

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

מִן	בָנִים	אֲנָשָׁם	בָנִים	וּמִן	לִلְבָבָה	הַ	חַיִתָּם	אֲ	וְעַם	לִלְבָבָה	הַ	חַיִתָּם	אֲ	וְעַם	
from	the sons	of men	And he was driven		and his heart	like	the beasts								
H4481	H1123	H606	H2957		H3825	H5974	H2423								
שׁוֹרִים	וְעַם	עַזְבָּנִים	מִדּוֹן	הַ	עַשְׁבָּה	אֲ	כָּתָרְרִים	עַשְׁבָּה	אֲ	כָּתָרְרִים	עַשְׁבָּה	אֲ	כָּתָרְרִים	עַשְׁבָּה	
like oxen	like	was with the wild asses	and his dwelling	him with grass	like oxen										
H8450	H5974	H6167	H4070	H6211	H2423										
לְ	וּמְטָה	לְ	יְסַמְּךָ	שְׁמַיִם	אֲ	גְּשָׁמָה	עַ	עַד	אֲ	לְ	עַד	לְ	עַד	לְ	
till	wet	till	dwelt	of heaven	and his body	was wet	till	till	like	till	till	till	till	till	till
H1768	H5705	H1768	H6647	H1655	H8065	H6647	H5705	H1768							
אֲנָשָׁם	בְּמָלֹכָה	וְתַ	עַלְיָה	אֱלֹהִים	אֱלֹהִים	עַלְיָה	בְּמָלֹכָה	וְתַ	אֲנָשָׁם	בְּמָלֹכָה	וְתַ	אֲנָשָׁם	בְּמָלֹכָה	וְתַ	
of men	in the kingdom		in the kingdom	God	that the most high	in the kingdom	in the kingdom		of men	in the kingdom	in the kingdom		of men	in the kingdom	
H606	H4437	H1768	H426	H5943	H1768	H426	H5943	H1768		H4437	H4437		H606	H4437	
עַלְיָהָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	אֲ	יְמִינָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	וְ	יְמִינָה	
over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over	over
H5922	H6966	H6634	H4479	H1768	H7990	H426	H5922	H6966	H6634	H4479	H1768	H7990	H426	H5922	H6966
וְלֹמְדָה	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ
it whomsoever	he will	and that he appointeth													
H4479	H6634	H4479													

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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