

Daniel 4 & 5-How the Mighty (Proud) Fall

In Australia and around the world, leaders and governments come and go. That's what we observe if we wait around long enough. And when we see it, it can fill us with all sorts of emotions – elation, joy, disappointment, despair. But a couple of things that Christians must keep in perspective are: one, pride is often at the centre of the personalities of governments and those who long to govern, and two, that over and above the rising and falling of leaders and governments – God is Sovereign.

In a very dramatic way, this is what we'll see in chapters 4 and 5 of Daniel. We'll see again in this study that the kingdoms of the world are ultimately under God's control, and leaders in this world would do well to pay attention to Him.

Read Daniel 4 - Think it through

Like chapter 2, this chapter starts with a dream, but in a very unusual way that's supposed to grab our attention. For the first time in the book of Daniel, the writing takes the form of 'direct speech' ie. 'this is what I want to tell you'.

This style of writing should make us sit up and take notice, especially as the person speaking is Nebuchadnezzar, ...not a person from God's family Israel, ...but a foreign false-god-worshiping-king.

In a way, this king is addressing us – “...the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world. [wanting to prosper greatly]”, ...with words of affirmation about “... the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me”.

This is one of those amazing times when a non-believer in the God of the Bible affirms the God of the Bible!

a) According to verse 4 what is the situation Nebuchadnezzar finds himself in?

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b) What makes this bloodthirsty tyrant-king so terrified? (v5)

c) List the different elements of the dream that has Nebuchadnezzar so terrified. (v9b-17)

d) After the Babylonian magicians and enchanters have a go and fail (v7), Daniel arrives and he provides the interpretation of the dream. According to Daniel, what is the meaning of this dream, and how does it come to pass? (Vv19-27)

This dream was given to Nebuchadnezzar to tell him what will happen in the future. Even though there may have been a chance to avoid the fulfillment of this dream (v27), Nebuchadnezzar doesn't pay heed and the dream becomes reality (v33). (It's possible he's overcome by the mental disorder [delusion] 'zoanthropy' [from Gk. zoion "animal" + anthropos "man"], in which a person imagines they are an animal.)

From his response there are lessons for Nebuchadnezzar, and us:

1. What should have been Nebuchadnezzar's attitude to the Lord, the Most High? (v17, 25, 34-35)

2. From this understanding of God what should have been his attitude to his own kingship? (also read v30, v37)

3. What type of kingship should Nebuchadnezzar have exercised? (v27)

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Ponder This

Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that the Lord Most High is the sovereign king over all earthly authorities. God sets up kings to rule and he can just as easily bring them low again. In this sense, all authorities in the world have a delegated authority from God. Therefore their attitude should be one of humility.

Read Daniel 5

Back ground Info

Babylon fell in 539BC, twenty three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, 25 years has elapsed since the events of chapter 4. Belshazzar is understood to be the eldest son of King Nabonidus (556-539BC), and to have shared the duties of the throne when his father was away from Babylon. Chapter 4 and 5 of Daniel are clearly linked by the contrast of two kings, one past - Nebuchadnezzar, and one present - Belshazzar.

How many times is Nebuchadnezzar's name mentioned in chapter five?

In the many mentions of Nebuchadnezzar's name, we're supposed to see a contrast between these two kings. How would you compare Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar?

What similarities are there between the two kings and their experiences with God?

Think it through

Knowing Nebuchadnezzar's past, King Belshazzar should have known better than to willfully reject the rule of God. But he does! He refuses to humble himself and acknowledge that he owes his existence, let alone his kingship (v23) to God. With the taking of the gold and silver goblets, he was throwing down the gauntlet and challenging God.

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What does God do? (5:5)

What are the reactions of the:

King

King's wise men

King's [wise] wife

man of God Daniel

The words: Mene, Tekel and Parsin were aramaic words related to weights and measures. Mene = minah (600g). Tekel = a shekel (10g). Parsin = half minah or half shekel. At the time these words would have been readily understood, but the difficulty was interpreting what these words meant as they eerily appeared on the wall. It seems a word-play is at work (vv26-28). From these verses what word is key to each of the following words?

'Mene'

'Tekel'

And 'Parsin'

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Think it through

This was the basis for Daniel's interpretation. God has numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign and it is about to come to an end. His rule has been weighed and has been found wanting. And his kingdom would soon be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. And all these things happened!

Explain your thoughts about Belshazzar's actions in 5:29?

So God brings deadly judgement on him. That very night, Belshazzar is assassinated, and a new ruler arrives on the scene, Darius. Think back to the first study where we looked at the situation the Israelites find themselves in exile under the power of foreign kings. Describe the impact these stories might have had on them, and/or later generations?

Ponder this

Another part of the Old Testament sums up the attitude of those like Belshazzar and God's judgement upon them. "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)

Now reread Daniel 4:37

Another King who doesn't "walk in pride".

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 appears to be talking about a king-like figure. How does this king-like person exercise his rule?

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Read Mark 10:35-45 & Phil. 2:6-11

How does Jesus exercise his rule and what is his rule contrasted with?

Write down the relationships you are in where you have authority:

In what ways do you fail to exercise authority in the way God desires, and should follow the example of Jesus?

What specific things can you do differently?

Spend time praying:

- * for ourselves and for the way we use authority
- * for those over us in the church under God's sovereignty, that they would rule by Jesus' example
- * for those over us in 'the world' under God's sovereignty, that they would rule with justice and mercy
- * and give thanks, that in Jesus we know what perfect servant leadership/ authority looks like