

Daniel: God's Control of National and World Events

Overview: The book of Daniel demonstrates a clear and consistent Biblical principle: God governs world events on a national and international level in order to accomplish His divine purposes. This governance is still operative today.

1. Earlier OT Background

- A. God has used a number of agents in punishing or blessing nations according to His will: natural calamities/disasters, supernatural events, etc. But God has also used civil powers to achieve His ends.
1. Through a combination of human free will (the selling of Joseph by his brothers), providence (Joseph's imprisonment among Pharaoh's servants), miracle (the revelation of Pharaoh's dreams), natural forces (famine) and political beneficence (the goodwill of Egypt), God "grew" the nation of Israel from a handful of Abraham's descendants.
 2. God left indigenous nations in Canaan to periodically test Israel: *"Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, 'Because this nation has transgressed My covenant ... I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations ... so that through them I may test Israel ...'"* (Jud 2:20-23; cf. 3:8, 12; 4:2; 6:1-2; 10:7-8; etc.).
 3. Many other examples abound:
 - a. *"Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon ..."* (1 Kgs 11:14, 23).
 - b. *"So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria ..."* (1 Chr 5:26). Assyria is called *"the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation"* (Is 10:5).
 - c. *"The Lord delivered a very great army into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God ... So they executed judgment against Joash"* (2 Chr 24:24).
- B. Israel had a clear understanding that God was in control of the nations:
1. Jehoshaphat: *"O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?"* (2 Chr 20:6).
 2. Hezekiah: *"O Lord God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth"* (2 Kgs 19:15).

3. Psalm 47: *“For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth ... God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne”* (vss. 2, 8).
- C. The ultimate threat against Israel and Judah for their unfaithfulness was total overthrow by foreign powers and exile from the land.
1. Dt 28:47-53, 63-67 – Moses warns the people as they enter Canaan.
 2. After several hundred years of downward spiral, Israel succumbs to Assyria (2 Kgs 17:5-24) and Judah to Babylon (2 Chr 36:15-20).
 3. God has delivered Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar: *“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand ...”* (Dn 1:1-2). Daniel is taken captive in 605 B.C.

2. The Rule of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar

A. Daniel’s understanding of God’s rule over kings/nations:

1. When Daniel is enlightened by God concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he extols God’s providential control in national affairs: *“And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings ...”* (Dn 2:20-21).
2. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of an image that represented the rise and fall of future world-dominant kingdoms: his own kingdom of Babylon, his successors the Medo-Persians, then the Greeks and, finally, the Roman Empire (Dn 2:36ff).
3. To Nebuchadnezzar Daniel says: *“For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory ... He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all – you are this head of gold”* (2:37-38).

B. But Nebuchadnezzar didn’t heed this truth and boasted of “his” accomplishments. This elicited a lesson in humility from God.

1. Nebuchadnezzar dreams of his coming insanity, sent by God *“in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men”* (Dn 4:17).
2. Daniel explains to Nebuchadnezzar that these things would come upon him *“till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses ... after you come to know that Heaven rules”* (Dn 4:25-26, 32).

3. As Nebuchadnezzar then lives as a wild beast for “seven times,” the kingdom is reserved for him by God. Thus God can even rule a kingdom without a king!

C. These events are recounted to Belshazzar (Dn 5:18-21), but he, too, ignores the

lessons: *“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this”* (5:22). Consequently, *“God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it ... Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians”* (5:26-28).

3. God’s Continuing Control Over the Nations

- A. Pilate was serving as Roman governor by God’s permission: *“You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above”* (Jn 19:11).
- B. Rome was to exercise God’s wrath against Jerusalem: Mt 24:15; Lk 21:20-24.
- C. Jesus is given all authority in heaven and on earth, including authority over civil powers: Jn 17:2; Mt 28:18; Eph 1:20-21; 1 Tim 6:15 (*“He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords ...”*).
- D. The book of Revelation portrays a mighty, exalted Jesus who is *“ruler over all the kings of the earth”* (1:5) with a rod of iron (2:26-27). In my view (although others differ), Revelation is a behind-the-scenes look at the sovereign control of Jesus over Rome, the horrible persecuting force against the church. The Lord allows Rome’s onslaught for His purposes (6:10-11; 13:7) but in the end judges her for her treachery (18:4-8, 20; 19:2, 11-16). One of the main themes of the book whether one accepts an early or late date: **God and Jesus still control the nations, and no civil government will ever be able to destroy the spiritual kingdom and rule of Jesus.**

4. Issues for Discussion

- A. Does God’s control of nations mean that world leaders are conscious of His purposes and His use of them?

Thoughts: There is no evidence that those nations in the OT used by God were always conscious of such use. Isaiah notes of God’s use of Assyria: *“Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations”* (10:7ff). On the other hand, Pharaoh Necho apparently had some divinely revealed knowledge of God’s use of him (2 Chr 35:21-22). Since we believe that God’s final words to the world came through Jesus Christ and His apostles, and thus modern prophecy is nonexistent, nations today are lacking in direct knowledge of their place in God’s scheme of things.

- B. If God continues to use such nations today for His purposes, how do we know when He does so?

Thoughts: Again, in the absence of direct revelation, we cannot know which circumstances or outcomes reflect God’s specific will and which are the natural ebbs and flows of human free will. But this is not unusual. We likewise often cannot discern the specific answers to our prayers. We pray while trusting that

God hears and answers according to His will and our best interest and we accept the outcomes of life in that light. Similarly, we might not be able to understand how the hand of God is operative in a certain political trend, military action or other international event, but we proceed through life confident that all things are under His control. We might also distinguish between things God *causes* and which He *allows*. Whether by causation or allowance, all the affairs of man are subject to the authority and will of God. Nothing happens apart from His omniscient gaze.

C. Does Satan raise up nations, or only God?

Thoughts: It certainly appears that many civil governments are founded upon principles of evil. One may think of the beast from the sea in Revelation 13: “*So they worshiped the dragon (i.e., Satan, Rev 12:9 – jj) who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast ...*” (13:4) or even the modern examples of the USSR under Stalin and Germany under Hitler. One of the temptations of Jesus was Satan’s offer to give Him “*all the kingdoms of the world and their glory*” (Mt 4:8) in return for Jesus’ worship. Remember the above comments on the permissive will of God. God may allow a nation to rise on the principles of evil or gradually be turned to wickedness by various forces, but He is in control of this process.

Satan is called “the ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4), and his demonic bureaucracy is styled “principalities ... powers ... rulers of the darkness of this age ... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). There is no doubt that many nations past and present operate according to the dictates of the devil and not God. This, however, does not suggest that God is not in ultimate control of them.

D. Does God’s use of a nation justify everything it does?

Thoughts: No. Consider that God held Babylon accountable for its cruelty even though their actions were used by God for His purposes: “*For you shall no longer be called the Lady of Kingdoms. I was angry with My people; I have profaned My inheritance, and given them into your hand. You showed them no mercy ...*” (Is 47:5-7); “*For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation ... Then his mind changes and he transgresses; He commits offense, imputing this power to his god*” (Hab 1:5-11). Also, “*I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped – but with evil intent*” (Zech 1:15). Whether an individual (Pharaoh, Judas, Pilate, etc.) or a nation (Assyria, Babylon, Rome, etc.), all who act according to the principles of evil – even when such serves a useful purpose to God – are held accountable by God.

E. If it is true that God uses nations today for His purposes, how does this impact the Christian’s responsibility to vote, hold governmental office or serve in the military? Would we potentially be acting against God in doing so?

Thoughts: Daniel is a case in point of a man of God serving in a governmental

capacity – of a foreign power being used by God against Israel at that! This particular problem of inadvertently interfering in the will of God is faced by the Christian at every turn. If we don't know the specific will of God in every matter, can we do *anything at all*? We must deliberate carefully about all of our actions in life and determine what is lawful. We must then act in good faith upon all the information we have at hand, seeking that God's will be done in all things. If we find ourselves at odds with God's purposes, we will not hinder Him. We're not that powerful. We are not accountable for violating matters that are unrevealed.

F. Might God someday raise up a nation against the United States and punish us for our ungodliness?

Thoughts: There is no principle of which I am aware that guarantees the United States unlimited prosperity or existence. Some might take solace in the assumption that America is a "Christian nation," but evidence that such a slogan is legitimate is increasingly scarce. While all nations possess some degree of wickedness and antipathy toward God, history has shown that God will not tolerate an excess of evil indefinitely.

In regard to the conquest of Canaan, God delayed Israel's invasion because "*the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*" (Gn 15:16). Where and when God decides to draw a line in the sand, no one knows (unless, as God has done in times past, He reveals this information by inspiration). As Christians, we are to continue to be salt and light in our generation and preach repentance to the world around us. If it happens that God brings judgment upon us through gradual decline, economic collapse, or outright invasion, we might find ourselves in the role of a Jeremiah or a Daniel.