



Study 4— How the Mighty Fall

Daniel 4 & 5

Can you think of any times when certain leaders and regimes around the world have fallen or been deposed?

At those times, can you remember how you felt?

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 one thing that may be a new perspective for us is that behind the rising and falling of governments—God is at work. In a very dramatic way, this is what we'll see in chapters 4 and 5 of Daniel. As the book has been constantly teaching us, we'll be reminded again in this study that the kingdoms of the world are ultimately under God's control. And as we'll see today, because God is the ultimate King, leaders in this world would do well to pay attention to Him.

Read Daniel 4

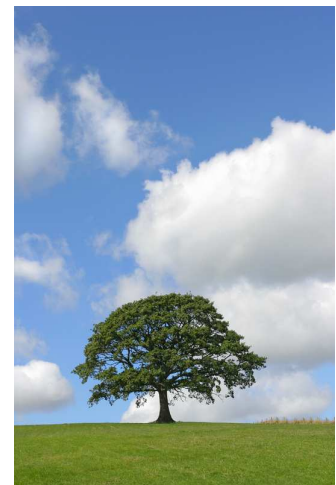
This chapter starts in a very unusual way that's supposed to grab our attention. For the first time in the book of Daniel, the writing takes the form of 'direct speech' ie. this is what **I** want to tell you'. Having this style of writing makes us sit up and take notice. But more than that, the person who is speaking is Nebuchadnezzar, not a person from Israel, the family of God, but this foreign false-god worshipping king. But on top of that, this king is speaking in a way to address us—'To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world'. All together, this shows us that what is about to be said, is going to be worth listening to!

a) From verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar starts to tell us his story. According to verse 4 what is the situation he finds himself in?

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

c) List the different elements of the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had:

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?



This vision 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 vision becomes reality. There are a number of lessons in this – for Nebuchadnezzar and us:

1. What should have been Nebuchadnezzar's attitude to the Lord, the Most High ?
(v17, v25 v34-35)

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)

Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the lesson 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 rule from God. And therefore their attitude should be one of humility. It's interesting that the Israelite kings were urged to rule in righteousness and with mercy and justice [Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Psalm 72]. But because all powers are given their position from God, all powers on the earth should similarly rule with justice and serve the needs of those under them. These were lessons Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way!

Read Daniel 5

Chapter 4 and 5 of Daniel are clearly linked. In Daniel's conversation with King Belshazzar, he mentions the episode of Nebuchadnezzar. We're supposed to see a contrast between these two kings. What would you say are the similarities and the differences between the two:

Nebuchadnezzar	Belshazzar

Given the past with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar should have known better. But he willfully rejects the rule of God. 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, it was like he was fragrantly throwing down the gauntlet and challenging God. So God brings deadly judgment on him. That very night, Belshazzar is assassinated, and a new ruler arrives on the scene, Darius.

e) Think back to the first study where we looked at the situation the Israelites find themselves in—in exile under the power of foreign kings. What impact would have these stories have had on them?

The words: Mene, Tekel and Parsin were aramaic words related to weights and measures. Mene = minah (600g). Tekel = a sheckel (10g). Parsin = half minah or half sheckel. 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. 'Mene' is related to another word meaning 'numbered'. 'Tekel' is related to another word meaning 'weighed'. And 'Parsin' is related to another word meaning 'divided'. 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.

Another part of the Old Testament sums up the attitude of Belshazzar and God's judgement on him, 'Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall' (Proverbs 16:18).

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

How does Jesus exercise his rule (Mark 10:35-45) and what is that 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, that follows 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, that they would rule with justice and mercy.
- * and give thanks that in Jesus we can know what perfect servant leadership looks like.

In preparation for next week, make sure you read Daniel 8-12. You'll find it to be one of the most unusual parts in all the bible! It will make next week a lot easier if you have a read of it in advance!