nice breeze in there to close the window or direct everyone away from Daniel's house or turn off the sun so that he prays in shadow. Daniels is praying that YHWH's will be done, not that he may be able to act boldly. As stated, Daniel is simply doing what he has always done.

*12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"*

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*The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."*

*13 So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."*

The den of lions is an interesting historic anomaly. It's a much more Roman punishment and is often a criticism of this story that it looks like the idea of being thrown to the lions in an arena. However, the Persians enjoyed a wide variety of gruesome deaths that are irrelevant to this story and the intention is to be respectful and not gruesome.

The lion was an image shared, culturally, between Persia and Babylon and its inclusion here reenforces speculation about the cultural exchange that is the entire point of the decree. The advisors would argue along the lines of "what better animal to punish those who violate your law than one we both revere," especially when trying to find things in common.

Understanding this makes the idea of Daniel being thrown to the lions a much more reasonable proposal.

The wise men of the kingdom come to the King and accuse Daniel of violating the law. What is important is they refer to him as "[one of the captives from Judah](#)" and not as a Satrap or other leader in Babylon. They are making clear to the King that he does not speak or act for the people of the conquered nation, but rather is a member of a conquered tribe himself.

The king does, technically, have an escape route here by sanctioning Daniel's people and God but that would then be an exception caused. He would not have been able to consider the law immutable if he made allowances for Daniel and his situation.

*14 And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king,*

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*“Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”*

If the King is considering him for higher office, then it is reasonable that he would have his lawyers and chief politicians try to find a way out of the situation for Daniel, but to no avail. The King's passion here is, again, probably hyperbole but he would have worked his lawyers like slaves. Nevertheless, the men approach the king and remind him that the law is unchangeable.

*16 So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” 17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.*

Darius has one last chance to save Daniel; Daniel's God. How actually hopeful he was in that faith is unknowable, but he wants Daniel to be ok. Nevertheless, he does the ritual things; he seals the stone with the seal of a King that only a King can roll back. It is the king's law and the King is putting a high official to death. This is no different to an English King sealing a death warrant.

What complicates this is the fact that, as stated, lions were divine creatures in both Babylon and Persia, yet Darius is invoking faith in another God to save Daniel. Technically, Darius broke his own law.

### **Daniel Saved from the Lions**

*18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”*

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### Daniel Saved from the Lions

Darius spends a sleepless night worrying about someone he clearly respects. Often this is interpreted as them being friends or having a close relationship, which is not an inappropriate inflection but all we can get from the text is mutual respect. The King is clearly desperate to know if his friend has survived so, at the earliest possible moment he went back to the cave to ask if Daniel has survived.

If we are going to interrogate the law so explicitly, we must ask the question of if there was a time limit on how long convicted prisoners spent with the lions. It could have been unspecified, or could have been clearly stated, more likely the former. Darius, not wanting to loose face, left Daniel in the den for a period of time and then attempted to find out if his servant was dead or not.

*21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."*

*23 Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.*

God has, of course, saved Daniel. Daniel states that he has done nothing wrong before his God, but also that he has *"done no wrong before you."*

Earlier, in verse 10, Daniel is said to have *"prayed and gave thanks before his God"* but it is not mentioned that he asked for anything. The law stated was that *"whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you"*, the King, should be put to death. Daniel, evidently, did not request anything of the King. Instead, he simply had a conversation with God, explaining to him the situation and thanking him for the blessings that he has received. Daniel was an extremely intelligent man, and would have known how to use the law to his advantage, and remain blameless.

The question that naturally follows from this is why Daniel was thrown to the lions in the first place, if he did not break the law. The answer is simple; interpretation. Daniel's definition of 'petitioning' God was different to Darius' court's interpretation.



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### Darius Honors God

We can infer here that there was a series of events that Daniel did not record for one reason or another. Either he did not want to appear boastful, or he wanted to keep the story simple; or they have just been lost to history. When the law was being discussed, Daniel probably debated the meaning of some words, asking for his people to retain their ancient rights. He also would have explained that the law, as written, had some ambiguities. When the law was passed, he attempted to comply. A conversation with God would have been easy to have. "Oh Lord, God of Hosts, You have set above us this King, Darius, and he now demands our submission. As I take requests to him, let him do Your will and not ours" or words to that effect. Daniel then can pray to him all he likes, saying things like "Oh Lord, I asked the King for more bread today. I pray that his answer will be yours".

Such things would not have offended God, he is a jealous God but a realistic God. It preserved his position as supreme ruler of Heaven and Earth while also offering to Daniel and his people a way to comply with the law and honour YHWH.

In this case, Daniel was protected by the angel and we can only imagine, reading the other chapters that are recorded here, what conversations would have happened in those dark hours while the lions watched on.

### **Darius Honors God**

*24 And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.*

This is a very Semitic way of doing the law. If someone accused you of doing wrong and you are found innocent, the accuser suffers the punishment they request. Daniel had, effectively, been tried by the ordeal of being in the Lions Den for several hours and now has been declared innocent by his God. That is more than enough to have his accusers defined as guilty before the law.

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*25 Then King Darius wrote:*

*To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:*

*Peace be multiplied to you.*

*26 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.*

*For He is the living God,*

*And steadfast forever;*

*His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,*

*And His dominion shall endure to the end.*

*27 He delivers and rescues,*

*And He works signs and wonders*

*In heaven and on earth,*

*Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

*28 So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

The decree is about worship and respect; it is not exclusive. Darius is recognising Daniel's God, YHWH, as worthy of respect and adoration but does not go so far as to replace the entire pantheon of Persian Gods with this one. Notably, his name is not mentioned, instead calling him "[the God of Daniel](#)" as a way to describe the unnamed God of the Jews. Daniel's fame – especially in light of this story – would have spread far and wide so to identify this God with Daniel was an easy shorthand.

The text is clear for what Darius is praising God. He is living, active, engaged with his people. Stands forever and for a kingdom that will not be destroyed. That kingdom is the client-kingdom of Israel, where plans were, at this time, being setup for its rebuilding which will be discussed in later chapters. The fact Daniel had risen to this position demonstrates that Daniel is a leader of a kingdom inside Babylon, and is possibly being considered for King. In Daniel's own story, He delivers and rescues and works such sings and wonders as the world has never seen. Darius is praising God for things he has experienced and there is little here that is new for him.

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### Darius Honors God

Much has been made about the fact that this proclamation is not mentioned anywhere in history; no written records of it have been found and this is the only known reference to it. The question that should arise, from anyone who knows history, is; 'so what?' There are thousands of references to books, proclamations and all manner of literary and physical history that has been lost to time. When the Library of Alexandria burned down, the entire store of the world's history was lost and we will never recover it. Even recently, documents are lost through mistake and mishandling.

Carl Sagan once said the "Absence of Evidence is not Evidence of Absence" and it is as equally applied to history as it is Physics. This decree has been preserved; here, in Daniel's book. The fact that this is the only known version means that we should look sceptically on it, but not dismiss it out of hand. Even if this was a fabrication, the author must have referenced some ancient decree, or his book would have no credibility. That it is recorded here and nowhere else is simply evidence that things get lost in history, and not that this is a lie.

I have already explained the connection between Darius and Cyrus in the last sentence and will leave to the reader to review that in the previous chapter.