

Commentary

1-3 The year is 539BC. The exile was about to end. The Babylonians had just been overthrown by the Persians (5:30). Darius begins his reign by decentralising power and promoting Daniel to be one of three presidents, potentially even ruling the other two (v3b). With Daniel's exemplary track record, this is understandable!

4-5 The satraps hate Daniel for this. It seems to be motivated by jealousy, but behind it is spiritual opposition. Note Daniel's integrity: after around 70 years of service, they can find nothing to fault him on in his public or private life. They know the only way they can land him in trouble is in the area of his faith. Because they know from past experience that if Daniel is forced to choose between obeying the king and obeying God, he will choose God every time. Quite a challenge! Could our colleagues say the same of us?

6-9 If God was Daniel's weak spot, Darius' is pride. The satraps convince him to pass a ridiculous law; no-one must ask for anything from anyone but him. The whole country would be ordered around him. The satraps have to lie to get this law through since they weren't all agreed (v7) – Daniel certainly didn't! Note the pattern in v6, 11, 15 how they always come 'by agreement'. They prowl in a pack like... well, like lions!

10 What is Daniel's response? Business as usual. He doesn't let it faze him, he just continues to pray to God the same as ever. It is a public thing with the windows open and where the satraps can easily find him. He faces Jerusalem, which isn't like Muslims facing Mecca, but is a reminder that God had promised to restore those ruins, just as He had said Babylon would fall (cf 9:2, 16-19). And the content of Daniel's prayers, even in this situation, are thanks to God! Daniel is steadfast in serving God faithfully.

11-18 The satraps find Daniel and go to trick Darius. They remind him of the law he'd passed, getting him to agree that it still stands. *Then* they mention Daniel. Much is made of how unchangeable the law is (v8, 12b, 15, 17). The situation seems hopeless and, despite Darius' efforts, Daniel is thrown to the lions.

19-20 The real issue that is at stake is raised here. Is God able to rescue Daniel (cf 3:15, 17-18)? Darius is eager to find out. Focus is again put on Daniel's constant service of God.

21-23 Daniel is safe! But it must have been quite a night down there. Many cartoons show the lions being stroked as he exits the cave, but there's no reason to think they weren't still frightening. He tells the king that God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. So they could well have been stalking and growling all night but unable to eat him. God's absolute control is on display again. Daniel is saved because he is found to be blameless (v22) before God and Darius. Also because he trusted God (v23 and Hebrews

11:33). He was persecuted unjustly for worshipping God and this rescue vindicates him.

There is a pattern here of opposition, steadfastness & vindication. The same pattern occurs a lot in the Bible, most notably in the life of Jesus. He was opposed by the authorities (although the ruler tried to free Him unsuccessfully too). He remained steadfast in His service to God being obedient even to death. And when the stone was rolled off His cave one morning & He walked out alive, He was vindicated! His vindication guarantees ours even when we don't have such a squeaky clean record as Daniel (and certainly not as good as Jesus!). They were freed because they were blameless. We are freed because Jesus was blameless. As Jesus' followers this pattern applies to us today as we look forward to our future glory. The cross-*then*-resurrection, opposition-*then*-vindication pattern is the normal Christian life.

24 This is a tricky verse. We're squeamish at the thought of the satraps and their families being thrown to their deaths here. But there are a few reasons why this element is included. Firstly, it shows that Daniel's rescue really was a miracle and the lions weren't just housetrained vegetarians. Secondly, there is a certain justice to it. Even in Israel's law (cf Deut 19:15-21), if you falsely accuse someone of something, the punishment you wanted for them happens to you. It's a fair comeuppance considering what they've done. Thirdly, it shows that the ultimate vindication of God's faithful servants corresponds with the ultimate end of their oppressors, something which is only an uncomfortable thought for us if we've never really been persecuted. For those across the globe and across the ages who have known real persecution, this is a huge comfort. Daniel's original readers would have cheered at this verse as the baddies lose in the end (cf Revelation 19:1-3).

25-27 Here we get the application and theological reflection on the story. It's not what we'd expect. It's not to emulate Daniel, although doubtless that is a good thing too. The shock is that the application is to tremble and fear before God. Why should we? Because He is the true God whose kingdom lasts forever – a very Daniel-ish idea! In v14 Darius tried hard but ultimately failed to deliver and rescue Daniel. Here we see that God manages to deliver and rescue and save. God's kingdom lasts forever, unlike Darius. God is able to rescue, unlike Darius. God is the hero once again, not Daniel or anyone else.

28 This isn't talking about two different kings. It is highly likely that Darius and Cyrus are the one and the same person! Confusing huh?! Rulers often had throne names in a similar way to popes getting a new name when they take the crown. In Ezra 1:1-4 Cyrus issues an edict sending the Jewish exiles back home to Jerusalem, thus ending the exile after 70 years in Babylon, just like God had promised (cf Jeremiah 25:11-12). So this verse, along with 1:21, reminds us that Daniel was protected and blessed by God the whole way through the exile. It brings something of closure to the narrative section of Daniel, before we move to the apocalyptic stuff which shows us what was going on in the spiritual realm during all these events.

Group Study Outline

Daniel 6 Theme Sentence

The Lord is the king who will vindicate His faithful servants after hostile opposition.

Launch Question

What kind of opposition do we face because we are Christians?
How do we cope with it? What does it help to remember?

READ Daniel 6

Focus on Daniel 6:1-18

What was Darius planning on doing for Daniel?
How did the satraps feel about this? What was their plan?
Why was this their only option? (see v5)
How did Daniel respond once he knew about the edict? Look at details.
Imagine you don't know how the story ends. How are we left feeling in v16-18?

Thinking it through

How does Daniel's example in v5 challenge you at work or among friends?
Can you relate to this kind of opposition? (see 2 Tim 3:12 if not!)
How might we have been tempted to behave in Daniel's situation?

Focus on Daniel 6:19-28

What is the issue in v16 and v20?
Who gets the credit for Daniel's survival?
Why was Daniel kept safe? (see v22-23)
Why are we told about the fate of the satraps? (Deut 19:15-21 may help)
How should we respond to God and why? (v26-27)

Thinking it through

Does God always rescue His people? ...
If so, when? how? and from what? If not, why not?
In what way does the passage point us to 'the last day'? (v24, 25; Is 11:6-9)
Where else in the Bible do we see this pattern of opposition, steadfastness & vindication? (note the similarities between Daniel & Jesus)
How does Jesus' vindication enable us to keep serving under pressure like Daniel?

Wrapping it up

What specific times are there in our lives when we are under pressure to stop serving God?
How can what we've learnt today encourage us in those specific situations?

Pray for each other about those times.

Daniel 6



Intro

The stories in *Daniel* are Sunday School classics. And none more so than Daniel in the lion's den. We've all seen the flannelgraphs & cartoons of Dan having a sleepover with the big cuddly cats. But this story is full of suffering, bravery, office politics, redemption and a cruel death sentence. Plenty for us adults to be getting on with!

The story so far... Despite many warnings, God's people rebelled against Him and so the southern kingdom of Judah was taken off in exile to Babylon. This had huge implications! Was God still in control? What about His promises to give His people a land in which to serve Him? How should they behave as exiles? As Psalm 137 puts it: 'How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?'

In *Daniel* we find God's people getting involved in Babylonian life whilst still being distinctively His. As with the whole Bible, *Daniel* is first and foremost **a book about God**. So in the epic stories like this one we must keep God the focus. Daniel isn't a superhero. He's a normal believer living faithfully for an incredible God in a hostile world.

In this exciting chapter, we discover:

- God's faithful servant is opposed.
- God's faithful servant is steadfast.
- God's faithful servant is vindicated.

This pattern is seen clearly in Daniel's life. It also is mirrored in the life of Jesus, God's *ultimate* faithful servant. And because Jesus was vindicated in His resurrection after the humiliation of the cross, we too will definitely be vindicated after our suffering.

(NB)

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Application

- The big application of these events in v26 is to fear God. He's the king.
- God's servants should live distinctive lives like Daniel did. His enemies couldn't fault him. Keep serving God even under pressure.
- Trust God that just as He vindicated Daniel (and Jesus) so He will vindicate us on the last day.