TRACK FIVE

Deep Dive

A closer study of Daniel 6 for teachers, preachers, and anyone who wants to dig in: history, language, structure, interpretation, and Christ.

How to read this section. Where scholars disagree, the major views held by orthodox Christian interpreters are set side by side and labeled. Scripture is quoted from the World English Bible (WEB). Aramaic words are given in Hebrew script with a simple transliteration. Verse numbers follow English Bibles; in the Aramaic text each verse of chapter 6 is numbered one higher, because English 5:31 is Aramaic 6:1.

1. Historical and Cultural Background

AFTER THE FALL OF BABYLON

Daniel 6 picks up where chapter 5 ends: "Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old." (5:31) Babylon fell to the forces of Cyrus in October 539 BC (see *The Writing on the Wall* guide). Daniel had been taken to Babylon around 605 BC (1:1-6), so he had been in exile about 66 years and was probably in his eighties. *(An estimate; the Bible gives no age.)* He would continue "even to the first year of King Cyrus" (1:21) and beyond (10:1).

GOVERNING AN EMPIRE

Darius set "one hundred twenty local governors" over the kingdom, with three presidents over them, "that the king should suffer no loss" (6:1-2). The WEB's "local governors" translates *'ăḥaštarpĕnayyā'* (אֲחַשְׁדַּרְפְּנַיָּא), an Aramaic loanword from Old Persian; the same title reached English, through Greek, as *satrap*. Herodotus counts only twenty satrapies under Darius I (*Histories* 3.89), so Daniel's 120 were probably officials over smaller districts. *(An interpretation; compare Esther 1:1.)*

"THE LAW OF THE MEDES AND PERSIANS"

The officials press the king to sign a decree "according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter" (6:8; also 6:12, 15). Esther presents the Persian decree the same way: one sealed with the king's ring "may not be reversed by any man" (Esther 8:8; compare 1:19). Evidence outside the Bible is limited. Diodorus Siculus (*Library* 17.30) tells how Darius III regretted ordering the execution of Charidemus but could not undo it: a king unable to reverse an execution, not proof of a legal rule.

LIONS AND THE DEN

Lions lived wild in ancient Mesopotamia, and Assyrian kings kept them for royal hunts; the Nineveh reliefs of Ashurbanipal (British Museum) show lions released from cages. The den itself has not been identified archaeologically. The text says only that the pit had a mouth a stone could cover (6:17) and a bottom (6:24). The stone was sealed with the king's signet and his lords' signets (6:17), probably impressions pressed into clay across the stone so that any tampering would show. *(An inference from ancient sealing practice.)*

PRAYING TOWARD JERUSALEM

Daniel's windows were open toward Jerusalem (6:10). At the temple's dedication Solomon asked God to hear His people if, in exile, they would pray "toward their land which you gave to their fathers, the city which you have chosen and the house which I have built for your name" (1 Kings 8:48). The temple had been burned in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:9), but Daniel still prayed toward the place of God's promise. Daniel 9 records another of his prayers from "the first year of Darius" (9:1).

2. Literary Structure

DANIEL 6 WITHIN DANIEL 2-7

In the mirror pattern of the Aramaic chapters (see Adrien Lenglet's 1972 study),[1] Daniel 6 is paired with Daniel 3:

A	DANIEL 2	Four kingdoms, and the kingdom of God
B	DANIEL 3	Faithful servants delivered from the furnace
C	DANIEL 4	A proud king humbled, and restored
C′	DANIEL 5	A proud king weighed, and judged

B′	DANIEL 6	**A faithful servant delivered from the lions**
A′	DANIEL 7	Four kingdoms, and the kingdom of God

The parallels with chapter 3 are close. Jews in royal service are accused by rivals (3:8-12; 6:4-13). A royal decree collides with the worship of God. The penalty is death, by fire or by lions. God "has sent his angel" (3:28; 6:22), the men are found unharmed (3:27; 6:23), and the king praises their God in a public decree (3:29; 6:26-27). The differences matter too. In chapter 3 three young men refuse false worship; in chapter 6 one old man refuses to stop true worship.

THE SHAPE OF CHAPTER 6

6:1-3	Daniel distinguished under Darius
6:4-9	The search for a fault, and the decree
6:10	Daniel's prayer, "as he did before"
6:11-15	The accusation and the king's distress
6:16-18	The den, the sealed stone, the king's night
6:19-23	Dawn: Daniel delivered
6:24	Judgment on the accusers
6:25-28	Darius's decree; Daniel prospers

3. Commentary

6:1-3, DANIEL DISTINGUISHED. Daniel stands out "because an excellent spirit was in him" (6:3; compare 5:12), and the king plans to set him "over the whole realm" (6:3).

6:4-5, NO FAULT FOUND. The rivals investigate Daniel "as touching the kingdom" (6:4), that is, his official conduct. They find "no occasion or fault, because he was faithful" (6:4). Their conclusion is a backhanded tribute: "We won't find any occasion against this Daniel, unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God." (6:5) The text doesn't state their motive. Envy is a common reading. *(An interpretation.)*

6:6-9, THE DECREE. The officials come to the king together. The verb *hargišû* (הַרְגִּשׁוּ; 6:6, 11, 15) has been understood as coming in a throng or coming by agreement. Their claim that "All the presidents of the kingdom" had agreed (6:7) was evidently untrue, since Daniel was one of the three. *(A widely noted inference.)* The decree forbids any petition "of any god or man for thirty days, except of you, O king" (6:7). The king signs (6:9), apparently without seeing the trap.

6:10, AS HE DID BEFORE. The verse is carefully worded. Daniel *knew* the writing was signed. He went to his own room, where the windows were already open toward Jerusalem (the Aramaic word means an upper room). He knelt three times a day "and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did before." (6:10; compare Psalm 55:17) He neither hid nor staged a protest. Thanksgiving under a death sentence is the surprising detail. Jesus' warning about praying "to be seen" (Matthew 6:5) concerns motive. Daniel prayed in his own room, as was his custom.

6:11-15, THE ACCUSATION. The men find Daniel "making petition and supplication before his God" (6:11). They call him one "of the children of the captivity of Judah" (6:13) and claim he "doesn't respect you, O king", which the chapter shows to be false (6:4, 22). The king is "very displeased" (6:14). He works "until the going down of the sun" to rescue Daniel (6:14). The king who ruled over 120 local governors is bound by his own decree (6:15).

6:16-18, THE DEN AND THE SEAL. Darius says, "Your God whom you serve continually, he will deliver you." (6:16) The WEB, like the KJV, reads this as a statement. Many translations render it as a wish ("May your God..."), and the Aramaic verb form allows either. The stone is sealed "that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel" (6:17). The language of the unchangeable decree now closes over Daniel himself. The king fasts, no "musical instruments" are brought (the Aramaic word is uncertain), and "his sleep fled from him" (6:18).

6:19-23, DAWN. The king hurries to the den and calls "with a troubled voice" (6:20). He calls Daniel "servant of the living God" and asks whether his God was "able to deliver" him (6:20), echoing Nebuchadnezzar's challenge in 3:15 and the three men's confession in 3:17. Daniel answers: "My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me, because innocence was found in me before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." (6:22) The angel is not described. The narrator adds the decisive explanation: no harm was found on him "because he had trusted in his God" (6:23). The verb is from the same root as *faithful* in 6:4 (see section 4). Hebrews 11:33 later remembers those who through faith "stopped the mouths of lions".

6:24, THE ACCUSERS. The king has the accusers cast into the den, "them, their children, and their wives", and the lions overpower them "before they came to the bottom of the den" (6:24). The verse shows the lions were not tame or full, so Daniel's preservation was God's doing. *(A common observation.)* It also shows a reversal Scripture often describes: the one who digs a pit falls into it (Psalm 7:15; Proverbs 26:27; compare Haman in Esther 7:10). See section 5.

6:25-28, THE DECREE. Darius writes to "all the peoples, nations, and languages" (6:25), as Nebuchadnezzar had (4:1). He commands his realm to "tremble and fear before the God of Daniel" (6:26) and confesses that "he is the living God, and steadfast forever" (6:26), that His kingdom "will not be destroyed" (6:26), and that "He delivers and rescues..." (6:27) These themes run through the book (2:44; 4:3, 34) and prepare for Daniel 7:14. The closing note, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." (6:28), reports what happened; it is not a promise of prosperity to every believer.

4. Key Words

WORD	TRANSLITERATION	MEANING AND USE
עִלָּה	*ʿillâ*	"occasion," grounds for a charge (6:4-5). The rivals searched for one and found none.
מְהֵימַן	*mĕhêman*	"faithful, trustworthy" (6:4), from the root *ʾmn*, "to be firm."
הֵימִן	*hêmin*	"he trusted" (6:23), the same root. The man found trustworthy before men had trusted in his God.
בְּדָת אֱלָהֵהּ	*bĕdāt ʾĕlāhēh*	"concerning the law of his God" (6:5). *Dāt*, a Persian loanword, is also the "law of the Medes and Persians" (6:8, 12, 15): two laws collide.
אֱסָר	*ʾĕsār*	"decree, interdict," from a root meaning "to bind" (6:7-9, 12-13, 15)
מְצַלֶּא וּמוֹדֵא	*mĕṣallēʾ ûmôdēʾ*	"praying and giving thanks" (6:10): Daniel's response to the decree
גֻּבָּא	*gubbāʾ*	"the pit, the den" (6:7, 12, 16-17, 19-20, 23-24)
שֵׁיזִב	*šêzib*	"to rescue, deliver" (6:14, 16, 20, 27), the same verb used in the furnace story (3:15, 17, 28)
זָכוּ	*zākû*	"innocence, blamelessness" (6:22)
אֱלָהָא חַיָּא	*ʾĕlāhāʾ ḥayyāʾ*	"the living God" (6:20, 26), in contrast to the lifeless gods of gold and silver (5:4, 23)

5. Interpretive Questions

WHO WAS DARIUS THE MEDE?

Daniel calls him Darius the Mede (5:31; 11:1) and "the son of Ahasuerus, of the offspring of the Medes" (9:1), says he "received the kingdom" (5:31), and distinguishes his reign from that of Cyrus the Persian (6:28). Babylonian records, including the Nabonidus Chronicle, name Cyrus as Babylon's conqueror and king and mention officials named Ugbaru and Gubaru, but no king named Darius before Darius I (522 BC). Evangelical scholars have proposed:

- **Gubaru,** the governor Cyrus installed over Babylon (John C. Whitcomb, 1959). The Chronicle names an Ugbaru and a Gubaru; whether they are one man is debated. *Darius* would be a throne name, and "was made king" (9:1) would fit a ruler appointed under Cyrus. No surviving record calls Gubaru king.
- **Cyrus himself** (D. J. Wiseman, 1965), reading 6:28 as *the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian*. Compare 1 Chronicles 5:26, where two names for one Assyrian king are joined the same way. But Daniel calls Darius a Mede, gives a different father (9:1), and seems to keep the two kings distinct.
- **Cyaxares II,** a Median king, Cyrus's uncle and senior partner in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (argued at length by Steven D. Anderson, 2014). Josephus also says Darius was the son of Astyages and had another name among the Greeks (*Antiquities* 10.248). Herodotus and the cuneiform sources do not mention Cyaxares II.

Many critical scholars read Darius the Mede as a literary figure. This guide, following Daniel's own presentation, takes the account as historical. No identification is settled, and silence in surviving records is not proof of error. Belshazzar, too, was once known only from the Bible (see *The Writing on the Wall* Deep Dive), though his case does not settle who Darius was.

WAS DANIEL'S OPEN WINDOW AN ACT OF DEFIANCE?

Some read 6:10 as a deliberate public witness. Others stress "as he did before": he changed nothing, neither hiding nor flaunting. Both agree on the main point. When a law

forbade what God commands, Daniel obeyed God (compare Acts 5:29), and he stayed respectful (6:21-22) and accepted the penalty. He did not resist with force or disrespect, which fits the New Testament's call to honor rulers (1 Peter 2:13-17).

WHY WERE THE ACCUSERS' FAMILIES THROWN IN (6:24)?

The text records the king's command and the result. It neither commends nor condemns it. Herodotus tells how Darius I arrested a conspirator with his sons and household (*Histories* 3.119); Ammianus Marcellinus (4th century AD) describes Persian laws that put a guilty man's relatives to death with him.[2] Both show collective punishment in ancient accounts of Persian rule; neither independently documents 6:24. God's law forbade this kind of punishment: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers." (Deuteronomy 24:16; compare Ezekiel 18:20) The verse shows the severity of a pagan king's justice. It is not a model for God's people.

6. Cross-References

- **Daniel 3**: the companion chapter to Daniel 6.
- **1 Kings 8:46-49**: praying toward the land, the city, and the temple.
- **Psalm 55:17**: "Evening, morning, and at noon, I will cry out in distress. He will hear my voice." (WEB)
- **Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20**: each person answers for their own sin.
- **Acts 5:29**: "We must obey God rather than men." (WEB)
- **Hebrews 11:33-38**: some "stopped the mouths of lions"; others were not delivered.
- **2 Timothy 4:17**: "So I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." (WEB)
- **1 Peter 5:8**: the adversary walks around "like a roaring lion".

7. How Daniel 6 Points to Christ

Blameless, and accused. (A gospel parallel, not a claim that Daniel 6 predicts it.) Daniel's enemies could find no fault in his work, so they used his faithfulness to God against him. Jesus was handed over "because of envy" (Matthew 27:18, WEB), and Pilate said, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." (Luke 23:4, WEB)

Sealed in. (A theological reflection.) The king sealed the stone over Daniel "that nothing might be changed" (Daniel 6:17). The authorities sealed Jesus' tomb too: they "made the tomb secure, sealing the stone." (Matthew 27:66, WEB) The difference is important. Daniel was kept from death. Jesus truly died, and He rose from the dead.

The king who could not save, and the God who does. Darius could not both keep his law and rescue Daniel. In the gospel, God does not set His justice aside. In Christ He is "just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26, WEB). *(A theological application.)*

The living God and His everlasting kingdom. Darius confessed that God's kingdom "will not be destroyed" (6:26). The next chapter shows "one like a son of man" receiving a kingdom "that will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14, WEB), and Jesus took that title for Himself (Mark 14:62). Here the New Testament itself draws the connection.

8. For Further Study

COMMENTARIES (ACCESSIBLE) - DALE RALPH DAVIS, *THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL*, THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY (IVP, 2013). - IAIN M. DUGUID, *DANIEL*, REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY (P&R, 2008). - TREMPER LONGMAN III, *DANIEL*, NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY (ZONDERVAN, 1999). - JOYCE G. BALDWIN, *DANIEL*, TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES (IVP, 1978).

COMMENTARIES (ADVANCED) - STEPHEN R. MILLER, *DANIEL*, NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY 18 (B&H, 1994). - ERNEST C. LUCAS, *DANIEL*, APOLLOS OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY 20 (APOLLOS, 2002). - JOHN E. GOLDINGAY, *DANIEL*, WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY 30 (WORD, 1989; REV. ED. ZONDERVAN, 2019).

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND - JOHN C. WHITCOMB, *DARIUS THE MEDE* (EERDMANS, 1959). - D. J. WISEMAN ET AL., *NOTES ON SOME PROBLEMS IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL* (TYNDALE PRESS, 1965). - STEVEN D. ANDERSON, *DARIUS THE MEDE: A REAPPRAISAL* (2014; REVISION OF HIS DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY DISSERTATION). - A. K. GRAYSON, *ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES* (J. J. AUGUSTIN, 1975), CHRONICLE 7, THE NABONIDUS CHRONICLE. - HERODOTUS, *HISTORIES* 3.89, 3.119; XENOPHON, *CYROPAEDIA*; DIODORUS SICULUS, *LIBRARY* 17.30; AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS 23.6.81; JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 10.248. - ADRIEN LENGLET, "LA STRUCTURE LITTÉRAIRE DE DANIEL 2-7," *BIBLICA* 53 (1972): 169-90.

NOTES

1. Lenglet, *Biblica* 53 (1972): 169-90; see also J. Paul Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003).
2. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History* 23.6.81 (4th century AD); Herodotus, *Histories* 3.119, on Intaphernes.

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