

Daniel 6: Narrative Analysis

Scotty Williams

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Setting: Location

The book of Daniel takes place in Shinar, otherwise known as Babylon (Dan. 1:2). Shinar is the same location where the Hebrew people proved their desire to live outside God's provision and guidance and chose to "make a name for themselves" by building a city and tower to heaven. Ultimately, God stopped their endeavor by confusing and changing the language of the world and scattering them over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:1-9). Thus, Babylon becomes an archetype to represent when man no longer chooses to live in the blessing and abundance of life that God offers, and instead, seizes abundance and life on their own terms and their own wisdom.¹ It seems that the biblical author of Daniel is hyperlinking Daniel's story to the story of Babel in order to help the reader understand this deeper, thematic meaning. From the first couple lines of the book of Daniel the reader is able to recognize the Babylonians quest of life on their own terms. Daniel 6 takes place in the center of Babylon where Daniel is serving as an administrator for the king. The location of Daniel sets the stage for the reader to diagnose the deeper symbolic and spiritual battles throughout the entire book, and more specifically, in chapter six.

Setting: Time

It is important for the reader to know where in the timeline of Israel's story Daniel 6 takes place in order to correctly analyze the chapter. The book of Daniel tells of a time in Israel's history, between 606-535 BC, when the Israelite nation was scattered/exiled into the land of their enemies after becoming a "Babylon" of themselves.² But amidst their enemies God promised the

¹ Tim Mackie, "Blessing and Curse" (Bible Project, May 17, 2017), <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/blessing-and-curse/>.

² Köstenberger Andreas J and Richard Duane Patterson, *For the Love of God's Word : An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Kregel Academic, 2015), 41.

children of Israel prosperity and abundance as long as they sought His face (Jer. 29:5-7). The book of Daniel, especially Daniel 6, exemplifies this promise. In chapter one, Daniel and his friends uphold the food laws of the Lord, resulting in their conqueror, King Nebuchadnezzar, finding Daniel and his companions the wisest of all in the kingdom. In chapter two, the Lord uses Daniel to interpret the king's dream, causing the king to fall prostrate on his face in worship of Daniel (Dan. 2:46). In chapter three, Daniel's three friends serve and worship God despite being mandated to only worship the statues and idol of Babylon. As a result, they get thrown into a blazing furnace where God protects them. King Nebuchadnezzar sees this miraculous event and makes a proclamation that no other God could save the way the God of Israel could (Dan. 3: 29). Finally, in Daniel 6, we read that despite Babylon having a new king, king Darius, Daniel's commitment to worship and pray to the Lord of Israel was met with God's provision and protection as Daniel's life was saved as he spent the night in a den filled with lions. On the other hand, the book of Daniel, along with Daniel 6, unveils that those whose hearts are hard and rebellious toward God's rule experience His judgment and the consequences of their decisions as noted through the series of events that led to the death of the king's satrap and officials.

Setting: Culture

As stated previously, Babylon represented mankind's quest to make a name for themselves and to obtain abundance and life on their own terms. The author of Daniel uncovers this theme in Daniel 6, where he reveals the king's allegiance to his own laws and the "law of the Medes and Persians" culture (Dan. 6:12,15). These societies cultivated a culture of a ruler's self-righteousness and polytheism, which go hand in hand. In Daniel chapter one we see the Babylonians take articles from the God's temple and bring them to the temple of their god. In

Chapter three, King Nebuchadnezzar, after declaring Daniel's God "God of gods and Lord of kings", erected a gold statue for everyone to bow down to and worship. He punished those who worshiped anyone or anything else (Dan. 2:47). Similarly, in chapter six, the satraps and king's officials convinced King Darius that all must pray to him alone, casting anyone who prayed to someone else into a den of lions. It is important to identify the pattern of a culture and society that bent their hearts to the itching ears of their kings. It resulted in kings who lived to serve themselves, becoming a god to the people, as well as idolizing anything that would contribute to their prosperity. This conflict between opposing cultures is on full display throughout Daniel 6 as Daniel is met with immense persecution, specifically by the kings' satraps and officials, because he lived contrary to the Babylonian culture and laws, worshiping the God of Israel and living in His abundance and blessings.

Characters: Protagonist

Daniel is quickly identified as the one who "distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom." Even the opposition, the king's administrators and satraps "could find no corruption in [Daniel] because he was trustworthy, neither corrupt or negligent". The evil administrators and satraps go on to say they "will never find any basis of charges against Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of God" (Dan. 6:3-5). Daniel is also seen describing himself as "innocent in [God's] sight" (Dan. 6:22). I believe the author uses this kind of language in order suggest that Daniel could be the new Adam; a son of man who, figuratively, chooses God's tree of life over the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This imagery is supported in Daniel 6:10, "When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his

upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” Just as Adam and Eve were given a perfect kingdom to rule in the garden, which was taken from them because they chose to live their own way, Daniel seems to be on the verge of ruling a kingdom by trusting the will and way of God (Dan. 6:3). New Adam parallelism is made even stronger when the king saw Daniel living in union and dominion over the beasts after he spent the night in the den. This should prompt the reader to correlate Daniel to Genesis 1 and 2 where mankind lived in a good and perfect union with God and had dominion over the birds of the air and the beast of the field. Although Daniel was not the Son of Man, the promised Messiah, he points us to a hope that one day the Israelite nation and the entire world would experience a perfect Adam that is able to “rule” an even better kingdom.

Characters: Antagonist

In Daniel 6, the king’s satraps and officials oppose Daniel and the God of Israel. Driven by jealousy, they conspired to get rid of Daniel by appealing to the king’s self-righteousness. Knowing Daniel is committed to serving the God of Israel, the satraps and officials convince King Darius to edict and enforce a law that required everyone to only pray to the king. The consequence of breaking the law was to be thrown into a den of lions. Multiple times the king’s satraps and officials are seen placing their trust and forcing others allegiance in the laws and ways of the Medes and Persians. These details allow the reader to associate the king’s satraps and officials with what it means to be a “Babylon” and create for oneself a life of abundance on their own terms. As a result, God’s promise to justify the innocent, was made public as the “men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den” (Dan. 6:24). The

depiction of the king's satraps and officials does not deviate from the message that Jesus delivers when He says "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25).

Characters: Stereotype

King Darius is a character that many can relate to as he represents the tension between a heart keen on the fulfillment of the flesh and a heart filled with the majesty and splendor of God. The first half of Daniel 6 illustrates King Darius' selfishness, even from the opening words, "It pleased Darius..." (Dan. 6:1). The author seems to encourage the reader to view the king as one blinded by his own self-centeredness. For this reason, the satraps and officials treat the king like a pawn in their master plan to kill Daniel by appealing to the king's evil heart to obtain a god-like status by having people pray to him alone. In other words, king Darius' "freedom" to indulge in his flesh results in enslavement to sin (Rom. 2:20-22). Adversely, the second half of Daniel 6 expresses a clear change in King Darius' heart in reverence for God, specifically found in his final letter to all nations. In the end, King Darius makes a very "king Darius" type move by creating a new decree, but this time declares that everyone must fear and give reverence to the God of Daniel (Dan. 6:26). The author wittily makes it clear that although king Darius has a desire and change of heart to bring honor to God, he does so by reverting back to a worldly pattern that has defined his life up to this point. These relatable attributes allow King Darius to become the stereotype of the wrestling match we all find ourselves in between being a heart governed by the flesh and a heart ruled by the Spirit.

Plot: Beginning

Daniel 6:1-5 sets the stage for the of the chapter as a whole. The author makes quick work to identify Daniel in an esteemed position over the Babylonian empire. He seems to attribute Daniels success to his pureness and trustworthiness to God, but simultaneously gaining the favor of Babylonian kings. Opposing Daniel are the king’s satraps and officials who begin to plot an evil plan to get rid of Daniel. At this point, I believe the author is prompting the reader to remember an important theme found in the Hebrew Bible from the story of Joseph. Joseph’s brothers plotted his death and destruction because of jealousy, yet despite their efforts, Joseph rose to power in Egypt and ultimately recognized that what his brothers intended for harm, “God intended for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). As the reader continues through the rest of the chapter, they can see the dots connect, for what the satraps and officials meant for evil, God meant for his glory. Ultimately, the beginning plot line in Daniel 6 set the stage for the irony of the story as a whole: Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves before the Lord will be exalted (Matt. 23:12).

Plot: Development

Daniel 6:6-10 thickens the plotline and the conflict of the story. Because the king’s satraps and officials are in positions inferior to Daniel, an “outsider” (both culturally and allegiantly) they rage with anger and jealousy and develop a way to get rid of Daniel. They use the king’s stereotypical heart of self-righteousness and convince the king to pass a law that would prohibit anyone from praying to a god or human other than King Darius for thirty days. Those who broke the law were to be thrown into a den of lions. How does Daniel react to this new law? Like anyone who is in full submission to the King of the universe, by going to his

upstairs room and “three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before” (Dan. 6:10). As Adam and Eve were faced with the temptation in the garden to find blessings in their own ways and on their own terms, so Daniel was faced with a similar choice, to find blessing and abundance on man’s terms or continue in faithfulness to the God of Israel. Unlike Adam and Eve though, Daniel yielded to God’s rule and authority. In my mind, and many readers alike, this leads to the question “does submitting to God’s way of life always mean peace and abundance from a fleshly/earthly point of view”? A prominent question that will get answered in the next sections.

Plot: Climax

The climax of Daniel 6 uncovers many of the chapter’s themes. Daniel 6:11-24 continues the plot as the satraps and officials catch Daniel praying to God and report him to King Darius. Upset at himself for allowing such a law to be made, King Darius has Daniel thrown into a den of lions. The temporary loss of Daniel in the lion’s den seems make the king recognize the fault in pursuing life on his own terms (Dan. 6:18). The next morning the king runs down to the lion’s den to find Daniel unharmed and alive. After brining Daniel out of the den, the King throws his satraps and officials into the lion’s den, where they were crushed and overpowered before they even hit the floor (Dan. 6:24). Three themes come to a head in the climax of the story. First, we see how those live like the satraps and officials, seeking power and exaltation for themselves, are destined to become humbled to the point of death (whether in divine destruction or eternal separation from Him). Secondly, the king represents those whose hearts succumbs to the worldly desires, but ultimately decide to receive a new heart from God (Ezekiel 36:26). Lastly, Daniel represents a heart solely focused on the approval of God and death has no power over them. In

the story of Daniel 6, although Daniel physically remains alive, it seems to pale in comparison to the spiritual innocence that is truly makes Daniel's character come alive (Dan. 6:22).

Plot: Denouement

At the conclusion of chapter six, the author offers more color to King Darius character, allowing him to share in attributes of an agent. The end of Daniel 6, specifically verses twenty-five through twenty-eight, unveil the true depth of the themes identified throughout Daniel 6. Moved that God spared Daniels life, "King Darius issued a decree that "in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. 'For he is the living God, and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth'" (Dan. 6:27-28). First, the God of Israel is actively involved and present amongst His people. He desires intimate relationship with His children. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Ps. 139: 7-8). Second, no decree or law made by man, even an earthly king, can overturn God's authority and rule. "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does" (Ps. 145:13). Third, God rescues and saves those who flee to Him, just as he spared Daniel's very own life from the mouths and claws of the lions. "Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death. Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins" Psalms 68:20-21). Fourth, from God accepting the repentance of a rebellious heart to shutting mouths of lions, He is love, grace and longsuffering are always deserving of our worship. "I will remember the works of the LORD; yes, I will

remember Your wonders of old. will reflect on all You have done and ponder Your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who works
wonders. You display Your strength among the peoples” (Ps. 77:11-14).

Bibliography

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