

Daniel 6

Rescue from the Pit of Beasts

The title of this series has been “Exalting God in Babylon” and it’s a series where we take time to study a chapter each week in the book of Daniel, we examine the story in its original context - what God was speaking to the Israelites in Exile back then - and what God has for us today. And to refresh any memories, or if you’re just joining us for the first time, the Exile was a period in Israel’s history where they were taken into captivity by the Empire of Babylon. It was a dark, but necessary time for the covenant people of God. The faithful prophets had warned for years that because of Israel’s idolatry, immorality, and injustice, Yahweh God would give them over to the wrath of their enemies.

And this is where, at the start of the book, young and innocent Daniel finds himself. In the strange, twisted world of Babylon because of the sins and failures of those before him.

The questions that we’ve wrestled with throughout this book of Daniel are:

Will we totally reject Babylon, and rebel against it every moment?

Or will we completely give in to its power and accept the status quo?

Or will we find the better way that the Bible is teaching us? The way that seeks the welfare of Babylon, while ultimately serving the one, true King? The way that lives “in the world, but is not of the world.”

So today, we’ll be in Daniel chapter 6, and this is the classic story of Daniel and the Lions’ Den. For anyone who doesn’t know this story - welcome! I’m glad you’re here today!

For those of us who may have been in the Church for a while, this may be a familiar, possibly even an over-familiar story. I pray that as we read it, we would see it with fresh eyes. If it’s still not fresh after that, then we’ll go over some key points that will help put this story into perspective.

And just before we read, here is the **Main Idea** of the message today:

Just as God rescued Daniel in Babylon,

He continues to rescue us from the Pit of Beasts today.

Daniel 6:

[1] It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom;

[2] and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss.

[3] Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

[4] Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.

[5] Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”

[6] Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever!

[7] All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

[8] Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked."

[9] Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

[10] When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

[11] Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

[12] Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked."

[13] Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

[14] Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

[15] Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed."

[16] Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!"

[17] And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

[18] Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

[19] Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

[20] As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

[21] Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever!

[22] My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."

[23] Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

[24] And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

[25] Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you.

[26] I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.

[27] He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

[28] So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

So, as we've just finished reading this story, a few points to put it in context:

First, this story is **Structured**

If, as we were reading, you may have thought - this story sounds a lot like the story of Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mishael (or Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego) in Daniel chapter 3 - you're right! The book of Daniel is structured in such a way that chapter 3 and this chapter 6 are like mirror images of one another.

And that's not just a coincidence! The structure of the book not only helped for remembering and memorizing the Scriptures, but the structure helped convey important theological meaning. In this case, that God is completely sovereign, or rules over all things, and that He honors the humble and brings down the proud.

Let me explain, especially since we're coming to a hinge point of the book of Daniel next time in chapter 7.

The book is divided into two parts, with chapter 1 written in Hebrew serving as an introduction of the 4 Israelite boys in Exile. Chapters 2-7 are written in Aramaic, and 8-12 are written again in Hebrew. So, even in the language used, there's a clear pattern break.

Within chapters 2-7, it goes like this:

Chapter 2: Prophecy of Four Empires

 Chapter 3. Trial of God's Faithful

 Chapter 4: Prophecy to a Pagan King

 Chapter 5: Prophecy to a Pagan King

 Chapter 6: Trial of God's Faithful

Chapter 7: Prophecy of Four Empires

And at the very center of this pattern (which is called a “chiasm”) is chapter 4, verse 37 which is the theme of this book. Again, that God is sovereign, fair, and just; and that He humbles proud peoples, kings, and nations.

[37] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (ESV)

The structure is so amazing. It shows us that these are not random stories, but an ordered account of who God is, and what He is trying to teach His people in Exile.

This leads to the second point about this familiar story: That it's **Sophisticated**.

I don't mean that in a hoity-toity way, but that God's Word is a theological + artistic + literary masterpiece. It's simple enough for children to understand, yes, but deep enough for us to continually draw from it wisdom, encouragement, and hope.

Because of the clear structure of the book we can compare and contrast the characters, events, repeated words, and themes throughout. The point is, we are not to just take Biblical stories at random, but see them fitting into the whole, and letting it teach us wisdom.

For example, how does Nebuchadnezzar react in chapter 3 in comparison and in contrast to Darius in chapter 6?

Or, for another example, seeing that “beasts” are a recurring theme in Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the first king in Daniel, becomes like a beast because of his pride. The four empires in this story are compared to beasts in the next chapter. In this chapter, Daniel, now about 70-80 years old, has survived through the different “beastly” kingdoms in Exile, and now *literally* survives in a pit of beasts...

So good. God's word is a masterpiece. Again, I hope that seeing the structure and sophistication of Daniel, and every other Biblical story will help open up these stories in our imagination, and rekindle the awe of what God is teaching us, if stories like this have become overly familiar.

Finally, this story is **Supernatural**

I mentioned this a few weeks ago, but the Exile into Babylon had massive spiritual implications. It isn't just a story of a lost war and a conquered people. It's a story of spiritual warfare. The Babylonians did everything in their power to make sure the Israelites felt like Yahweh had lost, and that their gods had won. That's why their names were changed in chapter 1 to honor the Babylonian pantheon. Psalm 137, a song of lament in the Exile, says that their captors mocked them to sing songs of Zion, their homeland, as they wept.

They faced humiliation and taunting. They were forced to bow down to idols, to false gods, to pray to the Persian King that was to be seen as a god-man channeling the deities.

But God shows that He alone is in control over peoples, kings, empires, and the false gods.

In another, potentially over-familiar story of the plagues and Passover in Exodus, there's that peculiar verse in Exodus 12 where God says, "...on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD." The ultimate purpose of the Exodus was supernatural. It was spiritual warfare.

The same is true in Daniel - a book of miracles, visions, spiritual beings, and prophecies. It's supernatural. It is a story of God's will being done on earth, as it is in heaven.

And this is most demonstrated in the notion of "sacred space" in Daniel being thrown into the lion pit. If you were at Phantom Ranch over Memorial Day, you might remember that with the story of Naaman the Leper and the dirt. Throughout the Ancient Near East, the gods all had their plot of land and their speciality that they ruled over. Ba'al and Marduk in Babylon. Ra and Horus in Egypt. Zeus and Apollos in Greece. But not Yahweh, the God above all gods!

J.P. Tanner writes in his Evangelical Exegetical Commentary on the book of Daniel: "The point is that the omnipresent Yahweh Elohim is free to break into the god space of the Medes and Persians at will to demonstrate His power and proclaim His kingdom intentions—and this while 'His city' lies in shattered ruins."

God was showing them that He is not just the local/regional God of Israel, but the true Ruler of heaven and earth, who would even condescend down into a Pit to deliver His faithful servant from the mouths of lions. More on that in a second...

So, with this story, as with every story in the Bible that might be overly-familiar, seeing it as **Structured, Sophisticated, and Supernatural** will be like seeing a movie in 3D IMAX, if we have eyes to see it...

The clearest way to see this story, then, and how it fits into God's entire plan of redemption, is to see Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of it. That this story was a foreshadowing of the reality we find ourselves in today. That in the same way God rescued Daniel from the Pit of Beasts back then through Jesus, God continues to rescue us from the Pit of Beasts today, through Jesus Christ.

Now, if you're curious why I keep calling it Daniel and the "Pit of Beasts" instead of the more recognizable Daniel and the Lions' Den, it serves a couple purposes.

One, to shake off that potential over-familiarity.

But two, because that language is so much more applicable to the story of Daniel, and to the language and metaphors used throughout the unified story of the Bible.

The "Pit of Beasts" then, is a more appropriate description of the three tyrants that Christ has claimed victory over: Sin, Death, and the Devil. Martin Luther once called these three the

“unholy Trinity” since like the lions in the pit, they are out to devour us. But Christ rescues and redeems!

Jesus Rescues from the Pit of Death

So, I want to highlight this term “Pit” or “Den” that’s used in chapter 6. Some English translations have “Den” like the ESV we read this morning, but many others have “Pit” as the correct translation. Which, I don’t know about you, but when I hear “den” I associate like a cave or a cage, or even a “group of lions.” But even in the story, this is clearly a large hole, or pit in the ground that Daniel is lowered into all the way to the bottom, and is raised up from it the next morning.

Since this portion of Daniel is the only part of the Hebrew Old Testament written in Aramaic, it’s a bit difficult sometimes to compare the vocabulary used, but older translations like the Greek and Syriac texts make it very clear that this “pit” was more than just a hole in the ground.

To ancient readers, this “pit” had a clear parallel to images of death, darkness, and Sheol.

This is seen in other passages where this “pit” imagery is used:

In Psalm 30, David writes

[1] I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

[2] O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

[3] O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; (*or, the land of death*) you restored me to life from among those who go down to the **pit**.

...

[5b] Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

This Psalm is like a perfect recap of the story of Daniel. Being delivered from near certain death, to a new-lease on life in the morning. But there’s a much deeper hope in this imagery of rescue from the pit. That the same God who can show a glimpse of His power by rescuing from a literal pit, has the ultimate power over Death itself, and He rescues all who put their trust in Him to an eternal, abundant, redeemed life.

One Biblical scholar writes, “Aligning the lions’ den with this ‘pit’ then, the ancient versions activate an inner-biblical set of associations for the pit which speaks of death, and those associations in turn project deliverance from the pit into a life beyond death.”

In other words, Daniel is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ victory over the pit, that is Death itself.

That is why Paul can quote the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians:

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”
 “...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Angel of the Lord that was sent to save Daniel, many believe as do I, was the preincarnate Christ. *So, just as Jesus saved Daniel from the Pit, Jesus saves us from the Pit of Death into new life.*

Jesus Rescues from the Power of Sin

Next, we've already gone over the use of "beast" imagery in Daniel. And though the word here is literally "lions" we now know there's more to this structured, sophisticated, supernatural story.

From the very first pages of our Bibles, we see time-and-time again that beast imagery is used of spiritual evil, sinister empires, and sinful appetites.

God tells Cain in Genesis chapter 4, "...sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." This word for crouching is animalistic, beastly. According to the flesh. Sin can destroy us and turn us into beasts of pride, greed, lust, and murder - chasing after the desires of our flesh.

Empires also can become terrible agents of sin, depravity, and persecution. We see those envious satraps, conspiring against Daniel in the only way they knew they could get him - by trying to get him to sin against Yahweh.

But just as Jesus shut the mouths of the lions, Jesus rescues us from the power of sin.

As Paul wrote in Romans chapter 6, "Sin will have no dominion over you" through the finished work of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave.

Jesus Rescues from the Prowling Devil

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

We have an enemy in our Exile. An enemy that seeks to devour, to plunge us deeper into sin, that seeks to divide and conquer the Church. An enemy that works his schemes through concentrations of power and pride. An enemy that seeks to turn both individuals and empires away from the living God.

But we can have full assurance and confidence that this prowling lion's days are numbered.

Jesus rescued in the story of Daniel, and continues to rescue us today. From the pit of death, from the power of sin, and from the prowling devil.

Once again, the story of Daniel finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

When you realize that, it's astounding at how many more parallels there are from Daniel to Christ. Here are just a few:

- In chapter 5, Daniel is given a purple robe. Jesus is given a purple robe at his crucifixion.
- There is a group conspiracy by government officials to kill them.
- They are arrested on false charges.
- The rulers (Darius and Pilate) find them innocent, but still carry out the death sentence.
- Darius couldn't sleep, and neither could Pilate's wife.
- Set into a pit, and a stone rolled over it with the officials' seal.
- People run to see what happened in the pit/tomb.
- Raised to new life.
- Daniel was given authority over a kingdom, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and earth by the Father (more on that in Daniel 7)

In both Daniel's day and still today, Jesus saves, rescues, redeems, and continues to show His power. It is Jesus' power that is present in Daniel's life and in our lives.

Christ is the one who invades the pit of sin, the pit of depression, the pit of persecution, the pit of anxiety and fear, the pit of loneliness, the pit of prison, the pit of sickness, the pit of substance abuse. And in these pits, He promises deliverance and new life. He can promise these things because God the Father finds us blameless through Jesus Christ. He offers rescue from the pit, possibly in the present according to His will, but certainly in the end.

We can have that same assurance that Daniel had in Exile - that God is the King of kings, the God of gods, and the Rescuer from the Pit of Beasts. That confidence in Christ makes all the difference in how we can live our lives today. Not afraid of death, because we know there is Victory over it. Not enslaved to sin, because there is Freedom from it. And not falling victim to Satan's schemes, because there is Protection from it.

And as we live our days in Exile, we can once again, take a few lessons from Daniel's life. Namely, his **Reputation**, his **Resistance**, and his **Reliance** on God.

Daniel's Reputation

As we've seen throughout Daniel's story so far, Daniel and the other Israelites continually found favor in the kings' eyes. In Chapter 1, they were found to be 10x better than all the other wisemen in the king's service. In Chapters 2 and 4, only Daniel is able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. In Chapter 5, Daniel is able to explain the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. And here we see that in all his decades of service throughout the different empires, Daniel is known in Darius' council as someone who has an "excellent spirit" in him. He is trustworthy, with not even a hint of corruption, or negligence. Daniel did things well, and to the best of his abilities that God granted him.

Daniel took to heart the wisdom of Ecclesiastes:

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might"

Or as Paul writes in Colossians 3, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

We can't all be Daniels, serving in the upper echelons of authority, but we can be like him, seeking to do the best with our God-given abilities. In our workplaces, in our schools, in our homes, and serving our Church body.

The surrounding world in our Exile is watching. Do things with excellence, and seek to have a worthy reputation in and out of the Church. It's why church leadership in the New Testament has to meet the qualification that they are "well thought of by outsiders." (1 Timothy 3:7)

The Apostle Peter was certainly thinking of Daniel's story when he wrote this in 1 Peter 2, "[11] Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh..." He goes on: [12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

Daniel's Resistance

Though Daniel's Reputation preceded him, there was a point where he Resisted. The decree to pray to the king as an intercessor for the deities of Persia was a clear violation of Daniel's worship and his conscience. But did he rebel? In way no - he didn't violently rebel or fight to have it overturned. He just continued doing what he had always done. Go to his window, facing the destroyed city of Jerusalem, and praying to Yahweh that he would bring restoration to His people.

There's precedent in the Old Testament of people praying toward the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8), on their knees or another worshipful position, 3 times a day (evening, morning, and noontime as David does in Psalm 55).

He may have been praying the Shema out loud:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"

Whatever the case, Daniel teaches us an important lesson in resisting when the line is crossed. He is found blameless and excellent in all manners of his life, except in denying Yahweh God the worship He alone deserves.

Daniel's Reliance on God

Finally, Daniel shows that he was ultimately relying on God in his time of Exile and in the Pit of Beasts. Daniel's devotion to prayer is evidence of that. As he is being lifted out of the Pit, it says in verse 23, that "...no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

The same was true of the three Israelites thrown into the fiery furnace of chapter 3. Nebuchadnezzar exclaims that they were delivered by Yahweh God because they trusted in Him.

They all completely trusted and relied on God.

But what of those that aren't delivered from the Pit? What of those in the Early Church who were thrown to lions in the Colosseum and eaten alive? What of those believers in evil empires who die in labor camps and prisons? Were they not delivered because they didn't trust enough?

Not at all. Their reliance upon God was in the deeper hope that God will indeed rescue from the Pit of Death, and be raised to new life.

Just as Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mishael told King Nebuchadnezzar:

"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

They knew that their loyalty, allegiance, and reliance upon Yahweh God would lead to their ultimate deliverance, no matter the consequence to their physical bodies. May we have that same courage as we continue to live in our Exile today.

So, if you're here for the first time, I pray that this story showed you a glimpse of what God can do. He can deliver you from the Pit of Sin, Death, and the Devil. Put your trust in Him today.

And if you've heard this story a hundred times, I pray that we all see it in a fresh way. To see what God is and has always been doing - delivering those faithful to Him.