

Daniel 5:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

Analysis

Daniel details Nebuchadnezzar's judgment: driven from human society, given beast's heart, dwelling with wild donkeys, eating grass like oxen, body wet with heaven's dew—'till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.' This comprehensive humiliation had a specific purpose clause: 'till he knew'—the judgment was pedagogical, designed to teach divine sovereignty. Once the lesson was learned, restoration followed. This contrasts sharply with Belshazzar's coming judgment: Nebuchadnezzar's was temporary and redemptive; Belshazzar's will be final and terminal (death that very night). The difference? Nebuchadnezzar eventually learned; Belshazzar refused to, despite knowing the example. This teaches that God's discipline, though severe, aims at restoration for those who respond; but continued rebellion leads to final judgment.

Historical Context

Daniel's recounting assumes Belshazzar knew this history—it was royal family knowledge, likely documented in court records. The precise details (wild donkeys, eating grass, dew-wet body) match chapter 4's account, confirming historical

continuity. Nebuchadnezzar's restoration after learning the lesson (4:34-37) provided powerful testimony that acknowledging God's sovereignty brings healing. Ancient Near Eastern courts preserved records of kings' reigns, though embarrassing events were typically suppressed. That this humiliation was known suggests either Nebuchadnezzar himself publicized it (as chapter 4's first-person format implies) or it was too dramatic to hide. Either way, Belshazzar had access to this object lesson and ignored it.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the purpose clause 'till he knew' demonstrate that God's discipline aims at teaching rather than merely punishing?
2. What's the difference between temporary pedagogical judgment (Nebuchadnezzar) and final terminal judgment (Belshazzar)?
3. Why does refusing to learn from available examples compound guilt and invite harsher judgment?

Interlinear Text

וּמִן	בְּנֵי	אָנָשׁ	א	טָר	יָד	וּלְבָבִי	הוּא	וְעַם	א	חַיֹּת
from	the sons	of men		And he was driven		and his heart		like		the beasts
H4481	H1123	H606		H2957		H3825		H5974		H2423
שָׁוִי	וְעַם	עִרְדֵּי	א	מְדוּרָה	ה	עִשְׂבֵּה	א	כְּתוֹרִין		
was made	like	was with the wild asses		and his dwelling		him with grass		like oxen		
H7739	H5974	H6167		H4070		H6211		H8450		
דִּי	עַד	יִצְטָב	ע	גִּשְׁמִי	ה	שְׁמִי	א	וּמֵטָל	ל	יִטְעֲמוּ
		was wet		and his body		of heaven		with the dew		they fed
		H6647		H1655		H8065		H2920		H2939
אָנָשׁ	בְּמֶלֶךְ	וְתֵת	עֲלֶיהָ	אֱלֹהִים	א	שָׁלֵט	יֵט	דִּי	יָדַע	
of men	in the kingdom		that the most high	God		ruled		he knew		
	H4437		H5943	H426		H7990		H3046		
עֲלֶיהָ:	יִקְרָא	יָמִים	אֵלֶיךָ	א	דִּי	וְלִמֹּן				
over	and that he appointeth		he will		it whomsoever					
H5922	H6966		H6634		H1768					

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.

Ezekiel 17:24 (Creation): And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

Daniel 4:35 (Parallel theme): 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?

Daniel 4:17 (Kingdom): 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.

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