

Daniel 5:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

Analysis

Daniel describes the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's God-given authority: all peoples feared him; he had absolute power of life and death ('whom he would he slew, whom he would he kept alive, whom he would he set up, whom he would he put down'). This depicts complete sovereignty—the marks of ultimate earthly authority. Yet this power came as gift ('for the majesty that he gave him'), not inherent right. The comprehensive scope ('all people, nations, and languages') emphasizes universal dominion. This historical review serves multiple purposes: reminding Belshazzar of God's sovereignty over kingdoms, establishing that even the mightiest rulers rule by divine permission, and preparing for the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar's eventual humbling/restoration and Belshazzar's coming judgment without restoration.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kings wielded absolute power—no constitutional limitations, democratic checks, or judicial appeals constrained royal authority. Nebuchadnezzar's historical record confirms this: he executed Zedekiah's sons before his eyes (2 Kings 25:7), destroyed Jerusalem and temple, exiled populations, and built empire through military might. Yet Daniel's interpretation reframes even this absolute power as delegated authority—'the majesty that he gave him.' This

theological reading of history affirms God's sovereignty over even tyrannical rulers (Romans 13:1). For oppressed people, this provides both comfort (tyrants rule only by God's permission and only temporarily) and challenge (resisting tyranny doesn't mean denying God's sovereign purposes).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does God's granting absolute power to Nebuchadnezzar teach about divine sovereignty over even tyrannical rulers?
2. How should recognizing that rulers' authority comes as divine delegation affect our response to governmental power?
3. Why does Daniel emphasize that even life-and-death authority was delegated rather than inherent?

Interlinear Text

מִן	רְבוּתָא	דִּי	יְהִיב	לֵיה	כֹּל	עַמְמֵי	אַמְיָא
And for	the majesty	H1768	that he gave	H0	him all	people	nations
H4481	H7238		H3052		H3606	H5972	H524
וּלְשׁוֹנֵי	הֵן	זָאֵעַ	וְדָלִין	מִן	קִדְמָה	וְהִי	דִּי
and languages	he set up	H2112	and feared	And for	him		H1768
H3961	H1934		H1763	H4481	H6925		
הֵן	צָבָא	הֵן	קִטְל	וְדִי	הֵן	צָבָא	הֵן
he set up	H6634	he set up	H6992	H1768	he set up	H6634	he set up
H1934		H1934			H1934		H1934
אֶמְ	וְדִי	הֵן	צָבָא	הֵן	מֵרִים	וְדִי	הֵן
H2418	H1768	he set up	H6634	he set up	H7313	H1768	he set up
		H1934		H1934			H1934
הֵן	מִשְׁפָּל:						
he set up	H8214						
H1934							

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 3:6 (Parallel theme): And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Daniel 3:4 (Parallel theme): Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,