

# Chapter 5

## Daniel 6 – The Question of Loyalty

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**“I issue 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. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.’”**

– Daniel 6:26,27

Someone once said that loyalty is like the juice of an orange – the flavor cannot be determined until the orange is squeezed beyond the breaking point. The Bible testifies to the truthfulness of this statement. Loyalty is one of the most powerful forces within the human heart. Loyalty can produce good results, and misplaced loyalty can produce evil results. For example: Judas Iscariot was loyal to his dreams of self-importance, power and wealth. When he realized that following Jesus would not fulfill *his* dreams, he betrayed Jesus for the equivalent of \$12.60 (thirty pieces of silver). King David was loyal to *his* passions for Bathsheba. To cover up their illicit affair and the resulting pregnancy, the king killed her husband. David’s crime was especially heinous because Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, was one of the thirty-seven gallant men who defended David during his days of hiding from King Saul. Peter swore loyalty to Jesus in the garden, but when he learned that he might have to share a martyr’s death with Jesus, he denied that he knew The Master. The Philippian jailer was loyal to his job until an earthquake destroyed his jail. When he realized his life was in jeopardy, he suddenly experienced a change of heart. Saul was loyal to his religion. He faithfully persecuted Christians until Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. Afterwards, Paul maintained unwavering loyalty to Jesus and he suffered persecution from Jews and Romans alike for preaching salvation through Jesus

Christ. Legend says that Nero sentenced Paul to death because Paul refused to renounce his loyalty to Jesus and worship Caesar. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chose to be loyal to the God of Heaven rather than worship the golden image, and King Nebuchadnezzar threw them into a fiery furnace. John the Baptist was loyal to God's righteousness when he told King Herod that living with his brother's wife was a sin. John's remarks cost him his life. Jonathan was loyal to David instead of his father, King Saul. Jonathan was almost killed because of his loyalty to David. Jeremiah was loyal to the Lord when he told Israel all that the Lord had said about their apostasy. The Jews threw Jeremiah into a cistern to die. Job's loyalty to God was tested with some of the harshest suffering ever recorded, but Job was more blessed in the end than at the beginning. Noah was loyal to God's command and he suffered an incredible amount of ridicule, but his loyalty and faith saved his family. Ruth was loyal to Naomi and chose to suffer poverty with her, but Ruth's loyalty to Naomi made her an ancestor of Jesus. Because she feared God, Rahab, the prostitute, was loyal to the spies that entered Jericho and she saved her family. Queen Esther was loyal to her people and ultimately saved them from destruction. The prophet Daniel chose to defy the decree of the king by openly praying toward Jerusalem, and for this act of rebellion, he was thrown into the lions' den. Webster says that loyalty means being constant and faithful, bearing true allegiance to something. Every human being has loyalties, but the essential question is, "To what or whom are we loyal?" *Our deepest loyalties are revealed when we are forced into making a decision that favors one loyalty and harms others.* Until we are put to the test, it is impossible to say where our deepest loyalties really lie. This is the sobering point that Peter learned after the rooster crowed the third time.

### **Daniel: A Prisoner of War**

For centuries, Christians have repeated the story of Daniel's escape from the lions' den, but few people know the whole story that surrounds this incident. As we will see, Daniel's loyalty to God had a profound impact on two nations! I would like to present this story with the necessary background information so that (a) you can "stand in Daniel's sandals" and consider the importance of loyalty to God, and (b) Daniel 9 will make a lot more sense.

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Daniel was taken to Babylon as a prisoner of war as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's first siege on Jerusalem in 605 B.C. It is believed that Daniel was about 17 or 18 years of age. It was King Nebuchadnezzar's policy to take the brightest captives and enroll them in an academy to prepare them for government service. The king had wisely established a school to train captives from various tribal nations, so the captives could return to their homeland and serve the empire of Babylon as rulers *loyal* to the interests of the king of Babylon. This is why Daniel and some of his friends were inducted into the king's academy. The book of Daniel begins with Daniel and his closest friends asking the king's steward if they could be excused from eating at the king's table. They wanted to maintain a more simple, vegetarian diet, but the steward refused this first request. He was sure that Daniel and his friends would become sick and feeble if they ate nothing but vegetables and water. If they became sick on his watch, he could lose his job or possibly his head! Daniel persisted and the steward gave in. When it came time for the king to test the trainees, Daniel and his friends were found to be at the top of their class. In fact, the Bible says their knowledge was ten times better than their fellow students. (Daniel 1:20) Do you think the success of Daniel and his friends had anything to do with their diet and their loyalty to God?

A short time later, Daniel gained world-wide recognition when God used him to interpret a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 2) As a result of that incident, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to a very high government position and all the *wise* men of Babylon reported to him. Do you think Daniel's lofty promotion had anything to do with his loyalty to God?

### **Why Was Daniel Sent to Babylon?**

Historians tell us that Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem three times. He finally destroyed the city in 586 B.C., because Israel's kings refused to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's "higher" authority. In actuality, God destroyed Jerusalem with Nebuchadnezzar's sword, and He put the Jews in captivity for seventy years because Israel refused to submit to His "higher" authority. The Bible carefully justifies God's wrath on Israel. To understand God's wrath, we have to start with a conversation between God and Moses. Carefully review these texts:

### 1. Sabbath Rest Required for the Land - Leviticus 25

A few weeks after the Exodus, **“The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.’”** (Leviticus 25:1-5) This text is self explanatory. God required the land to rest every seventh year. Why would any nation refuse a year’s vacation every seventh year? The Lord continues, **“You may ask, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?’ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.”** (Leviticus 25:20-22) There is a profound point in these verses: God promised to send a bumper crop every sixth year so there would be enough food to observe a year of rest! Contrary to what many scholars say, the Sabbath rest for the land was not for agricultural purposes. In fact, God made the land produce its greatest harvest during the sixth year – when the land was in its most exhausted condition! The first lesson to be learned from the Sabbath year is simple. God established the Sabbath year rest *to test* His people. Would Israel be loyal or rebellious? (See Exodus 16 for a parallel test concerning the seventh day.)

### 2. “If You Don’t Keep My Sabbath Years” - Leviticus 26

God warned Israel: **“If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. . . . I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will**

lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.” (Leviticus 26:27,28,31-35, insertion mine) A person does not have to be a rocket scientist to understand these words. God said His land was going to rest, with or without Israel. God wanted His people to understand a profound truth: “. . . [The Lord said] **the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.**” (Leviticus 25:23, insertion mine) God wanted Israel to know that their occupation of His land was conditional on their steadfast loyalty to Him. (Leviticus 18; Deuteronomy 28)

### 3. Because You Have Rebelled - Jeremiah 25

The Old Testament indicates over and over again that Israel did not remain loyal to God. Their cup of grace overflowed with rebellion and around 615 B.C., God gave a message to Jeremiah. He said, “**I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will make it desolate forever.’**” (Jeremiah 25:9-12) Notice three things: First, God called King Nebuchadnezzar “my servant.” This is an important concept. God chose a pagan king to be His agent of wrath against Jerusalem. (Parallel: The Antichrist, the modern king of Babylon, will be God’s agent of wrath during the Great Tribulation.) Second, God said that Jerusalem would be destroyed and Israel would be captives in Babylon for seventy years. Third, God said that Babylon would eventually be destroyed for the same sins as Jerusalem.

#### 4. 430 Years of Rebellion

During the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, God raised up two prophets. Ezekiel was a prisoner of war like Daniel, but Ezekiel lived among the captives while Daniel lived in the ivory halls of power. Ezekiel was timid and afraid of public speaking, so the Lord prompted him to “act out” various signs for the elders of Israel to watch. Notice this sign: “. . . **This will be a sign to the house of Israel. . . [Ezekiel] lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. ‘After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.’**” (Ezekiel 4:3,6, insertion mine)

This text is important because we find the length of rebellion to be a total of 430 years. (390 + 40 = 430) This number should catch the attention of the reader, because it is the same number of years mentioned in Exodus 12:41. These two separate and distinct instances of 430 years have three things in common: apostasy, timing and vigil. First, the apostasy of the Israelites in Egypt is no different than the apostasy of the Israelites in the promised land of Canaan! Apostasy is the direction of fallen man. Second, God’s timing was perfect in both instances. The Bible says that God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery exactly 430 years later, *to the very day*. (Exodus 12:41) If God delivered Israel from Egypt on time, then it should come as no surprise that He sent them into captivity on time as well. It should be noted that when Israel had filled up their cup of iniquity by violating seventy Sabbath years, God sent them into captivity! How do we know this? Ezekiel performed the “430 day” sign for the elders of Israel, because they knew there are seventy Sabbatical years in 430 years. In other words, the Babylonian captivity was seventy years in length because that is the exact number of Sabbath years Israel violated. Remember God’s threat in Leviticus 26:34,35? **“Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the**

**Sabbaths you lived in it.”** This text points to a significant parallel between these 430 year periods. Third, God keeps vigil. He does not sleep. He is very much aware of everything that takes place on Earth and He steps into the affairs of men when the timing is perfect. He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt on time, and He sent Israel into captivity in Babylon on time! Even more, the next text demonstrates that God delivered Israel from captivity right on time!

### 5. Prophecy Fulfilled

The Bible says, **“God handed all of them [the Jews] over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”** (2 Chronicles 36:17-21, insertion mine) Again, the reason for the Babylonian captivity is simple and obvious. God handed Israel over to Nebuchadnezzar because of disloyalty. Israel refused to keep His Sabbath days and His Sabbath years, so He evicted them and the land rested for seventy years.

### Zooming Forward

Now that we understand *why* the Jews were sent to Babylon, we can zoom forward to the fall of Babylon. Historians say Babylon fell on Tishri 16 (around October 13), 539 B.C. Darius began to rule over the province of Babylon during that year (his ascension year), so Darius’ first calendar year (according to the religious calendar of the Jews) was 538/7 B.C. The first year of Darius’ reign was Daniel’s sixty-eighth year in captivity. Daniel knew the end of captivity in Babylon was near. Daniel and his contemporaries knew that Jerusalem had been besieged during the Sabbath year of 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 34:12-21), and Daniel knew the seventy years of desolation decreed upon Jerusalem (Daniel 9:2) would have to end during a Friday year. (Counting inclusively, 605 B.C. minus 536 B.C.

equals seventy years, which is ten weeks of seven years.)

**Note:** When God established the weekly cycle of seven years at the time of the Exodus, God required Israel to set their slaves free at the beginning of the seventh year. The seventh or Sabbath year was observed as a year of freedom from the bondage of slavery. (See Exodus 21:2 and Jeremiah 34:14-16.) Daniel knew of God's requirements, and he understood the operation and synchrony of the Jubilee Calendar. In fact, God used the synchrony and operation of the Jubilee Calendar in Daniel 9 to pinpoint the year of Messiah's death (in the middle year of the week of seven years – Daniel 9:27).

### **The Political Situation in Daniel's Sixty-eighth Year**

It was most unusual in ancient times for a conquering king to give a prisoner of war a position of high authority in his government. The possibility of treason or rebellion was just too great. Incredible as it was, this happened to Daniel three times. Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel interpreted his dream. Belteshazzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel read the handwriting on the wall. Finally, Darius promoted Daniel to one of the highest positions in the kingdom when Darius became king. Do you think Daniel's promotions had anything to do with his loyalty to God?

Daniel must have believed that God placed him in a very powerful political position within the government of Darius so that *he, Daniel*, might facilitate Israel's release from captivity. However, Daniel was nearing ninety years of age, and he knew that if he acted on his own, he might interfere with God's marvelous ways as Moses did when he wrongfully killed the Egyptian. (Exodus 2:11-14) Daniel also knew that if any of his actions backfired, many Jews would suffer, as in the days when Moses and Aaron ordered the Hebrew slaves to rest from their weekly labors before the Exodus. (Exodus 5:5) Daniel was aware that he would dishonor God if his actions to free his people aroused suspicion, jealousy or any hint of rebellion against the Medes and Persians. Many of the Chaldeans intensely hated the Jews, and any move on Daniel's part to free his people would probably be construed as treason. If Daniel was convicted in a court of public opinion, he knew the punishment was sudden death.

**Note:** Hatred for the Jews erupted throughout the Persian kingdom



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about seventy years after Daniel died. The noble, Haman, obtained a universal death decree from King Artaxerxes for all Jews in the Persian kingdom, but God used a strategically-placed Queen Esther to save His people.

Daniel's dilemma also had other ramifications. During the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews multiplied and integrated into the province of Babylon. In some cities, the Jews prospered, while others remained servants or slaves of the Chaldeans. When Darius began his reign over Babylon, most of the original captives from Jerusalem had died. Therefore, the next generation had little attachment to Jerusalem, a place they had not seen. In fact, when King Cyrus set the Jews free in 536 B.C., Ezra 2 indicates that a small minority of captives, 29,818 Jewish males, returned to Jerusalem.

### **Political and Economic Problems**

Daniel knew the emancipation of his people after seventy years in Babylon could cause many problems for King Darius. If large numbers of Chaldeans lost their slaves, financial losses could destabilize the economy and produce social unrest. Daniel was also aware that during the seventy years of desolation, tribal nations had moved into Jerusalem and a *returning* Israel would be embroiled in wars and land disputes unless there was a royal land grant decreed by the king who ruled over the territory of Canaan. So, any decree that freed the Jews from the province of Babylon would also require a land grant by King Cyrus, who ruled over Canaan. Daniel's desire, of course, was that his people would recover the land they had lost, but the political and economic problems of setting Israel free greatly perplexed Daniel. What could *he* do to facilitate the freedom of his people? Even if they were set free, how would he motivate a majority of the Jews to return to Jerusalem? Daniel's mind must have churned over these issues for months. As a high government official, he saw how a significant exodus from Babylon could be a political nightmare.

### **Jealousy Knows No Bounds**

From Daniel's point of view, the upcoming seventieth year, 536/5 B.C., would not be a very good year to attempt the release of the Jews. Even though Daniel held one of the highest positions in the

empire, Darius was a new king over the province of Babylon. This meant a new administration was in place adhering to a new set of laws and a new corporate attitude, which included a large group of powerful nobles who hated the Jews. As Daniel pondered his helpless position, it became apparent to him that Israel's deliverance from slavery would have to be an "Act of God," a miracle as great as the Exodus from Egypt. To his credit, Daniel faithfully carried out his responsibilities within Darius' administration, and Darius came to explicitly trust his elder statesman. The Bible says of this time period, **"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."** (Daniel 6:3)

Sometime during Darius' first calendar year (538/7 B.C.), Daniel decided the best thing he could do was seek God's wisdom through fasting, praying and wearing sackcloth and ashes. Time was running out! The seventieth year was approaching fast. So, Daniel sought the Lord in utter humility to see what God wanted of him. To be seen in sackcloth and ashes was a sign of mourning or extreme humiliation. To the Medes and Persians, Daniel's appearance must have been very odd since he usually wore clothing appropriate for his exalted office. Regardless, Daniel embarrassed (humbled) himself before God as a man in sackcloth and ashes, demonstrating that God could use him in whatever meaningful or menial way God desired.

Unbeknown to Daniel, King Darius had planned to promote Daniel above the other two governors of his empire. Evidently, Darius decided to do this because he had contracted a degenerating health problem. Darius favored Daniel because Daniel was "pure in heart," a very unusual quality among people in political office. Darius also wanted to make Daniel, "the Jew," his number two man in the kingdom because this would strategically protect his throne when he became too weak to meet the day-to-day needs of his office. Unlike the other two administrators, Darius knew Daniel would be loyal to him instead of an inner or hidden ambition to acquire his throne. Darius knew that even an intelligent Jew could not aspire to be king over an empire of Medes. By putting Daniel in the number two seat, Darius knew his throne would be safe from the schemes of ambitious politicians and administrators.

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Somehow, Darius' plans were leaked to the two administrators, and they were filled with jealousy and rage. No self respecting Mede or Persian would be subject to a Jew! Jealousy and hatred for Daniel, "the Jew," led them to search for anything they could use to mar Daniel's reputation and disqualify him from such a position of honor. They closely studied Daniel's personal history, conducted interviews and audited his finances trying to find a flaw in his character. They were unable to find anything. The Bible says, **"At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'"** (Daniel 6:4,5) Given the hatred and determination of his enemies, and the notorious behavior of politicians down through the ages, these are amazing words coming from their lips!

### Putting the Squeeze on Daniel

Finally, the administrators and satraps concluded that the only way to stop Darius from promoting Daniel was to *prove* to Darius that Daniel's loyalty to his "Jewish" God was higher than his loyalty to Darius. They figured the question of loyalty would prove their point. When it comes to politics, kings have to be gods. Their ego and government rests upon nothing less than total submission and devotion to their will. If no one respects the king, how can he be king? Therefore, "loyalty tests" were sometimes used by ancient kings to ferret out people with bad attitudes. This may explain why Darius did not quibble or hesitate to issue a loyalty decree. Loyalty tests were simple: During the specified month, suspects were arraigned and questioned before a court of political leaders. If the suspect freely confessed allegiance to the king as his highest authority on Earth, the suspect would then affirm his loyalty to the king by swearing an oath. However, if the suspect was hostile toward the king or plotting rebellion, a "loyalty test" became a life and death issue, even though the suspect may not have been caught doing anything wrong. This is why loyalty tests were so effective. If the suspect refused to take an oath affirming his allegiance and submission to the king, he was declared a rebel and killed

immediately. On the other hand, if he lied about his allegiance to the king and gave an oath of loyalty, his sympathizers would see that the suspect was a common coward and a liar. Who could respect such a disgusting person? This technique for testing loyalty was simple and effective. Incidentally, the Caesars also used loyalty tests. Thousands of Christians perished because they would not bow down before the “man-god,” Caesar. (John 19:15; Romans 10:9) During the Great Tribulation, God will use a simple loyalty test. A test of worship will put the “squeeze” on every person and our deepest loyalties will be “squeezed out” for everyone to see. (See Revelation 13:8-18.)

### **The Perfect Plot**

The crafty administrators asked Darius for permission to conduct a “loyalty check” for three reasons: First, a loyalty test was a well-known tactic. Since the province of Babylon was a new territory for Darius, a loyalty test appeared to be a “good idea” to eliminate those who might be rebellious. Second, if Daniel should slip through the thirty-day decree trap, Darius would never know the real motives behind the administrators’ request for the loyalty test. Third, if Daniel was caught in their trap, he would be “legally” killed because the law demanded the sudden death of anyone caught in rebellion against the king. If Daniel was destroyed, the administrators would not be implicated in Daniel’s death. The “loyalty test” seemed like the perfect way to eliminate Daniel, or so they thought.

When the administrators asked the king for a loyalty decree, they must have known that Darius did not know about Daniel’s current state of humiliation. If Darius had been aware of Daniel’s behavior, praying to his God three times a day in sackcloth and ashes, this knowledge would have foiled their plot. **“So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ So King Darius put the decree in writing.”** (Daniel 6:6-9)

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### Daniel Springs the Trap

**“Now 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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: ‘Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’ The king answered, ‘The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ Then they said to the king, ‘Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.’ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.” (Daniel 6:10-14)**

Did you notice how fast Daniel *willfully* disobeyed the king’s decree? Why did one of the kingdom’s highest officials publicly defy the law of the king? The answer lies in the fact that Daniel understood the motives and reasons behind the *loyalty test*. Daniel remembered his three friends and their fiery furnace test, and he knew he was being tested just like them. Evidently, notification of the decree came suddenly and without warning to Daniel. I find it interesting that Daniel did not go to his immediate superior, King Darius and plead his case! When Daniel learned of the loyalty test, he ran to (not from) his prayer room. This action says volumes about Daniel’s loyalty to the God of Heaven!

When Daniel humbled himself by wearing sackcloth and ashes, Daniel’s heart was ready and willing to submit, even to death, if that was God’s will. Daniel was willing to do *anything* God required of him to facilitate the release of his people. Daniel’s loyalty to God was extraordinary and God’s approval of Daniel was amazing. In fact, Daniel’s loyalty became the very tool that God used to glorify His name before the Medes and Persians so that He could deliver the Jews from captivity! If the plot to kill Daniel was clever, God’s use of the situation was even more so. God used the administrators’

hatred of Daniel, Darius' affection for Daniel, Daniel's loyalty, and ultimately, the lion's den to set Israel free from slavery. Watch how these elements combined to accomplish God's plan.

### **King Darius Humiliated**

The next morning, “. . . the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!' A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.” (Daniel 6:16-18)

Daniel was quickly arraigned before King Darius. When the king saw his elder statesman in sackcloth and ashes, he became furious with his administrators. He saw through their plot immediately. Daniel, “the Jew,” was no rebel and Darius knew it. In fact, Daniel was the only administrator the king could trust! According to law, however, Daniel was subjected to the usual “loyalty” interrogation, and without hesitation, Daniel confessed to praying to his God three times a day. Daniel did not offer excuses, plead his case or beg for his life. Even more importantly, he did not swear an oath of loyalty to King Darius as his highest authority. King Darius churned with grief and anger. He condemned himself all night for failing to consider the intense hatred his administrators had for Daniel, “the Jew.” How ironic the twist of events. Darius was planning to promote Daniel, but now he would have to kill him instead. Darius knew Daniel was unjustly condemned, but not even the king himself could change the law of the Medes and Persians. With these words, **“May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”** Darius bade farewell to Daniel. The king gave the order and with his own ring and the rings of those who hated the Jew, Darius issued the judgment requiring Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel was at peace. Darius was in torment and the administrators were on their way to a secret celebration party.

**King Darius Exhilarated**

**“At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?’ Daniel answered, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.’ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: ‘May you prosper greatly! I issue 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. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius [the Mede] and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”** (Daniel 6:19-28, insertion mine) Thoughtfully consider the profound experience of Darius that morning. Upon hearing Daniel’s voice, a pagan king was given every reason to put his faith in the God of Daniel. The tomb was opened and “a dead man” walked out! The king immediately issued another decree requiring every person in his kingdom to fear and reverence the God of Daniel, “the Jew.” The news about Daniel’s miraculous deliverance was told everywhere! When the intense hatred of the Chaldeans for the Jews is considered, the significance of Darius’ actions really stands out. Because of Daniel’s loyalty, the God of Heaven was exalted to the highest position by a heathen king! This demonstrates an interesting point that all religious people would do well to

remember. *The objective of serving the God of Heaven is to bring honor and glory to God, not to the superiority of one's religion.*

### **Israel Set Free**

The story of Daniel's miraculous deliverance, and the immediate destruction of his enemies by the *same* lions that refused to eat him has been closely examined in this book for some important reasons. First, remember that God's timing is *always* perfect! Evidently, the lions' den episode happened during Darius' first year, 538/7 B.C. This allowed time for Darius to become acquainted with Daniel and to develop such confidence in him that he wanted to make him the number two man in his kingdom. As we are about to see, the timing of the lions' den event is too perfect to be a coincidence!

God used the hatred of the administrators and the loyalty of Daniel in a way that no one could have anticipated. I believe the events unfolded as follows: When Daniel sought the Lord in sackcloth and ashes for instructions on what he should do to facilitate the deliverance of Israel, God heard Daniel's prayer and gave him something that he did not know he was about to need. God gave Daniel *peace* in the face of death. This peace is reflected in Daniel's courageous action after he learned about the law. God did not give Daniel wisdom to outfox the evil administrators, and God did not rain down plagues on Babylon like He did in Egypt. God had a better plan in mind.

After Daniel violated the king's law, God rewarded Daniel's loyalty with protection and enormous notoriety. (Who else has spent a night in a den of wild and ravenous lions and lived to tell about it?) Simultaneously, God eliminated an enormous obstacle that stood in the way of delivering His people. God granted Darius a *legal* opportunity to purge his government of men who were disloyal to the higher interests of their king. Politically speaking, the death of these administrators made releasing the Jews a manageable problem for the king, even though Darius did not know the Jews were about to be set free. After Darius destroyed the administrators who hated Daniel, the king promoted Daniel to the number two position in his kingdom and no one dared to complain!

Evidently, King Darius died soon after this event (the following year) and King Cyrus (the Persian) absorbed the territory of Darius



into his expanding kingdom. Therefore, the ascension year of Cyrus over the province of Babylon was 537/6 B.C., and his first calendar year was 536/5 B.C. Because of Daniel's notoriety from the lions' den event and because he was the highest official in Darius' kingdom, Daniel became well acquainted with King Cyrus during his ascension year. During 536/5 B.C., which was the final year or seventieth year of captivity, King Cyrus met with Daniel, and Daniel informed the Persian king that the God of Heaven had chosen Cyrus to be a great king before he was even born. Daniel showed Cyrus the writings of the prophet Isaiah, where Cyrus is called *by name* in Scripture a hundred years before Cyrus was born. (Isaiah 45:1-4) When Daniel explained to King Cyrus why he was fasting and praying – the behavior that ultimately sent him to the lions' den – the king's heart was moved at the loyalty and devotion of this elderly man to the Supreme God over Heaven and Earth.

Daniel told Cyrus that the God of Heaven had appointed the Persian king to set the Jews free, "without price or reward," (Isaiah 45:13) for the purpose of rebuilding His temple. Cyrus was honored to learn of God's approval and blessings, and he issued the decree in Daniel's presence during the seventieth year, a Friday year, in 536/5 B.C. Free at last! Israel was free to enter Canaan a second time. It is interesting to note that Israel's first full year in Canaan after the Babylonian captivity was a Sabbath year. This beautifully parallels their first full year in Canaan after Joshua led them across the Jordan into the Promised Land. In both instances, the slaves had been set free to enjoy the Sabbath year in the Promised Land. The Bible says, **"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem." ' "**" (Ezra 1:1-3) The timing could not have been more perfect. The decree of Cyrus ended seventy years of captivity (counting inclusively). It is amazing how God took Daniel through

the lions' den so that he could present God's will to a pagan king who controlled the province of Babylon, as well as the territory of Canaan. This decree was only possible because Cyrus ruled over the province of Babylon where the Jews were captives, as well as the territory of Judea where Jerusalem was located. God solved the political and economic problems. God's timing is so perfect. His ways are so magnificent! Remember, God required slaves to be released at the end of the Friday year (the sixth year), and this is exactly what He did for the nation of Israel. The captives were emancipated from slavery in 536 B.C., a Friday year.

### Calendar of Events

#### Julian Years

1	2	3	4	
January	January	January	January	
539 B.C.	538 B.C.	537 B.C.	536 B.C.	535 B.C.
Tuesday Year	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday Year	
Spring	Spring	Spring	Spring	

#### Jewish Years

Chart 5.1

1. **Babylon falls, ascension year for Darius**
2. **First year for Darius, lions' den**
3. **Darius dies, ascension year for Cyrus**
4. **First year for Cyrus, frees the Jews**

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**Note:** There are three good reasons for concluding that the Darius discussed in Daniel 6 died in 537\* B.C. First, even though they were contemporary kings, Darius and Cyrus did not rule over the province of Babylon at the same time. History reveals that Babylon fell in 539 B.C. The Bible says that Cyrus, in the *first year* of his reign, which was the seventieth year of Israel’s captivity, issued a decree restoring the Jews to their land. **“The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing. . . .”** (2 Chronicles 36:21,22) If the seventy years in Jeremiah 25:11 began in the year 605 B.C. as most historians say, the decree of Cyrus had to be issued in the Friday year, 536 B.C. Israel’s first full year in their homeland was a Sabbath year. (This timing is consistent with God’s command that slaves were to be set free for the Sabbath year rest. Jeremiah 34:14) The count of years and actions of the kings easily align in this case. Babylon fell in 539 B.C. and Darius died in 537 B.C. Cyrus’ ascension year over the province of Babylon was 537 B.C. and his first year as king was Friday year, 536 B.C., the year he wrote the decree.

Second, history also reveals that Cyrus had been a Persian king for more than twenty years before he began to rule over the province of Babylon. For Cyrus to have “a first year” as king over the province of Babylon in 536 B.C., Darius had to vacate the throne by dying in 537 B.C. The Bible confirms that Daniel served under these two kings saying, **“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”** (Daniel 6:28) Of course, this text could also be interpreted to mean that Daniel prospered during the co-regent reign of both kings. The problem with this argument is that Daniel could not prosper under a king who did not rule over Babylon until the death of Darius in 537 B.C.

The third reason for concluding that Darius died shortly after taking office as king of Babylon comes from written history. The Nabonidus Chronicle, a cuneiform document which describes the fall of Babylon, indicates that an elderly man, Ugbaru, the governor of Gutium, entered Babylon without a battle on Tishri 16 (the seventh

month of a year in a Spring-to-Spring year). Daniel 5:31 says Darius was 62 years old when he took over the kingdom of Babylon. The Chronicle also indicates that Ugbaru installed satraps to govern the province of Babylon. The Bible says, **“It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom.”** (Daniel 6:1) The Chronicle says that Ugbaru died soon after he began to reign. He died on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Arahshamnu (the Jewish equivalent to Adar, the twelfth month of a Spring-to-Spring year). The province of Babylon mourned his royal death for seven days. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, Cyrus appointed Gubaru as governor over Babylon after Ugbaru died and Gubaru evidently assumed the name “Darius.” The Bible and other historical documents indicate the second Darius ruled for several years. For example, **“The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.”** (Ezra 6:15)

When all of the pieces of history are brought together, there is one explanation that resolves the puzzle. Once the reign of the kings is determined and once we understand that two men, Ugbaru and Gubaru, both using the name “Darius,” ruled in Babylon during this time-frame, the actions and dates given in the Bible fall into perfect harmony.

\*For purposes of discussion, the years mentioned in this addendum are singular instead of defined as 538/7 B.C.