

# DANIEL — WEEK 7

## AGENDAS: GOD'S AND OTHERS



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## The cover image is Daniel in the Lions' Den by Peter Paul Rubens

Belshazzar never humbles himself, so he's out. Darius comes in and everything starts all over. Darius likes Daniel for his good work, but all the other staff hate him for the same reason. So, they hatch this astonishingly evil—and stupid— plan to take him out.

They have no clue what they're doing.

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Daniel, Week 7 — Agendas: God's and Others  
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1 Daniel 5:18–23

*“O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.*

*“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.”*

Daniel’s explanation of the writing on the wall sure takes its time getting around to talking about the writing. He just said, *“I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.”* Okay, but this isn’t that. What’s the point of giving all this background?

Daniel isn’t explaining what the writing says; he’s explaining why it’s there. He sounds like a judge reading his decision. This is the verdict. The sentencing will come next—when he explains the writing.

Daniel is the judge, or at least the judge’s mouthpiece. That’s why he has the chutzpah to just blurt out a harsh verdict on a king who has the power to have him beheaded.

And notice how Daniel brackets his verdict. The key is the word “not.” *“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this ... and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.”*

What Belshazzar did was bad, but the real crime is what he didn’t do.

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Life is a trail of mistakes. We’re all sinners and we do dumb stuff quite often, but redeemed sinners aren’t like Belshazzar because we do the one thing that Belshazzar didn’t do. When we mess up, we recognize it as messing up.

This is the key to being comfortable with yourself as a Christian. If you expect to be perfect now that you’re saved, you’ll go crazy trying to measure up.

*Real spiritual growth is always growth downward, so to speak, into profounder humility, which in healthy souls will become more and more apparent as they age. — J.I. Packer*

2 Daniel 5:24–31

*“Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.*

*“And this is the inscription that was written:*

*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

*This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

Belshazzar seems to understand the value of what Daniel says, yet does nothing of substance in response. Reread all of Chapter 5 in one sitting and you'll notice a creepy “nobody's home” feel to Belshazzar's behavior. What's wrong with him?

This might be the best illustration of the relationship between faith and works in the whole Bible. Belshazzar's behavior looks like overacting. Everything he does is exaggerated, as if he's on stage. He knows everyone is watching him, and he's playing to his audience.

It's as if he is pretending to be a king.

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*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.” — Matthew 6:5a*

The Greek word, “hypocrite” literally means “actor”—a thespian. Jesus is leveling a withering criticism at these “prayer performers.” He's saying that they're just play acting.

But note that Jesus gives this instruction to believers. We need to be told not to be phony because phoniness is ingrained in our sinful nature. People are experts at being phony—pretending to be happy when they're sad, pretending to be rich when they're poor, pretending to believe when they don't. Phoniness is so pervasive that we don't even see it. Sin gives us an overwhelming power of pretense and self-delusion. This is what the classic tale *“The Emperor's New Clothes”* is all about.

The whole book of James is saying (to some people), “You think you're a believer, but you're not.” This isn't just about fooling other people; it's about fooling ourselves.

Rebirth in Christ is birth into a life of genuineness. Phoniness is at the core of what we repent *of*. When we quit trying to fool the world and ourselves about who and what we are, our works become real.

3 Daniel 6:1–5

*It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”*

For the next few devotionals, we will watch pure evil at work. These *governors and satraps* hate Daniel, not because he’s a Hebrew, but because he’s outperforming them. They simply resent his excellence. So, they will hatch a plan that doesn’t just take him down a peg; it’s a plot to kill him—all for the “crime” of doing good work.

But evil this great always has a spiritual element, and this is no exception. The officials could easily have framed Daniel any number of ways, but they insist on getting God involved. Pay attention to the bizarre way this takes shape.

*So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.*

So what? Who needs a legitimate reason to charge Daniel? These guys haven’t got an ethical bone in their bodies. They could just set him up with something bogus.

But no. It just has to involve “*his God*.” “*We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.*”

That is not a coincidence. The real force behind this plot is spiritual.

The battle will not be fought strictly on physical turf.

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As we watch this story unfold, be on the lookout for the stamp of spiritual evil. Also note the actions of the “useful idiots” who are under its spell.

Most importantly, watch how God’s agenda is on a different plane than their agenda and how His agenda stays on track the whole time while theirs does not.

The devil and his minions hate God first, and people second. They might hate servants of God more than everybody else, but they want everyone to suffer.

Thus, the useful idiots are more than just disposable; the forces of evil want them dead.

4 Daniel 6:6–9

*So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: “King Darius, live forever! All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.*

If Darius really knew his favorite governor (or his faith), he would never have signed this decree. The other governors and satraps can lay this trap because they know about Daniel’s prayer life and about his absolute commitment to it.

But Darius doesn’t. The history of Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar must not have been known to the invading Medes and Persians.

Notice the stamp of the forces of spiritual evil here. They always want death and they want it as gruesome as possible. This plan has that in spades.

God’s priority? Spiritual awakening leading to knowledge of Him. Darius deserves credit for recognizing Daniel’s talent quickly, but he’s in the dark spiritually.

Light is coming.

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The role of *the law of the Medes and Persians* in this saga is important, but the law itself is worth paying attention to. The existence of a permanent law that even the king must obey means that the nation was more than just a tribe. Permanent law is the foundation of civilization. In this case, they only had one permanent law—not all the laws were permanent—but that’s a good start.

Prior to the development of the concept of permanent law, the law was simply whatever the king said. It could change overnight with a new king. That’s what happened to Israel when Egypt got a new Pharaoh who didn’t know Joseph. Bang! Instant slavery.

The earliest permanent laws, such as the Ten Commandments and the code of Hammurabi, changed all that. Permanent law is what makes civilization civilized.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_history)

Permanence makes the law about justice instead of power. It’s the source of many basic principles in our legal system (e.g., *ex post facto* and *stare decisis*).

It’s why we post the Ten Commandments on courthouse walls.

5 Daniel 6:10–13

*Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*

*Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"*

*The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."*

*So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."*

Dumb, dumb, dumb. This plan has Darwin Awards written all over it.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin\\_Awards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin_Awards)

For crying out loud, what do *these governors and satraps* think Darius will do to them after they've tricked him into executing his favorite governor? Give them a raise?

This displays one of the most obvious stamps of spiritual evil. Sin makes us stupid, but not *that* stupid. Some things can't be explained so easily. These guys hatch a plan that's too dumb for a conspiracy.

It's like the joke—*What are a fool's last words?*

*"Hey everybody! Watch this!"*

One guy can do something dumb enough to win a Darwin Award, especially after a few beers, but not a whole group of guys. Surely, someone would notice it's a suicide pact.

That's what takes this outside the realm of the natural.

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Meanwhile, God's plan for spiritual awakening is on track. Darius hasn't met God yet, but he will.

Daniel did not keep praying unwittingly. He knew about the writ but maintained his prayer practice anyway. He trusted God. Daniel was simply doing what he knew God had called him to do, *according to His purpose*. He understood Romans 8:28 centuries before Paul wrote it.

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How have you "grown downward"?
2. What phoniness have you found in yourself?
3. When have you seen an evil you thought was spiritual?
4. What is good or bad about our criminal justice system?
5. Have you ever had to choose between God and the law?

*Items for prayer:*