

Studies in Daniel #2 – God’s Sovereignty

Review: The overall theme of Daniel is **God’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.** Dan. 4:3, 4:34, 6:26, 7:14, 7:27, Ps. 145:13

In the first study, we looked at how God is the source of wisdom and knowledge, the revealer of secrets. This time we will see how Daniel stresses the sovereignty of God.

Theme #2: God’s Sovereignty

“Sovereignty” means “supreme power and authority”. In this world, sovereignty is necessarily bound in scope, to a certain nation, empire, state, business, etc. A “sovereign” ruler in one realm does not have sovereignty in a different nation. With God however, sovereignty is absolute, because he is not only the Creator of all, but the Sustainer and Governor, the King of all. This doesn’t mean that everyone recognizes or respects that authority – they may not even believe he exists. But even they will, in the end, be forced to bow the knee to him, and recognize that he is all-powerful. In the meantime, he works invisibly in the kingdoms and affairs of men to bring his will to pass.

God’s sovereignty is enabled by his omnipotence – how could we say someone is sovereign if they don’t have the power and ability to enforce their will and bring it to pass?

Isa. 40:13-17, 21-23 speak of God’s superiority and sovereignty – “the nations are as a drop of a bucket ... All nations before him are as nothing”. In Isa. 44:28 – 45:3 he predicted the rise and empowering of Cyrus, by name, about 200 years before.

In the book of Daniel, God’s sovereignty is seen first in his control of the rise and fall of empires, and secondly in his ability to put individual men in power, or to bring them down, whenever and however he pleases, and for whatever reason pleases him.

1. The dream of the colossal image in chapter 2

When the dream and interpretation were revealed to Daniel, he said (2:20-21) “... for wisdom and might are his: And **he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings**”

Changing the times and seasons in the context of the dream refers to the rise and fall of empires. The times of the Egyptians and Assyrians had passed, and at the time of the dream, Babylon was the great power, under Nebuchadnezzar the king. The dream showed that over time the seasons would change, and new kingdoms or empires would rise, specifically the Medes and Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans. Since then, we have seen the rise and spread of Islam, the papacy and the “Holy Roman Empire” in Europe, the British empire, the United States, USSR, and China, and many others. The march of history may seem capricious and arbitrary to unbelieving historians, but God is in control of it all.

God is the one who brings specific men to power, for his purposes – Paul, Constantine, Martin Luther, George Washington, William Wilberforce, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump, and even men like Nero, Karl Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Obama, Clinton, and Biden. Usually we cannot see the big picture, and know why God is doing what he does, or for what purpose. The fact that a man comes to power does not mean that God approves of their personal lives. Bad men have been used for good purposes, and relatively good men for bad purposes, but ultimately they are used for the overall purpose of God. 4:17 says that God gives the kingdom “to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men”.

Then in 2:37, Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings: **for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, strength, and glory.**” He was the most powerful man in the world, but he was to know that it was only because God gave him that position.

2. The humbling of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4

The king told the dream to Daniel in 4:9-18, of a great, flourishing and fruitful tree which was then hewn down and cut up, but the stump remained, with an iron and brass band. "His heart" would be changed to be like a beast for seven times (years?). Verse 17 shows that it was to be done specifically at the decree of heaven, "... to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

Then in 4:19-27 Daniel gave the interpretation, that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his position because of his pride, and live like an animal for seven "times", but that he would return to sanity and power.

4:25-26 "... till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. ... thy kingdom shall be sure to thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule."

He then advised the king to "be good", hopefully to delay or avoid the pronouncement. 4:28-33 shows that his caution lasted a year but because of his pride it happened according to the dream.

4:32 – "... until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

4:34-37 shows his restoration, and his acknowledgement of God's power and sovereignty.

4:35 – "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

3. The handwriting on the wall in chapter 5

Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon, and in 5:1-9 it tells of him seeing fingers writing a message on the wall, but no one could interpret the writing. Daniel was called in and rebuked the king for not learning the lesson of Nebuchadnezzar his grandfather (5:21 – "...till he knew that the most high God ruler in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.") Then in 5:25-28 he read and interpreted the writing, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN":

MENE – God hath **numbered** thy kingdom and finished it.

TEKEL – Thou art **weighed** in the balances, and found **wanting**.

PERES – Thy kingdom is **divided**, and given to the Medes and **Persians**.

(one source says tekel and peres may grammatically have double meanings)

In that very night, Belshazzar was slain and the kingdom passed to Darius the Mede. So no matter how powerful a man seems to be at present, God can bring him down and raise someone else up at his own pleasure, using whatever means he chooses.