

NOVEMBER 29

Daniel 6

In my thinking, there are few chapters in the Bible that are as under-taught, underestimated and misunderstood as this chapter. This is one of those chapters that makes Bible study a lot of fun. Buckle up!

Vs. 1-3 Now, how is this possible? It should be impossible for anyone to read this and just accept it without wondering why Darius, the conquering general and ruler over this part of the Persian Empire, should elevate Daniel. Daniel was not only the final ruler of the Babylonian Empire, but he had served Babylon as a high ranking official for 67 years. These are the guys you kill when you take over. Assuming Darius was a rational man, why would he do this? It doesn't make sense. Darius must have had very good reasons for bringing Daniel into his government.

Just for fun look at the following verses: Daniel 9:1 and 11:1. All of this is happening in the first year of Darius.

The fact that Darius was 62 years old meant he would have been in his twenties when Neb lost his mind. There were great relationships between the Babylonians and the Persians and Medes. As royalty, Darius would have visited Babylon many times on official business or to attend events. He may have even fed Nebuchadnezzar a carrot. He would have known Daniel all his life as the ruler of the province of Babylon and the chief of the wise men. Daniel's eminence would have been even greater during the seven years while Neb was grazing. We don't know when Daniel was sent as an ambassador to Susa, but we find him there in chapter 8. This would have given Darius and Cyrus more contact with Daniel. Now, these could have been some reasons for Darius to have respected Daniel, but as we read on, we will find some reasons that were far more powerful.

Vs. 4-9 There are two things that are important to see here. First, these people were very religious, and to break the will of a people, you made them compromise themselves in the worship of their gods. We saw that in Daniel 1 and 3. So, as silly as this might sound to us, it made good sense to them. Second, in v. 8, it is very clear that Darius was an equal with Cyrus, in that he could sign a decree into existence that was binding and could not be broken in the entire empire. Official records of this would have been made, sent out by courier and put into official books. This information about official recorded decrees will come in handy at the end of the chapter.

Vs. 10-11 Daniel went and prayed anyway. Why? I've heard people attribute this to the faithful habits of a person having their quiet time and their sweet hour of prayer before the Lord. That is all great stuff. But, if you really want to know why Daniel prayed, as well as what he prayed, read Daniel 9:1-19. This was an absolutely crucial time in the history of Israel. Daniel's passion for the Lord and for his people, as representatives of the God of salvation, was burning in him. The seventy years were up and a new government had taken over. Daniel knew his entire life had been directed by God to save his people. He was begging God to fulfill His promise, given in Jeremiah 29:10, to end the exile after 70 years and return the people to Jerusalem. It is really deeper than that and we'll see it in chapter 9. There was no way in the world, regardless of the enemy or the cost, that Daniel would not beg God for His people. (By the way, we'll see later that facing Jerusalem in prayer was a part of another promise in Scripture.)

Vs. 11-13 The trap was sprung, but as we saw in Esther with Haman, sometimes the traps you set for others have a way of biting you back. In this case, the biting is meant literally.

Vs. 14-20 Here we go again. Darius is acting very strangely.

V. 14 I've heard this explained that Darius really loved Daniel and didn't want to lose such a cool leader. Maybe, but how do you explain that Darius is very distressed. This section shows that Darius was fearful. How do you explain that? Read on.

V. 15 This would not have endeared these men to Darius. How many men were a part of this conspiracy? Certainly there were the two other presidents, but some suggest that many of the local leaders were a part of this. I've read of numbers into the hundreds, but only so many men and their families would have fit in the lion's den. I think the main actors here were those other presidents and a few other high ranking men.

One of the things that leads people to misunderstand the depth of this book is that the first six chapters are seen individually, as disconnected children's stories. Just for the fun of it, Google "Daniel in the lion's den," and then click on "images." Notice how many of the pictures do not show that Daniel was in his eighties. I found one picture that looked like "Samson in the lion's den." Anyway, it should be impossible to read chapters 1-6 and not know that 70 years have passed, but most people still visualize Daniel as a young man.

V. 16 How did Darius have this information? I think Darius had known this about Daniel most of his life.

V. 18 No TV, no dancing girls, no nothing! Why in the world is a pagan king fasting, and whom is he seeking by his praying and fasting? Why couldn't he sleep? What was he worried about?

V. 19 Why is he going to the den so early and with so much agitation? Did he want to collect the bones? Guys like this never traveled alone, so the coach or the guys who carried him apparently had to do double-time.

V. 20 Why is he crying out in anguish? Just think of what Darius says here, *servant of the living God*. That is a grade "A" shocker. How did Darius know that?

I think Darius expected that God would act that night to save Daniel. I think Darius knew all about God's education of Nebuchadnezzar: the first dream, the dedication and furnace, and particularly the events that led up to Neb being punished. All of these actions were official Babylonian events, recorded in Aramaic, copied, sent out to the capitals of the provinces and filed. Then, the night that Darius took over, he heard of this strange event in the ballroom. He and Mrs. Darius walked into their new ballroom the next day to decide on paint and drapes, and there on the wall they saw the words carved in the plaster. Not only did he know the stories of what had happened to Neb, but now he had become a part of that history of this mighty God who mixes Himself in empires, and disciplines those kings who resist Him. For Darius, living in Babylon might have been kind of like inheriting a haunted house. I think that when Darius realized he had been tricked and maneuvered into putting Daniel to death, he feared for his life before Yahweh.

Vs. 21-23 Not only was Darius happy (and off the hook), but it was a visual sign and miracle to all of those officials and soldiers who were with him.

V. 24 Darius was also very mad. It was time for some "payback." And just like we saw in the book of Esther, when the decree was given to destroy the Jews, their enemies revealed who they were and were dealt with.

Vs. 25-27 I just have a few observations here. First, another pagan king is worshiping God. Actually, Darius is doing such a good job of it, you wonder if this event moved him to become a worshiper of Yahweh only.

Second, Darius writes a binding decree for the entire Persian Empire stating that people were to fear Yahweh. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar did this after the furnace in chapter 3. The force of Neb's decree was that no one dared force the Jews to worship any god but their own. That decree protected the Jews up until the Persian Empire. When the Persians came to power, they

hit the “reset” button and the Jews were threatened again with being forced to worship other gods. With this decree, the Jews were again a favored people in the empire and they were granted the freedom to worship Yahweh only.

Third, this information, the entire written account, would have been sent out in Aramaic to all the ends of the earth, not just the empire. Cyrus would have gotten a copy. The first year of Darius was also the first year of Cyrus. Guess what Cyrus did in his first year, and after this event? He sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Notice that they were sent to rebuild the temple, not the city. The focus of Cyrus' decree was the worship of Yahweh and wanting to earn Yahweh's favor. Was this event the catalyst to Cyrus' decree? That makes a lot more sense to me than that God just whammied him and Cyrus mindlessly did it. Read Ezra 1:1-2, and you'll notice that Cyrus had a lot of information. He most certainly had been influenced by what happened to Neb and Cyrus might have read some of the official Babylonian documents that had been written by Daniel, that is, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. (Chapter 7 is interesting and was written in Aramaic, years earlier.) I think that God used this crisis to put the fire under Cyrus to seek the favor of God and to send the Jews home.

Fourth, look at what God does through crisis. In God's hands, crisis is our friend. This should teach us something.

Fifth, though Belshazzar knew what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar, he failed to learn from it and paid the price. Darius was different. He not only observed; he took it to heart. Darius got an “A.”

As disciples, when Jesus tells us to go into the harvest and not to fear, I think He can really back that up. The question is, after reading all of this, have we learned anything?

2 Peter 3

Vs. 1-3 Peter is doing the same thing that Paul did with Timothy, when he told Tim in both letters that in the last days there would be false teachers. In this case Peter is saying that, from within the church, there will come false teachers who, among other things, will cause others not to take certain things seriously. People will scoff at God. It happens, too, and as a result, bitter, disillusioned, fruitless believers are easy to find.

Vs. 4-7 In this case they are creating doubt regarding the return of the Lord and judgment. Peter uses the example of the flood, to show that what happened once will certainly happen again. The same Word that created the world has brought judgment once, by water, and will bring it again. As sure as there is a visible world, there will be a time of accountability before the Creator. I think the issue here is not only God's delay, but whether He will bring judgment.

Vs. 8-10 Notice the prominence of the harvest and the importance of our mission in what Peter says here. The reason that God is waiting is for the harvest to be brought in. Notice that this judgment will come with fire on the earth. That sounds like the book of Revelation.

Vs. 11-13 Since we know the judgment is coming, we should live a particular kind of life, following Jesus. Since everything on earth will be done away with, except people, saving people is the goal, not acquiring stuff or fulfilling our desires. By working in the harvest, bringing in those whom God will save, we are hastening the coming of the Lord. Notice that Peter adds some reality here regarding the coming judgment and the promise of our future not being on this earth, but on the new one. Too many believers still think that heaven is on this earth. This earth and this time on earth is like the foyer or entrance to a building. We haven't really entered the true building yet.

Vs. 14-18 Notice here that Paul's writings are equated as Scripture. The people are to resist the false teachers, wait on the Lord, honor God and work in the harvest during this time of God's

patience. Notice that there were "other Scriptures" besides what Paul had written. This could be referring to the Gospels of Mark, Luke and the letter from James.

V. 18 says it all. Amen!

The time to be working in the harvest is now, before God's judgment begins. And, this is the perfect season in many western nations to use Christmas as a conversation starter, or to show kindness to someone in the name of our Lord.

Psalm 119:129-152

Vs. 129-130 Here, the Word becomes the light to the soul, giving understanding. *Unfolding* gives the sense of the Word gradually making sense to us as we spend time in it daily.

Vs. 131-136 On the basis of the light you have, you know how to move and respond in the darkness. David had plenty of darkness around him.

V. 133 David needed God to steady his steps and this came through the Word. In reading this, I think of how strong David was when he was afflicted and distressed. He was forced to go to the Lord in His Word. It seems like David lived in the Word. When he got comfortable and busy and important in his palace, I think he let the Word gather dust, and we've read the tragic results.

Vs. 137-144 Righteousness seems to be important in this section. Righteousness is like a standard, or measurement or guide to help us. Driving "righteously" would be obeying the rules, stopping at signs and staying inside the lines. We learn of God's guides for us in His Word. David's adversaries were out of bounds in pursuing David. It was a matter of knowing God's Word and living righteously before Him. David was distressed by the danger and the unjustness, but the Word gave David comfort. The righteousness of God and those standards expressed in the Word pleaded David's case.

Vs. 145-146 David's interest in God and in His Word was with his whole heart.

Vs. 147-148 I wonder if this was David's quiet time. Notice the mention of the promise.

Vs. 149-151 And here's the reason David got up so early. David knew of the *steadfast love* of God as revealed in His Word. God was near.

V. 152 David knew that the Word was eternal.

This makes me think that we need to pursue the Lord in times of "peace," the way we do in times of need and distress. The reality of this life is that we live behind enemy lines, with people around us being deceived and destroyed, around the clock. When God gives us peace, we shouldn't abuse it by forgetting why He has left us here. We are to pursue Him in this dark harvest, following Christ, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples. Very soon, both in the OT and in the NT, we will begin reading about the judgment that is coming.

Proverbs 28:21-22

V. 21 I'm sure this was another reason why Jesus taught His disciples that we should expect our bread from God and lay up treasure in heaven. If that's where our bread comes from, we can't be bought.

V. 22 I'm sure that "poverty of soul" is included in this.