

From Babylon to Bethlehem

The First Wise Man, Part 6

Daniel 6

I fear the average Christian is under the impression that:

- the older you grow in Christ, the lighter your battle becomes;
- the closer you live to God, the easier your walk becomes;
- the more openly you live for Christ, the more respect you will gain from others

We're under the impression that God rewards faithfulness with smoother sailing and peaceful times.

If there is one detailed account in the Bible that shatters that myth, it's the life of Daniel.

By the time we reach the climax of his faithfulness to God, he is in his mid-80's; he's spent most of his life in a foreign country that had defeated his country and killed his parents some 70 years earlier.

His life never went from difficult to easy or from dangerous to peaceful. Nearly every time we see him, his life is in danger – not because he was unfaithful to God, but because he was.

Chapter 6 ends the narrative section – or biographical section – of the Book of Daniel. Turn there please.

Before the dust settles in this chapter, and the biography of Daniel comes to a close, a lifestyle of wisdom will be obvious to everyone in the kingdom of Persia.

It's been said before, that knowledge is knowing the right answer; wisdom is having the right attitude.

Knowledge is being able to repeat back the truth; wisdom is being able to live out the truth. Five words that characterize wisdom lift off the pages of this episode in *Daniel chapter 6*.

1. The first word is personality.

Notice verse 1. It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, 2. And over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.

Darius is more than likely one of Cyrus' vice-regents – a man by the name of Ugbaru, chosen by Cyrus to reign as king in his stead.

The name Darius was a title of honor, as was Caesar, in the Roman Empire or Pharaoh in the Egyptian empire.

In fact, the word 'dara' from which Darius is derived is the Persian word for 'king'.¹

This particular Darius will reign in the place of Cyrus here in the former capitol city of Babylon for around 14 years.

Now notice *verse 3. Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.*

Mark that phrase – he possessed an extraordinary spirit. You could render it, "an excellent attitude"

Simply put - he had a great attitude – a great spirit.

It wasn't all that complicated – wisdom was demonstrated through his personable spirit.

The thing that made Daniel stand out wasn't the fact that he was an administrative genius or a leader with just the right amount of charisma to make him likeable but not untouchable.

He wasn't being promoted because he knew how to hobnob with the politically connected or the wealthy or the hoi polio.

Listen, the most attractive thing about your life as a Christian will never be what you drive, how much money you have, your title at the office or salary and benefit package. The greatest attraction to Christianity is a Christian who seems to be glad he is.

They are motivated and driven by the joy of the Lord which really is their strength.

We happened to contact a potential speaker for our summer series – a nationally known figure who is known as a Christian; his agent said there just wasn't anyway around the \$75,000 fee and, by the way, we would have to charter a private jet and the private jet had to be a certain size. \$75,000 dollars to come and give us his testimony; Pastor Burggraff

said he would give us his testimony for half that amount – and never mind about the plane.

Daniel was third in the kingdom, but he was so down to earth and everybody was marked by his extraordinary spirit – his winsome personality.

And don't overlook the obvious. But the age of 85, Daniel should have been one of the least personable men in the kingdom.

By now he should be ill-spirited . . . angry . . . bitter . . . he's there in that kingdom serving one more king in the long list; and he's there only because he was taken from his home in his early teens when Nebuchadnezzar crushed Jerusalem.

Jewish tradition and the early church believed Daniel had been subjected to castration as a young teenager – chapter 1 implies as much – we do know he remained unmarried his entire life.

He has been forced to endure blasphemy upon blasphemy by the kings he served. His political colleagues were idolatrous, conniving, pagan men. He'd watched as empires grew and then collapsed.

And now, after years of faithful service, he is set aside and forgotten; only to be called out of retirement to decipher the handwriting on the wall – a message from God that the Babylonian kingdom will be overthrown by the Medes and Persians.

Before he can make an exit, he's effectively promoted to Prime Minister. And the conquering empire immediately drafts him as one of three leaders, overseeing a collection of political leaders who will soon have him thrown to the lions so they can get on with padding their pockets.

If there's anybody in the kingdom with the right to be a bitter old man, it's Daniel.

If there's anybody in the kingdom you'd never want to be around, it would be this 85 year old bachelor who had lived nearly his entire life in a foreign country that ignored his God and used his people.

Listen, if you were God, in charge of writing Daniel's biography, about this time wouldn't you think to yourself, "You know, it's time for Daniel to phase out of the political pressure . . . it's time I allowed him to spend his remaining days planting a little vegetable garden or sitting on a porch overlooking the Euphrates; or even better, it's time for Daniel, my faithful servant, to come up here with me . . . he's had enough . . . he's earned his full reward.

But God is writing this biography! And in His mind, if you can believe it, it's just about time to test the heart and life of Daniel to the very limit.

It's time for wisdom to shine through personality like never before.

There's another word that comes to my mind in this scene.

2. It's the word, integrity.

When the news leaked out that the king was going to promote Daniel over all the rest of them, ***notice verse 4. Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful . . .***

That verb for "find" reveals the absolute tenacity as these officials searched for some ground of accusation.ⁱⁱ

This is like some candidate in our country running for office . . . rivals turn over every stone, looking for the bugs.

Surely this Jewish bachelor had dirt hiding somewhere. He's lived in Babylon, for crying out loud . . . when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians!

They starting tailing Daniel; they hacked into his computer; checked his mail; tracked his credit cards; there's got to be something somewhere.

But would you notice they are inspecting his **public** life from top to bottom – the text reads, ***trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs.***

They went all the way back to the time he was appointed as a 19 year old . . . they checked his time cards and business expenses all the way through the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

Listen, they're not checking his Old Testament Bible reading schedule. They're not interested in his religion – they couldn't care less about his prayer life – at least not yet.

They wrap up their search, gather in the backroom of the palace to deliver their results and they're all scratching their heads – no doubt – with amazement in their voices – this guy is clean!

Notice the last part of ***verse 4 – and no negligence or corruption was found in him.***

Not only was he a man of integrity in public, he was a man of integrity in private.

I mean, it's one thing to sound honest in public . . . it's another thing to be honest in private.

D. L. Moody once said that character is what a man was like in the dark.

Wouldn't it be great to be like Daniel? How long would someone have to tail us before they found something wrong?

If you want to live [in 2013] like Daniel, confess what you need to confess . . . get right with God where you need to get right . . . make a daily resolution to not be defiled by this kingdom of Babylon and begin living it out today.

The question is, did Daniel know the investigation was taking place? Probably.

So what did these guys do now?

Verse 5. Then these men said, "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God."

In other words, let's figure out a way to use his relationship to God against him.

And they did . . . notice their devious little plan in **verse 6. Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: Darius live forever. 7. All the commissioners of the kingdom, all the prefects and all the dirty little rats – I mean the satraps – we've all consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides, you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den.**

Here's the plan – O King, we're going to make you the god of the month! Nobody can pray to anybody but you for 30 days. And if they dare, they get eaten by the king's lion collection. Now the King is told that they've come in agreement – they're obviously missing one person.

But the king doesn't notice – probably because the word for "agreement" can actually mean "as a group – or, a throng of people".ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, they packed the king's throne room with so many people, so that he would be less likely to notice one missing person.

Let me give you another descriptive word for wisdom, reflected in the life of this truly wise man – personality, integrity, and now . . .

3. Thirdly, consistency

Verse 9. Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction. – follow this – 10. Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times

a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

You need to understand that this was a prayer of faith that the people of God would repent and be allowed to return.

Daniel already knew from the prophecy of Jeremiah that the Jewish captivity would end after 70 years – Daniel is turning that promise into a prayer.^{iv}

Three times a day.

And this decree from the King isn't going to change anything.

I couldn't help but wonder – what does it take to get your prayer life started? What does it take to get it stopped?

Daniel could have decided to have a month of silent prayer; or prayer during the nighttime rather than in the middle of the day.

He could have gone for a noisy cart ride and prayed without being overheard.

He could have decided to skip 30 days of devotions and assume that God would be fine with that . . . after all, he'd been doing this for 75 years . . . what would 30 days hurt?

And he didn't have to open his windows either.

He could have avoided what he knew was a trap!^v

But this was the pattern of Daniel's prayer life – and Daniel refuses to change his pattern even when under pressure.

John Phillips recorded in his commentary on Daniel a personal story from his own struggle during World War II. He writes, "I found myself in a crisis. I had just been drafted into the British army. I found myself sitting on a train, alone except for a friend who had also been drafted. Like myself, he was a professing Christian. It was a dark, cold, blustery night. As the train rattled over the points and roared through the tunnels, I did some thinking. After a while I said to my friend, "Fred, this time tomorrow we'll be in a big barrack room somewhere in Bradford. What are you going to do when it comes time to go to bed? Are you going to say your prayer in bed or down by your bunk?"

He did not hesitate responding – "In bed, of course!" he said.

I retired to my corner and thought some more. I had made a profession of faith at the age of ten and had been drilled in all the basics of the Christ life. I knew, however, that I had no vibrant testimony. I thought back over my high school days; I thought of my past few years in banking. I had been a compromiser. I had managed to jog along showing

one face to my friends at school and my colleagues in the bank and quite another face to my parents and my Christian friends. I [realized] there in that drafty, noisy train that what I had was a secondhand faith, the kind of faith that Lot had who compromised with his world; I needed the faith of Abraham – [and Daniel].

By this time, Fred was sound asleep. I pulled my coat collar up and shrank down into my coat for warmth; and there I prayed, “Lord, I am not proud of my Christian life. I don’t even know if I am a Christian. But here and now I purpose in my heart to let You be the Lord of my life. And I’m going to kneel by my bunk in that barracks tomorrow night. With your help, I’ll be a real Christian from now on.”

John Phillips writes, “I still remember that first day in the army. We were hauled here, there, and everywhere. We were given shots and issued boots. We were offered tasteless army food and documents to sign . . . we were soldiers.

Then bedtime came. I did what I had decided to do. I put my Bible on my bed, and knelt down [by my bunk]. And nothing happened . . . nobody noticed . . . nobody cared. I don’t know whether or what I [really] prayed. I vaguely remember counting up to 50 and saying, “Amen!” that was all right with God – I’m sure, for starters. I had made my statement. I had purposed in my heart.^{vi}

I was going to live for God.

Daniel went into his room and effectively said, “Even though I may lose my life, I will kneel here, perhaps for the last time, and praise and give thanks to my God.”

And the trap was sprung; notice *verse 11. Then these men came by agreement – literally – they thronged into Daniel’s room and found him making petition and supplication before his God.*

And they went running with glee to the king. We’ve caught him – and this time he will not get away.

And Daniel – up in his room – probably prayed just a little longer than usual.

As far as he knew, his life would soon be over.

Not because he was disobedient to God, but because he was obedient; not because he was faithless, but because he was faithful.

James Montgomery Boice wrote, “What Daniel [believed] he practiced openly . . . no retreat . . . no backing off . . . no privatizing convictions . . . he knelt in the sight of Babylon . . . [oh how] we need

more Daniel’s who will open their windows and honor God before a watching world.”^{vii}

No matter what!

Verse 14 records, “Then as soon as the king heard this statement he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him.

In other words, there’s got to be a loophole somewhere . . . besides, the king knew he had been purposefully deceived in order to eliminate the competition – the only honest guy he knew he could trust.

He knew he’d been tricked . . . so there’s got to be a way out.

Verse 15. Then these men came by agreement to the king – there’s that same phrase again – they came in a throng to the king – that’s because they were cowards – Daniel stands alone and these guys can’t move without the herd.

How like the world that blindly follows the crowd; how like the Christian who is willing to stand alone.

Notice here, And they said, “Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”

In other words, there’s no loophole . . . Daniel must be thrown to the lions.

One liberal scholar said that these weren’t real lions – this wasn’t a real lions’ den after all; this was simply poetic language for the fact that this circle of political colleagues had turned into lions, and they were eager to devour Daniel.^{viii}

Daniel would have been happy with that poetry.

This isn’t poetry.

These were real lions – and he expected to be their next meal.

Archeologists have uncovered near eastern lion dens or caverns which were actually open from above. They were dug deep into the earth and could be viewed from above. Steps leading down the side to an opening through which they could deposit a condemned prisoner – which they probably did with Daniel – or they could throw over the edge any number of people, which they will do later with these officials.

The lion’s dens were dug in a square fashion, having a partition wall built down the center which divided the den in half. At the base of the partition wall, was an iron door hinged so that it could be raised and lowered by a rope from above.^{ix}

In this way they could throw food into one side and get all the lions over in that section, close the gate and deposit a prisoner in the other side and once they covered that lower doorway with a boulder they could roll into place, they would go up the stairs to the top, raise the gate and the lions would be free to make their way into that other section and kill and eat the unfortunate victim who had **nowhere to run or hide**.

All day long the king tried to get Daniel out of certain death. He was furious with these officials and he was angry with himself for not looking at the fine print of that injunction.

We're not told what he tried . . . maybe he thought of overfeeding the lions all that day; perhaps he'd thought of covering Daniel with armor from head to toe – but any of that would be seen as an attempt to undermine his own decree. The truth was, only a miracle could save Daniel now.^x

You're saying, "We know, we know . . . he gets out – and angel comes down . . . no . . . slow down . . . I've got 15 minutes – or more.

The very fact that we know the end of the story stunts our powers of observation – and imagination.

Notice verse 16. Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you."

Evidently Darius accompanies Daniel to the den of lions.

Darius is the one who declares the only way out for Daniel – did you notice that in the last part of **verse 16b? Your God whom you just started serving when you found out you were going to die – oh no – your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.**"

But would you notice that Daniel doesn't speak in return? He doesn't say, "Amen to that King – I'm going to believe in miracles down here – God will come through, for sure – I'm declaring my victory even now."

He says nothing . . . why? More than likely Daniel doesn't think he's getting out alive.

Not because God can't, but because God might not.

You see, Daniel wasn't going to make promises God didn't plan to keep. Christians ought to do the same today. Stop putting words in God's mouth.

God *will* deliver Daniel, but He might choose to deliver him through death.

And this 85 year old man was willing to trust his God either way.

So he remains silent . . . and, I believe, fearing for his life.

How brave are you? When's the last time you were afraid?

I can always tell how brave I am by how I respond with noises in the night.

I'm evidently not growing any braver.

I can remember when our children were small – we had recently moved into our first home, after having rented a house in town for a number of years.

Every house has its noises . . . at least that's what we tell ourselves.

We were asleep when a bang and a thump awakened me. It was around midnight. I looked at Marsha, she looked at me with that look that said – "Yea, I heard it too." We stopped breathing and just lay there listening.

Nothing.

About 15 minutes later, about the time we both decided it was a random house noise or a limb scraping the roof – we were surrounded by trees – and we could go back to sleep, suddenly, another boom . . . thump.

I got out of bed and walked over and stood at the bedroom door listening. My wife said, "Why don't you go upstairs and look around . . . it sounds like it's coming from the boy's closet."

Great – that's the scariest place on the planet.

At the time, our boys were with their grandparents in Atlanta – no one was up there . . . it was dark.

I said, "Okay, but I want you to walk out to the living room and stand at the foot of the stairs while I go up there." She said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Absolutely . . . I'm not going to die up there and nobody know about it."

We crept down the hallway and into the dark living room and I went up the stairs, walked through the dark loft and into the boy's room, feeling for the light switch. I found it . . . no sight of anyone; the closet was empty . . . all that was left was to go into their bathroom and open that door that led directly into the attic.

It was the last place to look.

I opened the door . . . reached in, trying to find the string that pulled that light bulb on . . . expecting any moment to have my hand grabbed.

I found it . . . turned on the light . . . nothing.

I lost two years of my life for nothing!

When's the last time you were afraid?

Some of you have truly risked your lives. Some of you have nearly lost your lives.

Was Daniel frightened? Did he drop to his knees in that den? Did he cover his ears to block out the sound of roaring as the lions fought to be the first one through that iron gate?

Did he wonder if it would hurt . . . for how long? Is this the end? He could hear the gate opening . . . he braced for rush of lions and tearing and the pain.

The gate opened.

And suddenly, strangely, the den grew quiet. He may have felt the nuzzle of a nose and heard the rumbling of these giant cats purring as they brushed against him and then lay down.

Only then did Daniel open his eyes . . . he wasn't alone with these lions. There was an angel, sent down to not only bind the lions' mouths, but give him company.

God could have miraculously put those lions to sleep. He could have miraculously turned them into playful cats who wanted nothing more than to play fetch with Daniel – although cats don't play fetch – cats don't play anything – but I digress.

Isn't it interesting that Daniel was not only delivered, but that God gave him some company following perhaps one of the loneliest moments of his life.

At dawn, the king races from his royal bedroom and runs all the way to the den shouting – *verse 20 - "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" 21. Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever!"*

Can you imagine the shock of the king – and all the officials who were trailing him down that corridor?

He's alive!

Now before we notice what Daniel said, imagine for a moment what he might have said.

He could have given the king a lecture – “What do you mean, is my God able – of course he's able, and did you not know that I am his prophet?”

He could have acted really brave, “Oh King . . . there was nothing at all to fear – I've had a great night's sleep – you don't look like you've slept at all!”

He could have acted nonchalant, “Oh King, no problem – and I've gotten to know all these lions – that's Puddles over there and this is Princess and that's Cuddles and . . . I oughtta come down her more often!”

Here's another word to add to wisdom – personality, integrity, consistency and now,

4. Humility

Here's his answer – *verse 22. My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, have committed no crime.*

Just the clear facts, now that the king was in a position to listen; no bragging rights . . . no chip on his shoulder . . . no plans for revenge.

I read about a truck driver who was eating his food in a truck stop - he was rather small in stature - his meal was interrupted when three bikers pulled up - big rough guys in leather - they walked in and ordered their food too. Then they spotted the truck driver and began to tease him because he was small - they tousled his hair - then they took his food away and threw it in the trash. The little fella quietly paid for his food and left. The three bikers laughed and said to the waitress, “He isn't much of a man is he?” She peered out the window and said, “No, and he isn't much of a truck driver either - he just backed over three motorcycles.”

Yea, we like that . . . go get 'em back!

That'll teach 'em!

The king will take care of all of that . . . and the kingdom will never try to trap this king again.

There's one more word that comes to mind in this demonstration of a wise man's life.

It's the word, legacy.

Daniel's legacy is found in the lives of two kings who deliver their personal testimony of faith in the true and living God of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar and now Darius here in *verse 26; For the God of Daniel is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever.*

Cyrus will meet Daniel as well and issue the first of several decrees to allow the Jewish people to leave captivity and return to Jerusalem.

There will be 3 more decrees over time.

Daniel prophesied a staggering prophecy in chapter 9 that when the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem begins to actually take place, 483 years after that, Messiah the Prince will come.

That famous decree is finally issued by the Persian King Artaxerxes Longimanus. And in that

decree he actually commissions a man by the name of Nehemiah to go back and rebuild.^{xi}

That decree was signed in 445 B.C. Exactly 483 years later – to the very day – Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt as people shouted ***Hosanna, blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.***” (Mark 11:10).

They are shouting – the Prince has arrived.

But ***Daniel chapter 9 and verse 25*** also prophesies that the Messiah will be cut off suddenly. In other words, He’ll die.

Isaiah prophesied the same – and filled in the blanks. After a few days of riding into Jerusalem, the Messiah will die to pay for the sins of all the ***sheep who’ve gone astray (Isaiah 53:6).***

There’s more.

Daniel’s legacy and prophesies continued for generations until the Magi – the Wise men he once led and taught – men, by the way who were not among these officials who tried to have him killed.

No, he was revered by all of them at the time of his death.

Centuries later, from the kingdom of the East – from Persia – Matthew’s Gospel informs us, a group of Magi appear in Jerusalem, having traveled for nearly a year, asking, ***“Where is He who has been born, King of the Jews.”***

Where is the Prince whom Daniel, the Master of the Magi, spoke of . . . ***for we have come to worship Him? (Matthew 2:2)***

They were prepared for His coming. And they were already believers, ready to worship the Prince – their Messiah.

And Matthew records they found the house (οικια) where Mary and the Jesus were – not a stable – a house (2:11); and he’s not a baby – Matthew calls him a child – a paidion (παιδιον) – a toddler. Jesus would have been, by the time of their arrival at least a year old – maybe more.

And they presented Him with their gifts – these king makers from Persia had come to crown the Prince an heir to the throne of David.

And from whom did they learn to anticipate the coming Prince?

From a wise man named Daniel whose legacy spanned the Testaments, Old and New; a man who demonstrated wisdom in his personality; his integrity; his consistency; his humility and his legacy.

Now you might be tempted to think that Daniel had it made. Every king who came along ended up promoting him.

Listen, Daniel was never allowed by God to return home. He never went back to the place toward which he prayed – and for the people there for whom he prayed – three times a day.

And God’s answer was always the same – Daniel – I want you to stay here, in the courts of Babylon and Persia and not only provide a model of wisdom, but deliver the truth of a coming Messiah . . . and even beyond to a coming kingdom.

Which will include all of us – by the way – who have also crowned this Prince as our Lord and as our Messiah.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/23/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i Frank E. Gabelein, ed: The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 7 (Zondervan, 1985), p. 76

ii Sharon Pace, Daniel (Smyth & Helwys, 2008), p. 200

iii Expositor’s Bible Commentary, p. 79

iv Warren Wiersbe, Daniel: Be Resolute (Victor, 2000), p. 76

v Renald Showers, The Most High God (Friends of Israel, 2002), p. 67

vi John Phillips, Exploring the Book of Daniel (Kregel, 2004), p. 35

vii James Montgomery Boice, Daniel: An Expositional Commentary (Baker Books, 2007), p. 71

viii Pace, p. 211

ix Adapted from C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 9, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 216

x Expositors Bible Commentary, p. 81

xi Phillips, p. 169