

A PLOT IS LAUNCHED AGAINST DANIEL

DANIEL 6:1-9

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 6:1-9 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that the Word of God is alive and working in you (Hebrews 4:12).

In yesterday's reading, Daniel interpreted the words of doom written on the wall. King Belshazzar was killed, and King Darius came into power. In today's lesson, a devious plot is launched against Daniel. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 6:1-2

120 satraps (6:1): Darius divided his kingdom into 120 provinces, each one governed by a single satrap (a lieutenant or viceroy). The territory of each satrap was called a satrapy.

Three high officials, of whom Daniel was one (6:2): These 120 satraps were under the oversight of three administrators, perhaps with 40 satraps under each administrator. The key character trait required of these three administrators was trustworthiness. Daniel was an obvious fit for this position. This system of government greatly aided Darius in his administrative responsibilities.

That the king might suffer no loss (6:2): The 120 satraps were responsible for the security of their provinces and for collecting the proper tributes. The

three administrators were then responsible for ensuring that the satraps didn't embezzle any money and that the tributes reached the king's treasury.

Daniel 6:3

Daniel became distinguished (6:3): Daniel was now more than 80 years old. He was working with people who were much younger than he was and had more vitality than he did, but they were not believers in the one true God who guided Daniel and gave him strength. Despite the age advantage of his younger workers, Daniel—with God's favor and blessing—proved himself much more capable than the others. For that reason, the king came to greatly respect him.

An excellent spirit was in him (6:3): This was one reason for Daniel's rise to prominence in Babylon. Recall from Daniel 1:17 that Daniel and his associates had "learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." As well, "an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel" (5:12).

Bible expositors have taken the reference to "an excellent spirit" in various ways. Some take it as referring to the Babylonians' belief that their deities worked through Daniel. Others, however, say the phrase likely means that Daniel had a good character. He was a man of integrity. He was honest and faithful. He always accomplished his assigned task with a good attitude.

The king planned to set him over the whole kingdom (6:3): This would have made Daniel much like a prime minister. As noted previously in this book, when God exalts one of His own faithful children, He often does so through a powerful leader.

Daniel 6:4-5

A ground for complaint against Daniel (6:4): The satraps and other government officials in Babylon were apparently jealous and envious of Daniel's exaltation. They resented the king's favor toward him. They may have especially resented this favor being shown to Daniel since he was a Jew.

We learn elsewhere in Scripture that jealousy and envy are extremely dangerous. Jesus taught that negative emotions emerge from within the human

heart: "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts... coveting, wickedness, deceit... envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:20-22). James indicates that such negative attitudes are earthly and unspiritual: "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts... This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (James 3:14-16; see also Galatians 5:19-21). The better policy, of course, is to ignore self-honor and seek God's honor in all things. But such thinking was entirely foreign to the officials who plotted against Daniel.

He was faithful (6:4): Daniel diligently accomplished every task assigned to him. No one could impugn his faithfulness. Perhaps the best way to describe Daniel is that he persevered in faithfulness.

No error or fault (6:4): In terms of Daniel's work habits, he was faultless. He didn't arrive to work late or leave early, he didn't sleep on the job, he didn't waste time, he never daydreamed, he never settled for mediocrity... rather, his intent was to show excellence in accomplishing all his tasks.

The law of his God (6:5): These officials concluded, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Their intent was to undermine Daniel based on his religious practices.

Don't miss the fact that Daniel's commitment to the one true God was well known among the pagans in Babylon. Daniel was not a secret-agent believer. He followed God openly and served Him regardless of the consequences.

Daniel 6:6-9

These high officials and satraps came by agreement (6:6): The plot was launched. These unscrupulous men appeared before Darius the king with evil intent. They began by buttering him up with words of respect: "O King Darius, live forever!" (recall Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10).

All the high officials of the kingdom... are agreed (6:7): The officials who appeared before Darius lied. Not *everyone* agreed to their agenda—Daniel, one of the top three leaders, was certainly not consulted. All this was kept from Daniel, for the instigators knew that Daniel would not have agreed with this course of action. If a man of Daniel's high respect had warned the king

against this ordinance, the king probably would have declined. So the government officials kept all this hush-hush to ensure Daniel would not find out about it until it was too late.

The king should establish an ordinance (6:7): The government officials played on the king's ego: "Whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions." Ancient kings were often worshiped as gods. The Egyptian pharaoh was himself considered a god—the son of the sun god, Re. Likewise, emperor worship in Rome became common in New Testament times. Recall that Nebuchadnezzar had once spoken of himself in divine terms (see Daniel 3:1-7). Darius was no doubt greatly flattered by this course of action, and he consented.

The law of the Medes and the Persians (6:8): Medo-Persian custom dictated that once an injunction was signed into law by the king, it could not be undone, even by the king himself. The leaders emphasized that an ordinance "cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." We also see this in Esther 1:19, where a royal order was "written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed." To put it in modern vernacular, the injunction was set in concrete (see also Esther 8:8).

King Darius signed the document (6:9): The flattered king signed the document. By appealing to Darius's pride and vanity, the government officials were able to manipulate him into signing an irrevocable law that would put Daniel's life in jeopardy. The government officials knew Daniel would never compromise his commitment to God by praying to Darius, so he would be thrown into the lions' den. Government officials reasoned that they would finally be rid of Daniel.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *Human conspiracies.* Human conspiracies are common in the Bible. Joseph's brothers, in their jealousy and envy, conspired against him and sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:18-20). Korah and his associates engaged in a conspiracy against Moses (Numbers 16:1-35). Delilah and several Philistine leaders conspired against the mighty Samson (Judges 16:4-21). Jewish leaders conspired against the apostle Paul (Acts 23:12-15). And of

Jesus we read, "The Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him" (Matthew 12:14). The Jewish leaders "plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him" (Matthew 26:4). Daniel thus finds himself in good company.

2. *People who lay snares.* Closely related to engaging in conspiracies is the laying of snares to entrap others—also common in Scripture. The psalmist lamented, "For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life" (Psalm 35:7), and "The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law" (Psalm 119:85). "The arrogant have hidden a trap for me, and with cords they have spread a net; beside the way they have set snares for me" (Psalm 140:5). When one encounters such snares, the wisest policy is to obey God no matter what: "The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts" (Psalm 119:110). One must maintain faith in God, for "He Himself will deliver you from the hunter's net...His faithfulness will be a protective shield" (Psalm 91:3-4 HCSB). One is also wise to pray to God, "Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers!" (Psalm 141:9).

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

Honor and promotion in the book of Daniel—Daniel 2:48-49; 3:30; 5:29

Examples of evil counsel—Numbers 31:16; 2 Samuel 16:21; 1 Kings 22:52; 2 Chronicles 22:3; Job 2:9; Psalms 1:1; 2:2; Proverbs 12:5; Jeremiah 9:14; Nahum 1:11

Prayer should be to God alone—2 Chronicles 7:14; Daniel 6:10; Matthew 6:5-15; Philippians 4:6-7

LIFE LESSONS

1. *Good stewardship.* Daniel was consistently a good steward. He had proved this earlier during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and now it was obvious to Darius. You and I are called to be consistent good stewards as well. As Colossians 3:23 puts it, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord

and not for men." Related to this, Jesus asked, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household?" (Matthew 24:45). The context reveals that the faithful servant conscientiously fulfills his responsibilities and obligations while his master is away. He honors the stewardship entrusted to him. He pays careful attention to the details of his assigned tasks and avoids living carelessly and becoming lax in service. He governs his life so that he is prepared whenever his master returns. You and I are called to be good stewards, or good servants of the Lord, until His coming (see 1 Peter 4:10).

2. *Faultless living.* God blessed Daniel because he lived faultlessly before God and before other human beings (Daniel 6:4). Faultless living is described for us in Psalm 119. The psalmist boasted, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless" (verse 1). God blesses those who "seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong" (verses 2-3). The psalmist acknowledged to God, "You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently" (verse 4). The psalmist then yearned, "Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments" (verses 5-6). None of us is perfect, but we should all seek to be "Psalm 119" Christians.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been victimized by others? If so, do you think God taught you any spiritual lessons in the experience?
2. Do you think Daniel exemplified Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11-12?
3. Have you ever thought of your Christian life as a stewardship involving service to Christ? If not, would you like to begin now?