

have grown to the length of feathers (v. 33), and (b) “times” in 7:25 means years” (Pentecost 1985: 1342).

v17 “Mankind must know that rule and power are not native to man but are delegated by God, who is the ultimate ruler of all. This is political science of the highest order” (Feinberg 1981: 55).

v19 “The revealed humiliation of the king did not give him pleasure, and in this he reflects the divine heart and the Messianic Spirit (Ezk. 18:23; Mt. 23:37). No doubt Nebuchadnezzar was a frequently repeated name in Daniel’s regular life of prayer (cf. 6:10)” (Ferguson 1994).

v27 “By heeding the warning in this dream and performing good deeds, the monarch would prove that he acknowledged God’s supremacy over him. Daniel seems to have held out to the king the genuine possibility of foregoing this judgment, demonstrating God’s willingness to forgive” (Miller 1992: 139).

v33 “Having portrayed himself as superhuman (3:1–6; 4:30), he became subhuman; having set up his own statue to be worshipped as the image of a god, he forfeited life as the image of God (Gn. 1:26–27) and the last remnants of true glory (cf. Rom 3:23). Having behaved in bestial fashion he now reaped the harvest of which he had sown the seeds (Gal. 6:7–8)” (Ferguson 1994).

“The king returned to Him who smote him. His words were now words of praise and adoration of the God who corrects and chastens even the mightiest on earth. The God whom he had not honored before, he now honored. He was now quite prepared to acknowledge the temporary nature of man’s dominion, which serves to highlight the eternal dominion of God” (Feinberg 1981: 58).

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DANIEL 4: THE HUMBLING OF THE GREATEST KING

THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL 4

The Lord humbles an arrogant king who ultimately acknowledges the eternal kingdom of God (4:1-37).

“This is the account of the way God brought this proud king to humble himself before Him....It represents the way in which world rulers can be alienated from God; how they become degraded and bestial in character; and how they shall all be brought into submission to God at the end of time, when Christ returns in His glory” (Feinberg 1981: 53).

OUTLINE OF DANIEL 4

- I. Nebuchadnezzar praises the Lord in recalling his humiliation (4:1-3).
- II. Nebuchadnezzar recounts his dream of the great tree to Daniel (4:4-18).
- III. Daniel reveals that the dream predicts that Nebuchadnezzar will become like a beast until he submits to God (4:19-27).
- IV. Nebuchadnezzar describes the fulfillment of the dream when he became like a beast (4:28-33).
- V. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the sovereignty of God and his sanity is restored (4:34-37).

DANIEL 4 IN CONTEXT

In chapter 2, the Lord revealed his sovereignty over kings who would be opposed to his authority. In chapter 3, a story reminiscent of the tower of Babel where the peoples were united against God, the Lord demonstrated his superiority over all other powers. The fourth chapter addresses the subject of the individual king who raises himself up against the Lord. This prepares the reader for the “little horn” which comes from the fourth beast (ch. 7) and the “little horn” which comes from the third beast (ch. 8).

This story furthers the development of the argument of the book in several ways. First, Daniel's ability to interpret the dream makes it clear that Nebuchadnezzar's vision is a divine revelation. Second, the fulfillment of the vision as interpreted by Daniel also confirms the ability and intention of the Lord to act as he has decreed. This story thus serves as a "near-fulfillment" that justifies the reader's confidence in the book's "far-fulfillments."

Third, Nebuchadnezzar's judgment is that he is transformed into a beast, which serves both as an appropriate symbol for his character as well as a connection to the four beasts in chapter 7. Nebuchadnezzar becomes a beast with hair "like the feathers of an eagle" (4:33), suggestive of the wings of an eagle that characterized the first beast of Daniel's later vision (7:4).

"This story forms a pair with the one that follows [ch 5], since both describe the humbling of royal hubris. This story prepares the way for what follows, because Nebuchadnezzar is going to act as a foil against which Belshazzar is going to be shown up in a bad light, and seen to deserve the disaster that befalls him" (Lucas 2002: 104).

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF CHAPTER

Though never described explicitly as such, Nebuchadnezzar functions in this chapter as a "little horn" from the first beast. His arrogance against the Lord and his oppression of the righteous foreshadows the attitudes and actions of future wicked rulers. The command to repent and his ultimate humbling provide warning to and anticipate the judgment of kings who raise themselves up against the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of the Lord's kingdom as the eternal one looks ahead to the day when every knee will bow to the Lord (Isa 45:23; Phil 2:10).

CONNECTIONS TO SCRIPTURE

In this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that the stone of God's kingdom is greater than his head of gold (Dan 2).

In the context of an oracle against Egypt, given in June 587, Ezekiel 31 compares Assyria to a towering tree with beautiful branches, birds in its branches and beasts under its branches, the envy of all the trees. Yet it was proud of its height and God handed it over to the "ruler of the nations...and the most ruthless of foreign nations cut it down." This is a similar illustration about Babylon's predecessor. Assyria and Babylon were guilty of the same crimes and would suffer the same fate, as would Egypt. None can stand against God. This explains how the great mighty empires collapsed (and all in relatively short time).

The "beasts of the field and the birds of the air" that find shelter recalls Dan 2:38 ("in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air") which in turn recalls Psalm 8:6-8. Jesus will later speak of the kingdom of heaven in terms of a tree in which "the birds of the air come and perch in its branches" (Matt 13:31-32).

King David was walking on the roof of his palace when his pride took hold of him. When caught, Nathan told him, "You are the man!" (2 Sam 11-12). Nebuchadnezzar was told, "You are the tree," and he was walking on the roof of his palace when his pride overtook him and judgment fell.

NOTES

v4 "The king described his condition before the Lord began to deal with him. It was a condition characteristic of so many of the unsaved, a false sense of security" (Feinberg 1981: 53).

v12 "This verse intimates why God establishes earthly kings and rulers. It is for the protection and refuge of all creatures, man, beast, and bird alike" (Feinberg 1981: 55).

vv14-16 "Kings of recent centuries who have suffered from this are George III of Great Britain and Otto of Bavaria" (Lucas 2002: 111).

v16 "The "seven times" were probably seven years because (a) seven days or months would have been inadequate for his hair to