

The King Maker

Daniel 4

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We are living in some very unsettling times. As I write these words, there are still three months left in 2016. Though the year is not over, I am pretty confident that the motto for 2016 will be: "It just keeps getting worse!"

The dawn of each new day presents a series of headlines depressing enough to suck the joy out of a party clown high on Prozac and laughing gas. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about the culture, the church, international news, the economy, or the coming presidential election, every day's headlines are worse than the day before. If all we had available to us was the perspective of this world, from under the sun, we would have every reason to be discouraged and depressed.

It does not matter who is elected to the presidency on November 8, we are going to see a wicked person take the oath of office in January 2017. Neither one of the two major candidates are morally fit or qualified to be elected "Toilet Cleaner" at a federal penitentiary, let alone President of the United States. The fact that either one of these two moral reprobates is even remotely appealing to anyone in this country is an evidence that we are a nation under judgment.

One of the ways that God judges a nation is by giving it wicked and inept rulers. Wicked nations *deserve* wicked rulers. Wicked nations *desire* wicked rulers. God judges wicked nations by giving them exactly what they desire. Wicked rulers are judgment upon a wicked people. **Proverbs 29:2** says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan."¹

These are unsettling times, for sure, and it is in times like these that we need to be reminded of the glorious truths affirmed repeatedly in the book of Daniel. We need to be reminded that God is sovereign over all things and He is working all things out for the glory of His own name and the good of His people.

The Theme of Daniel

What do you imagine is the main theme of the book of Daniel? Why was Daniel written? What central and glorious truth was God trying to communicate through Daniel the prophet?

Many people associate the book of Daniel with some of the "Bible stories" that they heard in Sunday school. They recall the account of Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6) or the story of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3).

Others associate the book of Daniel with some of the bizarre dreams and visions that are recorded in its pages. There is Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an extraordinary statue made of gold, bronze, iron, and clay (Daniel 2). Who can forget Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a large tree that is cut down (Daniel 4), Daniel's vision of four beasts (Daniel 7), or his enigmatic vision of the ram and goat (Daniel 8)?

Still others will think that Daniel is mainly a book of confusing and inexplicable prophecies (Daniel 9-12) relating to the end times and the final resurrection (Daniel 12:2).

Though all of these incidents and elements are present in the book of Daniel, none of them is the main theme. All of these elements serve to prove, demonstrate, and illuminate the main theme, which is: ***God is the sovereign ruler whose kingdom will never come to an end.***

The account of Daniel in the lion's den shows that the Most High is sovereign over the wicked machinations of evil men who desire to thwart God's purposes and oppose God's people. The account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace demonstrates that God is sovereign over the pride of wicked rulers who oppose God and his people. Every story, every vision, every interpretation, every prophecy, and every conflict in the book of Daniel is intended to show that God is sovereign.

The visions and prophecies of Daniel have to do with the rise and fall of nations, the establishment and passing of kings and kingdoms. Those visions serve to demonstrate that God has sovereignly planned all of human history. He has already determined the time, the place, and the duration of every king and kingdom that has ever existed or will ever exist. To put it succinctly: ***God is completely and absolutely sovereign over all things.***

¹ All Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (The Lockman Foundation) unless otherwise noted.

In unsettling times, that is good news. No. That is **great news!**

Sovereignty in Daniel

The theme of the absolute sovereignty of God is woven throughout the entire book of Daniel. This theme finds its clearest expression in chapters 4-5. In chapter 4, the truth of God's sovereignty was **learned** by Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter 5, the truth of God's sovereignty was **spurned** by Belshazzar.² Those two chapters are worth some extended time of meditation, reflection, and soul-searching prayer. Let's take a quick trip through Daniel and see this theme woven throughout.

In **Daniel 2:20-21** Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and **power belong to Him.**³ It is He who changes the times and the epochs; **He removes kings and establishes kings;** He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding." Later in that chapter, when giving the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we read, "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the **God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory;** and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, **He has given them into your hand** and has **caused you to rule over them all.** You are the head of gold" (**Daniel 2:37-38**).

Notice that God is the one who gave to Nebuchadnezzar not only his kingdom, but power, strength, and glory. Further, Daniel affirmed that God is the one who caused Nebuchadnezzar to rule over all of them. Nebuchadnezzar was a wicked man when he had the dream and yet Daniel said that God had caused him to rule over all. God is sovereign over even wicked rulers and their rule is delegated to them by Him.

Chapter 2 also contains some information about the coming kingdom of God. **Daniel 2:44-45:** "In the days of those kings the **God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which will **never be destroyed**, and that kingdom **will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms**, but it will itself **endure forever.**"

Through the rest of the book of Daniel, the Kingdom of God is contrasted with the kingdoms of men. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom that is everlasting whereas the kingdoms of men come and go. The Kingdom of God endures from generation to generation whereas the kingdoms of men have passed away. The Kingdom of God

will never be destroyed, whereas the kingdoms of men are and will be destroyed.

Give careful thought to the following verses:

Daniel 4:2-3: "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! **His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation.**"

Daniel 4:17: "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order **that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men.**" Don't let your mind race too quickly past that verse. God wants us to know that He is the ruler over the realm of mankind. That is such an important point that it is mentioned two more times in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 5.

Daniel 4:25: "... and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the **Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.**" Again we see this mentioned in verse 32: "... seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that **the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes**" (**Daniel 4:32**). This is the central lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned and Belshazzar spurned. Daniel recounted the story of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation to his son Belshazzar, a story Belshazzar knew well. God humbled Nebuchadnezzar that he might recognize "**that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes**" (**Daniel 5:21**).

Though Nebuchadnezzar would be humbled, he was promised that his kingdom would be restored to him. Nebuchadnezzar would be given sovereignty over his kingdom **after he recognized that it is Heaven that rules** (**Daniel 4:26**).

In order to demonstrate this central truth - that it is God who sets up kings and takes down kings - God removed Nebuchadnezzar from his throne. Just as it was God who gave him his kingdom, God took his kingdom from him. **Daniel 4:31:** "While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: **sovereignty has been removed from you.**'"

Nebuchadnezzar learned his lesson and came to be a worshiper of the Most High God. "But at the end of that

² The exalted title "Most High" or "Most High God" is used 10 times in Daniel, 8 of the 10 occurring in chapters 4 and 5 (3:26; 4:2, 17, 24, 25, 32, 34; 5:18, 21; 7:25).

³ The bold text in the Scripture quotations that follow is intended to highlight the teaching on God's sovereignty and the nature of God's Kingdom.

period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the **Most High** and praised and honored Him who lives forever; **For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation**" (Daniel 4:34).

Further, Nebuchadnezzar boldly stated: "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'** At that time my reason returned to me. And **my majesty and splendor were restored to me** for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so **I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.** Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the **King of heaven**, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (Daniel 4:35-37).

Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson that God rules in Heaven. God is sovereign over the affairs of men. God removes Kings and establishes Kings (Daniel 2:21). All power and sovereignty belong to the Most High God and He and He alone determines who rules over the kingdoms of this world. He can strip a man of all his earthly power at any moment. He can raise up another king and give him authority over any kingdom He should choose at any moment He should desire. Belshazzar learned this the hard way. When Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall, he said to Belshazzar, "**Your kingdom has been divided and given over** to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:28). That very same night, Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took his kingdom from him (Daniel 5:30-31).

After Daniel was rescued from the lion's den, Darius the king said this about Daniel's God: "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; **For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever**" (Daniel 6:26). Darius learned the same lesson from Daniel's preservation as Nebuchadnezzar learned from his own humiliation.

When Daniel saw the vision of the reign of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man, he recorded: "And to Him [the Son of Man] **was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom**, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. **His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.**"

Ultimately, all the kingdoms of this world will be given over to the saints. **Daniel 7:27: "Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him."**

What Is the Lesson?

What are we supposed to learn from Daniel? We are supposed to know that **God is the sovereign Ruler Whose Kingdom will never come to an end.** God is the great King and the great king-maker. No man or woman rules over anything on this planet apart from God's will.

Other Scriptures affirm the very same thing.

Psalm 66:7: "He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah."

Psalm 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."

Psalm 135:6: "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps."

Psalm 145:13: "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations."

Isaiah 46:10: "Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

Romans 13:1: "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

Whatever you may think of the two major candidates for President (and nobody has a lower opinion of them than I), one of them is likely to be taking the oath of office in January. When that happens, you and I can rest well at night knowing that it is God who rules in the heavens, and He sets over the nations, including this one, whomever He wishes.

We may not like it. We may not enjoy it. It may mean some difficult times for us. But we can know for certain that God is perfectly accomplishing His purposes. He is moving all things inexorably forward to that time when the Great Kingdom of Christ will destroy all other kingdoms, and the Righteous One will rule and reign over all the nations. There will be no end to His sovereignty. There will be no end to His kingdom. His dominion will stretch from sea to shining sea. His kingdom will never

be replaced by another. His power will never be usurped. His throne will never be taken. He will have no successor!

Lord, hasten the day!

How Then Shall We Live?

What shall we do during these trying times? How shall we live? Fortunately, the book of Daniel provides an answer to this question as well.

Daniel was a righteous man who served in the administrations of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and then Darius the Mede. While living in a foreign land, surrounded by pagan idolaters, pagan religion, and a pagan culture, Daniel remained unspotted by the world (James 1:27). Even at a very young age, Daniel was committed to obeying the commands of God and he “made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). Daniel was not conformed to the unbelieving world around him (Romans 12:1-2) and he showed no love for the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17).

Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to bow down and worship the image of King Nebuchadnezzar. They would not compromise their faith, their convictions, or the demands of God’s righteousness. They did not count their lives as dear to themselves (Acts 20:24), but, like Moses, “chose rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25).

In other words, they were obedient. They worshiped God. They loved God. They served God in their own generation, all the wickedness of Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan idolatry of the Babylonian Empire, and the fierce opposition of God’s enemies, notwithstanding.

This is our calling. Whether we get Wicked Candidate A or Wicked Candidate B, our mandate is the same. We are to go out into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). We will preach the word of God in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

God may appoint a righteous, godly, and honorable man over this nation. That would require something entirely unforeseen at this point. More likely, He will appoint a wicked, unrighteous, violent God-hater. Either way, our responsibility is the same. We must stand for the truth, defend the truth, preach the truth, and love

the truth. There may be times when such a calling is more difficult than others, but the calling does not change.

By grace we stand!

Without Wax-



Quotable Quotes:

“Herein is His greatness, that it comprehends all littleness without a strain; the glory of His wisdom is as astonishing as the majesty of His power, and the splendors of His love and of His grace are as amazing as the terror of His sovereignty! He may do what He wills, for none can stop Him. But He never wills to do in any case anything that is unjust, unholy, unmerciful, or in any way inconsistent with the perfection of His matchless character! Here let us pause, and worship; I at least must do so, for my soul’s eyes ache, as though I had been gazing at the sun.”⁴

“This divine kingdom appeared very plainly to the once proud monarch of Babylon, to be an everlasting one; the reign of the Ever-living extends as other kingdoms cannot, ‘from generation to generation.’ The mightiest king inherits power, and soon yields his scepter to his successor; the Lord has no beginning of days nor end of years – ‘predecessor’ or ‘successor’ are words inapplicable to Him! Other monarchies stand while their power is not subdued, but in an evil hour a greater power may crush them down; there is no greater power than God - there is no other power but that which proceeds from God... Therefore, His monarchy cannot be subdued, and must be everlasting. Dynasties have passed away, dying out for lack of heirs, but God the Ever-living asks none to succeed Him and to perpetuate His name.”⁵

⁴ C.H. Spurgeon (Sermon 949, *The Unconquerable King*)

⁵ Ibid.