

Daniel 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: 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.

Analysis

The dream's interpretation declares: 'This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.' 'Watchers' and 'holy ones' (Aramaic: *irin*, wakeful ones; *qaddishin*, holy/consecrated beings) likely refer to angelic beings participating in God's heavenly council (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:6). God's judgment involves angelic agency while remaining ultimately His decree. The purpose clause reveals God's pedagogical intent: demonstrating to 'the living' that He rules all human kingdoms, deposing and elevating whomever He wills.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern religion included divine councils where gods deliberated. Daniel's theology maintains monotheism while acknowledging angelic beings who serve God's purposes. The 'watchers' concept appears in Second Temple Jewish literature (1 Enoch) but here serves orthodox theology—angels execute God's decrees, they don't decide independently. The phrase 'kingdom of men' emphasizes human political structures' subordination to divine sovereignty—a radical claim in absolute monarchies claiming divine right.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of angelic agents in governance and judgment reveal the cosmic scope of His kingdom?
2. What does the purpose clause teach about God using dramatic interventions to publicly demonstrate His sovereignty over human pride?

Interlinear Text

בְּגִזַּב ת	עִירִין	פְּתֻגָּמָא	וּמַאמַר	קֳדִישׁ ין		
is by the decree	of the watchers	This matter	by the word	of the holy ones		
H1510	H5894	H6600	H3983	H6922		
וּשְׁאֵלָתָא	עַד	דְּבַב ת	יִנְדַּע וְיָדַע	חַיָּא	דִּי	שֶׁל יֵט
and the demand	to	the intent	may know	that the living		ruleth
H7595	H5705	H1701	H1768 H3046	H2417	H1768	H7990
עַלֵּי א	בְּמַלְכּוֹת	אֲנָשׁ יִם	וּלְמַן	דִּי	יִצְבֵּא	
that the most High	in the kingdom	of men	it to whomsoever		he will	
H5943	H4437	H606	H4479	H1768	H6634	
וְיִתְּנֶהּ	וּשְׁפֵל	אֲנָשׁ יִם	יִקַּח יִם	עָלֶיהָ:		
and giveth	it the basest	of men	and setteth up	over		
H5415	H8215	H606	H6966	H5922		

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 4:25 (Kingdom): That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

Daniel 2:21 (Kingdom): And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

1 Samuel 2:8 (Parallel theme): He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.

1 Corinthians 1:28 (Parallel theme): And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

Daniel 11:21 (Kingdom): And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

Exodus 9:16 (Parallel theme): And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.