

Daniel 6 - Drawing the Line, Sleeping with Lions ¹

Before the Lesson: Prepare AV equipment to show the 5:20 minute video, “The Way of the Exile”. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/the-way-of-the-exile/>

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

- A. What do you look forward to with the Super Bowl? The game, the half-time show, or the commercials?
- B. What animal most frightens you?

Information

Pop-up advertisements “barge into” our lives. Here I am, looking up some information I want, when an ad pops up offering me a product I was not researching. I’m watching a YouTube video when it is interrupted by a video or a series of videos that some algorithm is convinced I’ll love to see. Companies that barge into my life are not appreciated.

Daniel is minding his own business, being among the most influential men in Babylon, worshiping his God as he always did, when his co-workers barged into his life convinced that for the new king to succeed, Daniel had to go.

“Daniel’s life and work are understood to have spanned the entire period of the exile and to have continued even after 538 B.C. If Daniel went to Babylon as a young man shortly after the first dispersion in 597 B.C., he is a very old man by ancient standards by the time he ceased his work sometime early in the reign of Cyrus.”²

- Read Daniel 6.

[Use the following quotes to guide class members through the story.]

Daniel, with the “excellent spirit that was within him” (v. 4), became a target of jealous co-leaders of Babylon. “It brought forth the inevitable jealousy from the other two presidents and the one hundred twenty satraps, who evidently did not have an excellent spirit within them.”³

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2025. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1984), 88.

³ Towner, 80.

“They decide to trap him in a conflict between two immutable laws...They are confident that Daniel would not side with the law of the Medes and Persians were the law of God threatened with violation.”⁴

“The presidents and satraps then ‘came by agreement’ or ‘came in collusion’ (an Aramaic word which has some sense of ‘swarming’) to the king and said, ‘All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps...have agreed...’ In this they lied because not all the presidents agreed – Daniel had not and had not even been consulted!”⁵

“The Persian loanword *dat* (‘law,’ ‘decree,’ ‘customary practice’) can refer to public legislation, a royal command, or normative religious practice. Since there is no scriptural command to pray three times a day, the contextual meaning is that of religious practice. But the wording sets up the conflict as one between the *dat* of God and the *dat* of the king.”⁶

“In Dan 6 the underlying conflict is not religious; religion is simply a means to dispose of an object of jealous professional rivalry.”⁷

- How long was the edict to take effect? Why do you think they chose this timeline?

“This absolute decree is to be in effect for only thirty days, so it cannot be an attempt to change the nature of the kingdom permanently. Thus, though the courtiers offer no rationale or purpose for the decree, it can only be understood as an act of flattery to the king, a symbolic way of marking him out as superior not only to all humans but even to the gods themselves.”⁸

“The development of daily prayers by laity occurred gradually during the Second Temple period as a custom of popular piety, not a requirement of torah. Practices varied with respect to frequency and prayer postures. The orientation toward Jerusalem appears to have developed in the wake of the exile and is well attested...Daily private prayer seems first to have been coordinated with the morning and evening sacrifices at the temple, perhaps with the notion that the smoke of offerings and incense carried the prayers of the faithful to God.”⁹

⁴ Towner, 81.

⁵ Towner, 81.

⁶ Carol A. Newsome with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* The Old Testament Library (Louisville: The Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 194.

⁷ Newsome and Breed, 194.

⁸ Newsome and Breed, 195.

⁹ Newsome and Breed, 197.

“Daniel’s response to the decree is described slightly differently in the OG [Old Greek] and the MT [Masoretic Text]¹⁰, which alters the dynamics in the story in each version. Both mention Daniel’s knowledge of the decree. Thus his actions represent a conscious decision. The OG (also the Vulgate), however, uses an active verb to describe Daniel opening his windows, implying that he intentionally made his violation of the king’s decree public. In the MT (and the Th) the description of Daniel’s room simply says that it had windows that opened toward Jerusalem. Here Daniel is characterized as doing nothing different from his customary practice, not actively advertising his behavior but also not concealing it.”¹¹

“A subtle difference exists between the narrator’s description of Daniel’s prayer in v. 10 and when it is perceived through the eyes of the conspirators in v. 11. In v. 10 the first verb for prayer is very general (*mealle*)...and the second (*mode*) refers specifically to prayer and thanksgiving. But in v. 11, as the scene is focalized by the conspirators, the prayers are described as ‘seeking mercy’ (*mithannan*) and ‘petitioning’ (*ba’e*) – the very act prohibited by the royal decree. The conspirators see what they came to see.”¹²

- Why do you believe Daniel thought it important to continue his prayer practice?

“The confrontation is not public and violent; it takes place quietly, non-violently, in the private realm. Still, Daniel’s act is one of civil disobedience...His is not the dissent of a religious fanatic, for he merely continues his usual practice - he prays and gives thanks. He does not court martyrdom, but when disaster threatens, he remains steady; and it is his sharp profile as an observant and obedient Jew that is both his downfall and his salvation.”¹³

“The king has spoken of the possibility of God’s delivering Daniel, and the sealing will make it necessary for God to prove himself in an extraordinary way if he is to act at all. ‘In testing Daniel, the king knows...that he is testing God.’”¹⁴

¹⁰ “The book of Daniel as it appears in Jewish and Protestant canons, derived from the Masoretic Text, is only one edition of one composition of a larger Danielic literature that flourished in the Persian and Hellenistic periods...The Catholic Canon, based on the Greek (LXX [- Septuagint]) version of Daniel, preserves additional narratives about Daniel... (Bel and the Dragon...Susanna). Moreover, Dan 3 contains two long poetic prayers not included in the Masoretic tradition.” Newsome and Breed, 2.

¹¹ Newsome and Breed, 196.

¹² Newsome and Breed, 197.

¹³ Towner, 82, 83.

¹⁴ John Goldingay, *Daniel: Revised Edition*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 2019), 321. Quoting A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*. Translated by D. Pellauer. London:SPCK, 1979.

“The Septuagint version of Daniel reports that God closed the lion’s mouths directly; but with a delicacy that befits the late Old Testament notion of a somewhat more transcendent and remote God, the Aramaic text treats such a miraculous intervention to an angel.”¹⁵

“We are told nothing of what happened in the lion pit...In parallel with the story in ch. 3...the narrative does not follow Daniel into the lion’s pit but follows the king.”¹⁶

“Human faithfulness is matched by divine faithfulness, and Daniel’s certainty of that enabled the writer of Hebrews to list him among those faithful ones of old who ‘died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar’ (Heb. 11:13).”¹⁷

“Daniel is the free man in this story, and the king – preeminent in the realm though his position was – is trapped in the myth of the immutability of his own law; he is thus in bondage.”¹⁸

“We should never believe people who say that human decisions cannot be changed! That is more than a mere moral to this story; that is a vital truth for our times. It is a lie when they say that the troop train which is rolling toward the border to launch the First World War cannot be stopped; or that nuclear stockpiling cannot be stopped; or that Jim Crow or apartheid are the law of the land and cannot be changed. When unjust or wrong, human law and human praxis can always be changed, though it may seem more dangerous to admit that fact than to risk the consequences of refusing to change.”¹⁹

“The stopping of the lions’ mouths is a powerful, Godly act, it is true; but even more fundamental is that human response which God elicited from King Darius. Surely it is nothing short of miraculous that the king of the mightiest empire of the day and a follower of a god other than Yahweh should be presented singing a hymn of faith and praise to the God who saved Daniel from the power of the lions. Darius’ confession is an act of God of profound significance.”²⁰

Transformational Exercise

We have probably not faced the life-or-death choice that Daniel faced. Yet, we like Daniel and the Jewish exiles, do live in a tension as we seek to live faithfully in a society that is not centered on doing God’s will and being obedient to God’s word. What shall we do? Rebel? Compromise? Subvert?

¹⁵ Towner, 85.

¹⁶ Goldingay, 316.

¹⁷ Towner, 85f.

¹⁸ Towner, 89.

¹⁹ Towner, 89.

²⁰ Towner, 90.

Let's watch this video to look for insight into how we can keep our faith while resisting the call of a Babylonian demand to follow its ways.

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What is the spiritual tension we live with? Do you sense this tension? How can we, like Daniel, be faithful while resisting "Babylon?"

Prayer: Faithful God, help us to remain faithful to you. May Daniel's fidelity be our model. Help us not to fear the lions that threaten our lives. Help us to trust that you will be with us in any den of lions we may face. Amen.