

## Some Notes on Daniel Chapter 6

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The sixth chapter contains one of the best known stories of the Bible, the episode of Daniel in the den of lions. The jealousy of political subordinates, working through the vanity of King Darius brought about this terrible sentence for Daniel. But God effected a miraculous deliverance for him, even as He had for the three friends whom He delivered from the fiery furnace. Then the king condemned those who had schemed against Daniel, sentencing them to the same punishment, and from it they were not delivered. Politically, the situation was quite different from that of the fifth chapter. The Medo-Persians had gained control, with Daniel serving as one of three chief officers under Darius the Mede. A period of time had elapsed since the fall of Babylon, sufficient for the new rule to have become established and jealousies to have arisen among the new officials—a period hardly less than two years, making Daniel now at least eighty-three years of age.

The identity of the Medo-Persian ruler in the story, Darius the Mede, has long been questioned. No one of this name is known from secular history, and it is well established that Cyrus, who captured Babylon, continued as ruler over the empire until 530/29 BCE, nine years after Babylon's fall. Three principles views are represented by scholars: one is that this man was Cyrus himself, under a different name. This view is favored by Donald J. Wiseman of the British Museum;<sup>1</sup> another is that he was Cambyses, son of Cyrus, who served under his father as ruler over Babylon and later succeeded him as emperor.<sup>2</sup> A third view is that he was Gubaru, appointed governor over Babylon by Cyrus immediately after the fall of the city, a view favored by John Whitcomb.<sup>3</sup> This view by Whitcomb is has the greater credibility and support from ancient documents.

A central figure of Whitcomb's presentation is a distinction which he draws between the Ugbaru, who captured Babylon for Cyrus, and this Gubaru, whom Cyrus made governor. In the past, these two men, both mentioned in the Nabonidus Chronicle, have been identified and called by the name Gobryas; but Whitcomb shows that Ugbaru died within three weeks of his capture of Babylon, while the latter continued as governor of Babylon for at least fourteen years (539–525 BCE), as substantiated by a series of inscriptions which date through years prior to 525/24 BCE.

A rather full picture of this man emerges when the presentations of both Daniel and secular history are put together. Born in 601 BCE to one Ahasuerus, a Mede, he was appointed by Cyrus as governor ("made king over the realm of the Chaldeans," 9:1) over Babylon and the "Region beyond the River" (Abarnahara), which means over approximately the same area as formerly constituted the Babylonian empire. He assumed authority as *de facto* king over this large territory when Cyrus himself withdrew from Babylon, which was still within the year of Babylon's fall, and Darius then appointed his own supervisors (120 princes and three presidents) over his domain, holding the power of life and death over them. He must have had a talent for organization to establish his rule after this pattern. He demonstrated both a humanitarian and religious interest in his relationship to Daniel. That he could be tricked rather easily into signing a flattering decree gives evidence of marked vanity on his part, but that he, in turn, quickly ordered the death of these perpetrators of crime indicates that he had a commendable sense of justice.

Daniel was given a high position in the new Medo-Persian government—one of the three top presidents under Darius. The significance of his holding this remarkable office—under a new government and when he was more than eighty years old—is an important historical aspect. Apparently God wanted him in a place of influence to encourage and assist in the Jews' return to Judah, just as he had been in a position earlier to contribute to their welfare while in Babylonia. The return of the Jews was made in Cyrus' first year, 538/37 BCE. (2Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-2), which means probably only a few months before the episode of Daniel and the lion's den. The edict signed by Cyrus, permitting the return, is most remarkable for the privileges it extended to the Jews, suggestion that possible influence of Daniel. Taking the record of it as given in Ezra 1:2-4 and 6:3-5, the following principle features appear: (1) The Jerusalem Temple was to be rebuilt when the people reach Judah, with the cost defrayed from Cyrus' own treasury; (2) certain specifications were to be met in the rebuilding; (3) all Jews who wished could join in the return to the homeland, with Jews who chose to stay in

1 See "The Last Days of Babylon," *Christianity Today*, II (Nov. 25, 1957), pp. 7-10.

2 Charles Boutflower, *IABD*, pp. 142-67.

3 Whitcomb, John. *Darius the Mede* (Eerdmans, 1959).

Babylon being urged to assist financially; and (4) the gold and silver vessels, seized by Nebuchadnezzar, should be taken back to the home city. To account for such favor toward the Jews, it is easy to think Daniel not only influencing Cyrus to write such a decree, but perhaps even helping to formulate it. Note Prov 21:1

The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD;  
He turns it wherever He wishes. (Prov 21:1)

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Chapter 6 first provides the background for the story proper, noting Darius' organization of his new government. Those who were jealous of Daniel and perpetrated the scheme to have him cast to the lions were members of this organization, as was Daniel.

1–2 *It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.*

- *Darius*: The name “Darius” may be an honorific title, meaning “holder of the scepter.” It is not used in Persian inscriptions for the man called Gubaru, but it is for five later Persian rulers. If not a title, it was likely a second name for this person—second names not being uncommon for the day. The indication here is that Darius made his own decision regarding the appointments mentioned, and this has prompted the objection that a subordinate of Cyrus could not have wielded such power. In response, two matters are noteworthy. First, the Nabonidus Chronicle states directly that Gubaru did make appointments of such officials. Second, this and other contemporary inscriptions show that persons with the title *pihatu* (the term used for Gubaru in the Chronicle) did hold authority like kings: having armies, levying taxes, possessing palaces, and doing in general such matters as would be in keeping with making their own appointments.
- *120 satraps*: Comparison has been made between this number and the number 127 of Esther 1:1 (cf. Esther 8:9), designating Persian provinces.

*Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus,  
the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, (Esth. 1:1)*

*So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan),  
on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews,  
the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia,  
127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to  
the Jews according to their script and their language. (Esth. 8:9)*

Since Darius' kingdom was not the whole Medo-Persian empire, however, but only the much smaller area approximating that of the former Babylonian empire, there is no intention to say that the two numbers have reference to the same land divisions. The objection has been raised that this smaller area would not have warranted 120 divisions (satrapies). Two responses are possible: First, the text does not say that Darius made 120 divisions, but 120 satraps to be “throughout the kingdom,” suggesting that the king simply wanted this number of “kingdom-protectors” (the meaning of “satraps”) to be scattered over his domain; especially since the kingdom was new and would need additional protection and supervision for a time. Second, even if each satrap was to have his own strapy, the land area was still extensive enough; for, as Wilson points out,<sup>4</sup> the size of satrapies varied greatly, from small to large.

- *over (throughout) the whole kingdom*: Whether in 120 respective satrapies or not, these officers were to be spread out in the kingdom, covering it entirely.
- *and over them three commissioners...* – The word for “commissioners” (סָרְכִין, *sarkin* < *sarak*), found only here in this chapter, is unknown as to its etymology, but from other considerations it clearly means “head” or “chief.” The arrangement of having three such heads over satraps finds no parallel in non-biblical sources.

4 Robert Dick Wilson, *Studies in Daniel*, (Baker Book House), p. 175–78.

Apparently, Darius conceived the idea for his own situation, possibly guided by the triumvirate arrangement for Babylon at the time of Belshazzar. Likely the satraps were divided into three groups, with each reporting to a respective commissioner.

- *of whom Daniel was one* – Daniel was given a place as one of these three. What means God may have employed to incline Darius to make this appointment, one can only guess. Perhaps Darius recognized the honor which Belshazzar had bestowed on Daniel that last night before the fall of Babylon. It may be, also, that the king had learned of Daniel's remarkable prediction of that fall and believed that such a man could be a valuable contribution to his new government. Certainly Darius would also have made inquiry into Daniel's record as a Babylonian administrator, before making the appointment; and this would have helped, for Daniel clearly had been capable. In respect to the unusualness of keeping a man in office who had already served under a former, deposed regime, it is pertinent to note that Cyrus instituted a policy of forbearance toward the former officers and institutions of Babylonia. The word for "one" (אֶחָד, *chad*) can be translated as the ordinal "first" (cf. *KJV*) but the meaning of the following verse seems to be that Darius was only contemplating raising Daniel to the first position, which argues that the better translation here is merely the cardinal "one."
- *king might suffer no loss* – We find a parallel expression in Ezra 4:13, 22.

*Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. (Ezra 4:13)*

*Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings? (Ezra 4:22)*

Officers of any king were supposed to serve to benefit the kingdom, and Darius made his appointments accordingly. Darius is called "king" (מַלְכָּא, *malka'*) as he is throughout the chapter and also in 9:1. Wilson speak of the terms as being the nearest Aramaic equivalent to the Persian "satrap" or Babylonian "*pihatu*."<sup>5</sup>

**3** *Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.*

- *began distinguishing himself* – The Aramaic uses a participle, indicating on-going or continuedness of action. Daniel was regularly distinguishing himself over the other two commissioners, as well as the 120 satraps. That Daniel had remained in responsible positions during the Babylonian time and now was achieving this sort of record under the Persians shows that God had endowed him with excellent ability. He worked hard and well.
- *because he possessed an extraordinary spirit* – The words of "excellent spirit" are the same as in 5:12 (רוּחַ יִתִּירָא, *ruach yatira'*). Here, as there, the thought is likely more than merely a commendable attitude (which certainly he had), but an ability for his work.
- *the king planned* – The word for "planned" is אֶשְׂחֵית, *asheit*, meaning "to think, purpose to do something." Darius had been taking note of Daniel's superior work and was therefore planning to elevate him in position. The new position is described as "over the entire kingdom," which apparently means over all satraps and the other three commissioners. Perhaps another man was to have taken his present post, and he himself given a new title. He alone would have reported directly to the king.

### A Treacherous Plot (vv. 4–9)

With the organizational setting given, the story moves on to tell of jealousy among these appointed officers, directed against Daniel, who was about to receive the promotion. They gave vent to their feelings by devising a decree for the king to sign that would forbid any person to make a petition of any man or god, except the king, for thirty days, with the penalty of death in the den of lions for disobedience. The decree flattered the unsuspecting king, and he signed, much to his later regret.

5 Robert Dick Wilson, *Princeton Theological Review*, XX (1922), pp. 186-187.

4 Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

- *Then the commissioners and satraps:* Since “commissioners” is plural, both of the other two officers of equal rank with Daniel must have entered this plot, and at least some of the satraps, since “satraps” is also plural. Because the satraps were scattered throughout the kingdom, it is not likely that all were involved, but only such as lived in or near the capital city.
- *began trying to find a ground:* The word for “ground” (עֵלָה, *illah*) means “pretext” or “cause for charges” (this single word is translated in the NASB as “ground of accusation”). These men, working closely with Daniel, tried to find some cause for charges against him, so that they might accuse him to the king. Several matters may have prompted their bitterness. The text implies the first, that they were envious of Daniel because of the king’s intention to elevate him, of which intention they had somehow learned. Another is that Daniel was old and of the Babylonian regime, whereas they probably were much younger and Persians, and thought themselves, accordingly more properly candidates for all high offices. Still a third is that they simply disliked Daniel, both for being a Jew (just as years earlier other informers had disliked Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego for the same reason, cf. 3:8, 12) and for being faithful to his God, rather than the Persian gods.
- *in regard to government affairs:* They tried first to find their ground for charges in connection with Daniel’s official life in the kingdom. Did he do his work well? Was he honest in his dealings? Was he fully loyal to the king? They likely observed, inspected, inquired of secretaries, and asked all who might give any pertinent information
- *but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption:* For all this effort, they could uncover nothing amiss. The word for “ground” is the same (עֵלָה, *illah*) as used earlier in the verse. The word for “accusation” is (שְׁחִיתָהּ, *shechitah*) is from the root שָׁחַת, *shichat* meaning “to corrupt, destroy.” They found no evidence of corruption that would give grounds for charges. This is remarkable. Because of his position, Daniel must have been responsible in many areas, with many different people working under him. Yet he, and apparently his staff, were found to be free from fault. He must have engaged people of integrity and then inspired them by his own exemplary life and ability so that nothing wrong, either in efficiency or morality, could be found.
- *in as much as he was faithful:* The word used to denote “faithful” is from the root אָמַן, *aman*, meaning “to trustworthy, able to rely on.” The reason why the investigators found no fault was that Daniel could be relied on. His word was good; he was honest and a man of integrity.
- *no negligence or corruption was to be found in him:* The same word for “corruption,” (שְׁחִיתָהּ, *shechitah* < שָׁחַת, *shāchat*) is used again as in the previous phrase. The word for “negligence” is שָׁלוּ, *shalu*, and carries the thought of “neglect,” being used, for instance in Ezra 4:22, “Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter....” Daniel was found without guilt both as to the way he did things and in not neglecting matters that should be done.

5 Then these men said, “We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.”

- *Then these men said:* The negative results of this investigation called for a consultation among the conspirators. They must have been amazed at what they had found, and, at the same time, privately chagrined that their own situations did not compare well with his. Daniel’s manner of life certainly was a rebuke to them. Bent on their wrong doing, however, they planned to entrap him another way.
- *with regard to the law of his God:* After what may have been considerable discussion of possible ways, they decided to strike at Daniel’s religious life. They would make his own degree of commitment to God work against him. Because this was their decision, two matters are made evident. One is that these men knew about his religious commitment and practice, which means that Daniel had not been a secret worshiper of God. He had not hidden his faith in order to keep his office. The second is that these men believed his degree of commitment to be great enough to keep him from changing even though faced by a penalty of

death. It is clear that they were not primarily interested in his changing, but rather in trapping him so that he so that he could be executed. The word for “law (דָּת, *dat*) is used in 2:23, 15 to mean “decree” of the king, and in 7:25 to mean God’s “law” (cf. Ezra 7:12, 14, 21, 26). That this word (rather than “religion” or some similar word) is used in this context suggests that Daniel’s regularity in practice, which they took as reflecting the law of his God, was what impressed them in making their decision.

6–7 *Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: “King Darius, live forever! All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den.”*

- *came by agreement*: The word used here has the root שָׂרַח, *ragash* and is often translated “came tumultuously,” but this thought does not fit the context; and Montgomery<sup>6</sup> demonstrates that it may mean “in concert,” with the possible thought of implied conspiracy. In its Hebrew form, it is so used in Ps 55:14, “Walked in the house of God in the throng” and in Ps 64:2, “tumult of those who do iniquity” which is paralleled with “secret counsel.” It is used also in Daniel 6:11, and there again the context calls for the idea of “meeting in concert.” The obvious sense in our verse is that the commissioners and satraps came with an agreed-upon agenda which had been previously configured together to obtain their own desire.
- *commissioners of the kingdom*: The same word is used for “commissioners” previously, but, since it is followed here by “of the kingdom,” it may carry a broader reference this time than merely to the two men who paralleled Daniel. It may be a reference to officials in general, of whom the four groups named would be included. The claim that all these leaders were agreed regarding the decree was lie. Daniel certainly was not, and it is about as sure that other commissioners (satraps) scattered far from Babylon were not either, and possibly not even all those near the capital. The active group may not have included a large number, though these men wished the king to think so.
- *the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together* – These terms have all been used in the book before (cf. 3:2, 24). The use of the conjunction “and” (copula *vav*) divides the classes into two groups, probably with the thought that the first group of two was higher in standing than the second. The groups together included more people than merely the “commissioners” and the “satraps” mentioned in v. 4. Whether some of the active conspirators were from this wider number or not is not clear. The claim may have been a pure fabrication.
- *that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction*: This double statement gives unusual emphasis to the thought: first, because it is double; second, the word for “set forth” (תַּקְפָּה, *taqqāphāh*) means literally “to grow strong,” thus carrying the thought of “setting forth strongly,” and third, the word for “injunction” (אָסַר, *‘esār*) is from an unused root meaning “to bind.” These men wanted the king to set forth strongly a decree that would be binding in every sense.
- *that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king*: The word for “petition” (בָּעוּ, *bā’u*), in view of the context, means a prayer-type request, not just any request among men. Such requests would normally be presented only to deity, but, since the king had to be involved in this instance, “men” are also mentioned. The reason for having the decree remain in force for only thirty days was that this would be long enough to trap Daniel, and these men probably did not wish to be restricted longer themselves. Also, opposition from priests could be encountered if the matter were prolonged. Liberal writers have objected that the whole idea of a Persian king signing such a decree is preposterous. Kings of other countries, however, were looked upon as manifestation of deity, and Darius could have thought it flattering that his officers wished to think of him in this way for a period of time. Vanity is one of man’s greatest weaknesses.
- *Den of lions*: The word for “den” (בֵּר, *gōv*), related to the Hebrew verb בָּרַח, *guv*, meaning “to dig,” carries the thought of a “pit” or “cistern,” implying that this den was underground, perhaps a natural cave reshaped for the purpose. This idea fits also the indications that Daniel was “drawn up” from the den, after his night of deliverance and that the conspirators, later cast in, were eaten before they came to “the bottom of the den.” An opening was clearly at the top of the den, and likely there was one also as a side entrance, for ventilation and through which the animals might be admitted and fed. The den must have been quite large, with room for numerous lions and space in which to cast many people, according to verse 24.

6 Montgomery, *Daniel in the ICC*, pp. 272-73.

Bertholdt describes dens found in Asia and northwestern Africa as being generally constructed underground from

*caves which had been excavated for the purpose, walled up at the sides, enclosed within a wall through which a door led from the outer wall to the space lying between the walls, within which persons could pass around and contemplate the wild beasts.*<sup>7</sup>

Keil takes the following description of such dens from G. Host:<sup>8</sup>

*They consist of a large square cavern under the earth, having a partition-wall in the middle of it, which is furnished with a door, which the keep can open and close from above. By throwing in the food they can entice the lions from one chamber into another, and then, having shut the door, they enter the vacant space for the purpose of cleaning it. The cavern is open above, its mouth being surrounded by a wall of a yard and half high, over which one can look down into the den.*

Even the suggestion of being cast into such a place filled with hungry lions would make a person shudder with fear. The fiery furnace, faced early by Daniel's three friends, and this den of lions, soon to be faced by Daniel himself, were two of the most fearsome forms of punishment of the day.

8–9 “Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

- *establish the injunction and sign the document*: The double phrase is used for emphasis. The men wanted the king to put this decree in writing to insure that it would be carried out. This stress, no doubt, was calculated to impress the king with their earnestness in wanting to honor him. At the same time, of course, they wanted to be sure that the king would not be able to set the decree aside, should he come to realize the true intention behind it. Their language shows that they feared he might wish to change it, which means that they were willing to risk the displeasure he might show, if he did, in their effort to be rid of Daniel.
- *so that it may not be changed...which may not be revoked* – The unchangeableness of Medo-Persian law is reflected also in Esther 1:19; 8:8 and in a quotation from Diadorus concerning the attitude of Darius III of Persia in connection with a death sentence he had passed on one Charidemus: “Immediately he repented and blamed himself, as having greatly erred; but it was not possible to undo what was done by royal authority.”<sup>9</sup> The reasoning seems to have been that, to change a decree once given, was to admit that it had been faulty, which was considered improper in reference to the high monarch. It was the unchangeableness of the decree which constituted the basis of the plot contrived by these men.
- *signed the document, that is, the injunction*: The same nouns are used here as in v. 8. The conjunction “that is” is actually just the copula *vav* and it properly understood as “that is,” or “resulting in,” etc. This makes it clear that he signed one document which included the injunction, and not two separate documents. If the king had waited until the next day before signing, he might have seen through the scheme; the request being so out of context for these men, and the nature of the request unreasonable. Great harm can come from important matters done in haste.

<sup>7</sup> Barnes, “Daniel” – *Notes on the Old Testament* (Baker, 1950), Vol. 1, p. 16

<sup>8</sup> Kiel & Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament: Daniel* (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Montgomery, *Daniel in the ICC*, p. 270.