

Devotion 30:

Our Father Rules An Everlasting Kingdom

Daniel 1—12

For my 50 years of life in this world my experience with the Old Testament has been rather spotted. Oh, I have read the entire text from Genesis to Malachi about 8 times, but it has always been random, pieces here and there. I usually followed some read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year plan where small chunks of the Old Testament were mingled with small chunks of the New Testament. And, if given the preference, I have usually opted to read something from the New Testament much more often. I wonder if my experience mirrors that of the vast majority of Christians today.

That kind of reading has been of value. But having read the first 27 books of the Old Testament in order has given me an exhilarating, spectacular view from a mountain peak. I now better grasp how some of those smaller pieces fit the larger puzzle. And the picture I am getting of our Father is awe-inspiring and...humbling. Like one standing at the summit and looking over the panoramic view of the valleys below, I feel quite small.

I offer some quick observations about the Old Testament. First, I never realized before just how much of the text is devoted to the time in history when the Babylonians captured the southern kingdom, Judah. In fact, there were about three deportations spanning several decades. Second, our Father's stature becomes larger in mind when entire countries, let alone kingdoms, pop in and out of history like bit players in a stage drama. Already we have seen Egypt, Israel, Assyria, and Babylonia arise and fall. This is not to mention the numerous, smaller countries that they overran.

And now Daniel will see visions of the future when the Medes and Persians will triumph over Babylonia, followed in succession by the Greeks and Romans. The attribute that stands out clearly about our Father is a word that I have never fully understood, although the meaning is becoming clearer after reading the Old Testament in order. Our Father is sovereign. *Webster's Dictionary* defines *sovereign* as "above, supreme, having undisputed ascendancy, absolute, enjoying autonomy." The essence of sovereignty is utter and complete independent control. Our previous devotion centered on the fact that our Father wishes to be known. At this point in Scripture, this is the quality He wants every nation and every king to acknowledge: He is sovereign.

Daniel gets a firsthand glimpse of our Father's sovereignty. Daniel was among the very first exiles to be taken from Judah to Babylonia. He served Nebuchadnezzar, his son, Darius, the Mede who overthrew Nebuchadnezzar's son, and Cyrus, who allowed the scattered children of Israel to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. He saw kings and kingdoms exchange hands. And he saw our Father's sovereignty over it all.

The foreign king Nebuchadnezzar had this to say about our Father after witnessing Daniel's interpreting dreams and Daniel's three friends being rescued by God from the fiery furnace:

“It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” 4:2-3

As Daniel interprets one of the king’s dreams, he echoes the refrain of the book:

“The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” 4:17b

In fact, Nebuchadnezzar will be humbled for a time, afflicted with insanity, *“driven away from people, live with wild animals; eat grass and be drenched with dew.”* (4:25) This all happens *“until (he) acknowledges that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”* (4:25)

After his sanity is restored, Nebuchadnezzar praises and glorifies God:

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” 4:34-35, 37

After Darius overthrows Nebuchadnezzar’s son and the Medes and Persians take over, the famous lion’s den incident occurs. On the heels of that great rescue by our Father, yet another king in another kingdom proclaims:

“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.” 6:26-27

It is impossible to read Daniel and not think about Jesus. Check in your concordance under the word “kingdom.” You will see that Jesus spoke about our Father’s kingdom quite often. You will probably recall John 18:36: *“Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world....My kingdom is from another place.’* Kingdoms from this world come and go.

But there is another reason it is impossible to read Daniel without thinking of Jesus. The most common title Jesus liked to use for Himself was “son of man.” It seems like an odd

title unless one has read the vision that God gave Daniel near the end of the 70 -year Babylonian captivity:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” 7:13-14

As I write this devotion, it seems to be a tumultuous time in the history of the United States and in the world. It is the end times. There are wars and rumors of wars. There are calamities in nature of astronomical proportion: floods, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and famines. Looking around the world, one can see an increase of wickedness and love growing cold. Older citizens are concerned with corrupt politicians, a disintegrating economy, and rampant immorality. History has shown us how national powers rise and fall. It is only a matter of time before the United States is humbled before our Sovereign God.

In light of such current events, it is tempting for a believer to become pessimistic and depressed. The flesh tries so desperately to establish its kingdom of this world. But the Son of Man is good news for those of us who are *“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that (we) may declare the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* (I Pet. 2:9) The Son of Man is in control. His kingdom, His everlasting never-to-be-destroyed kingdom, our kingdom, is not of this world.

We might wonder during these times as Daniel wondered in his day: *“My Lord, what will the outcome of all this be?”* (12:8) Our Father’s reply to Daniel is a good one for us to hear today as well:

“Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked....As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” 12:8b-10a, 13

In other words, “Trust Me, even though you don’t understand Me. It will all turn out for my glory, and you will receive, by My grace, abounding love, and faithfulness, an inheritance in My everlasting kingdom.”