

The Pride and Fall of Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 4

Introduction

Today we will continue our study through the book of Daniel by looking at Daniel chapter 4. This is a most unusual passage of scripture.

Sometimes I will come to a passage and will need to dig deeply and then preach it and apply it. Other passages seem to preach themselves and I just need to get out of the way. This is one of those passages. I will do my best, as we go through this chapter, to stay out of the way.

Daniel chapter 4 was written by King Nebuchadnezzar, himself. It was not written by Daniel. As a result, we will notice, as we go through this, that the first person singular is used. We will see words such as: “I,” “me,” and “my”. It is a very unusual passage in the fact that it is an autobiography of King Nebuchadnezzar’s life.

This passage is also one of the most revealing passages in the Bible on the subject of insanity. When I come to the end of a passage like this, I thank the Lord for reason. There is a very thin line that we walk and Nebuchadnezzar was pushed over that line by a sovereign hand.

Let us look at Nebuchadnezzar’s personal testimony.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Pride

We will begin by looking at Daniel 4:1.

Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: “May your peace abound!”

Nebuchadnezzar is giving a universal edict. He is addressing the entire world. As we have learned in our study of Daniel thus far, Nebuchadnezzar is the world dictator; he rules and owns, as it were, the entire known world. He is the first dictator on planet earth. In the scheme of prophetic events, he is a picture of the anti-Christ, who will be the last dictator of the entire world.

Nebuchadnezzar says an unusual thing in this verse. He says, “May your peace abound!” It is as if he is saying, “I have peace and I want you to have the same peace too.”

Look at Daniel 4:2-3.

It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.

How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.

When we get to the end of these verses, we might say, “Now, wait a second! I thought Nebuchadnezzar was writing this passage.”

Nebuchadnezzar *is* writing this passage. Obviously, he is a different man. He will now reveal what happened in his life that brought him to the point that he could say, “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.”

He will now say, “Let me tell you what happened to my life.” Look at Daniel 4:4, where Nebuchadnezzar begins.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.

We get the idea, from reading this, that Nebuchadnezzar is sitting back, while at his hand-carved desk, perhaps with his feet propped up, leaning his head back on the leather seat and thinking of all that he has. He says he was at ease or at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace. However, he dozed off. Look at Daniel 4:5.

I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. As he is taking this nap, he is interrupted with fitful things and he is restless.

He continues in Daniel 4:6.

So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

Now this is the same old Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, this is reminiscent of Daniel chapter 2, when he had a dream and called in the same lousy group of magicians. They never were able to help him.

Nebuchadnezzar is a creature of habit – when he has another dream, what does he do? This is years later, but he calls in the same poor group of interpreters and says again, “Men, can you give me the interpretation of this dream.”

Let me stop for a moment at this point to comment that we are exactly like King Nebuchadnezzar in that we are creatures of habit. God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel was the only one in the whole realm who could interpret dreams, and yet, at a later point in his life, he goes right back to the same lousy group of men. Even though God reveals something to us, we continue to do the same thing – we are creatures of habit. As a matter of fact, if we were given to greed and materialism last year, we are probably that way today. If we were given to discontent, criticism, and complaining last year, we are probably that way today. Unless the Spirit of God can get hold of our lives and wrench us from the wrong habits that are ingrained in our personalities, we continue to do the same things.

Nebuchadnezzar calls this group of men to him, and we almost want to say, “Wake up, king! Daniel is available.”

Look at Daniel 4:8.

But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying,

In other words, “When everything else failed, Daniel came in before me.”

Now Nebuchadnezzar will relate the dream. Let us read it in Daniel 4:9-16. Note these words.

O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great.

The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it.

I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven.

He shouted out and spoke as follows: “Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

“Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

“Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast’s mind be given to him, and let seven periods [years] of time pass over him.”

The angel comes from heaven and begins to call the shots in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. He is about to lose his sanity.

Over all of his years, time and time and time again, King Nebuchadnezzar had been told that God is the King of heaven, but he would not listen. He, the great dictator in all of his pomp, was creating in all men the desire to worship his image. God then steps in on the scene with an angel.

Now notice Daniel 4:17, which gives us the purpose.

This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.

Note the phrase, “the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind”. This is the reason that King Nebuchadnezzar was given this dream. God has moved in on the scene to interrupt the affairs of a proud, egotistical man that he, and all of the world, may know that God rules as the Most High in heaven among men.

We find this phrase in Daniel 4:24,

this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High . . .

We see this in Daniel 4:25b, as well.

. . . the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind . . .

Also notice Daniel 4:32b.

. . . the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind . . .

Now this is tremendously encouraging to us, as Christians. We live in a land that has gone mad. However, I have news – the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind; over the affairs of men.

Wherever we are; whatever state we find ourselves in, whether it is in pride or whatever, God is ultimately in charge; God is calling the shots. We can go as far away from Him as we want, but God is still in control. The Most High of heaven rules in the realm of men.

When the king gave Daniel this dream, Daniel was so shocked, as Daniel 4:19 tells us, that he could not even respond for a while. Look at that verse.

Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar replied, “My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!”

In other words, “You don’t want to hear what I’ve got to say. Your enemies are going to celebrate in the land. They’re going to rejoice. Are you sure you want to hear?”

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Please, go on.”

Daniel begins the interpretation in Daniel 4:20-22.

The tree that you saw which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth

and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged –

it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.

In other words, “You are the stump.”

Continue to Daniel 4:23-26.

In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods [years] of time pass over him,

this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:

that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods [years] of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of

mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.

And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.

Let us stop for a moment. If we were Daniel, I think we would have stopped at verse 26, and said, “Period, King. I’ve given you the interpretation; I’ve earned my salary; I’ve done what you hired me to do – period. That’s it. Can I go now?”

Daniel never did this. He was willing to go one step further and confront. Look at Daniel 4:27.

Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.

Daniel is saying, “King, listen! This can all be stopped, if you’ll just turn in your wickedness to God.”

Daniel went one step further because he cared. He was willing to confront.

If there was ever a need in our land today, it is for individual believers to not just give the facts, but say, “Look, if the shoe fits, wear it.”

Will you go one step further and confront, and say, “Look, stop! Give your life to Jesus Christ; give it to God. Repent!”?

The individual that you work with needs to hear, sooner or later, “Listen, you’ve got to give up your sin and come to God.”

We need to be willing to confront. We need to confront in the home. Parents must be willing to say, “Stop!” Siblings should be willing to tell brothers and sisters, “Stop! Change your ways.”

I read a true story of a young child, a first-grader, who was calling the shots in the home. I could not help but chuckle at this story because my wife, Marsha, and I are beginning to get to a point with our twin boys that we can identify with some of this. Many of you are long past this stage, so please pray for us. In the story, this little boy comes into the dentist’s office. He kind of struts in there – he is calling the shots in his life.

The dentist says, “Now son, please get up in the chair.”

In his first grade language, the boy responds, “No chance. If you make me get up in that chair, I’m going to take my clothes off.”

The dentist does not even crack a grin – I do not know how – but says, “Okay, young man, just put your clothes on the table over there and then get up in the chair.”

This first-grader, kind of shocked, stops for a moment, but he is not bluffing so he takes off his shirt and puts it on the table in the corner of the room. Then he looks at the dentist as if to say, “See, I told you.”

The dentist says, “Okay, now get up in the chair.”

The little fellow replies, “If you make me get in that chair, I mean it, I’m going to take my clothes off.”

The dentist says, “Okay, just go ahead and put your trousers over there on the table.”

The little boy gets down to his bare shorts and is standing there shivering in the little room.

The dentist picks him up then, without saying a word, puts him in the chair and works on his teeth. The nurse would come in – I cannot imagine this scene – and work on that little fellow.

Afterward, the dentist takes him out of the chair, sets him on the floor, and says, “Okay, young man, you can go now.”

The boy goes over to get his clothes and the dentist said, “Oh no, no. We’ll keep your clothes. If your mom wants them, she can come back later and get them.”

So this little boy walks out into the waiting room – old enough to be embarrassed. His mom leaves with him and takes him home.

A couple of days later, the mom comes back – not to get on to the dentist, but to thank him. She says, “We go to the grocery store and he always threatens me with this thing, but I have never called his hand. If he wants something and I say, ‘No,’ he says, ‘I’ll take my clothes off if you don’t.’ You’re the first person to ever follow up. Thank you so much.”

This was just one episode of someone willing to confront. I am not sure I would have had the courage to do what that dentist did. However, there are illustrations in our lives – in our own families, our own businesses, our own neighborhoods – in which we have to make a decision. Are we going to be willing to take one extra step and say, “Look, this is

what God has revealed to you in a dream; this is what God has said, but I'm going to go one step further and apply it to your life. The shoe fits, so wear it. You need to back away and take a good look at your sin and repent."

Nebuchadnezzar's Fall

Now notice Daniel 4:29a,

Twelve months later . . .

Twelve months have gone by. Nebuchadnezzar has heard that he is going to be reduced to the life of a beast. He is going to go out and eat grass. His kingdom is going to be taken away from him because of his pride. We would think Nebuchadnezzar would fall down immediately and say, "Oh God, forgive me."

However, twelve months later, we read in Daniel 4:29b-30,

. . . he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.

The king reflected and said, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?"

We would want to say to him, "Hey, king, do you remember what happened a year ago? Wake up!"

In his pride, Nebuchadnezzar refused to listen. Strutting about, as it were, like a Thanksgiving turkey, all fattened up and not realizing that the axe of judgment is about to fall. Spreading his feathers, he says, "Look what I have done."

God said He would teach him a lesson that the Most High rules in the affairs or realm of men. We read in Daniel 4:31a,

While the word was in the king's mouth...

The words are just rolling off Nebuchadnezzar's tongue; he is right in the middle of saying, "Look how great and mighty I am," when, at that second, the axe fell. Look at Daniel 4:31b-32.

. . . a voice came from heaven, saying, "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you,

"and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods [years] of time will pass over you

until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes."

Judgment has fallen. It is too late now. Nebuchadnezzar is going to live in the field like a beast.

Notice the next verse, Daniel 4:33.

Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

God said, "Time's up. That's it."

Now we tend to look at a man like this and think, "Isn't that sad. He'd never heeded the voice of God."

However, we need to look in the mirror. Are we heeding the known will of God? Are we obeying the commands of scripture? Are we doing what we know?

James tells us,

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

Let me read something about this particular situation that Nebuchadnezzar found himself in. It is not unheard of for someone to act like a beast and literally, eat grass. There are documented cases of that happening. I have a book in my library that talks about this. If you have a problem sleeping at night, by the way, you could take this book and a glass of warm milk, read a couple of pages, and you would be knocked out for sure! Occasionally, when things are a little dull in the office, I will take this thing out and take a nap! This volume was written by an Old Testament scholar by the name of Kyle, and was translated from German. He writes,

This malady in which men regard themselves as beasts and imitate their manner of life is called "insania zoanthropica," or in the case of those who think themselves wolves, "lycanthropia". The condition is described in a manner true to nature, even like eating grass as a beast. It is a circumstance that has occurred in recent times, as in the case of a woman in the Wurttemberg asylum for the insane. . . . Regarding the statement, "his hair grew as

the feathers of an eagle,” his remaining for a long time in the open air is to be considered. For it is an actual experience that the hair, the more it is exposed to the influences of the rough weather and to the sun’s rays, the more does it grow in hardness and thus becomes like unto the feathers of an eagle.

Imagine the king in all his glory. Look at him now – beard matted with grass clots, eyes filled with some kind of insane fury, nails long and curled, as he is groveling on the ground eating grass. How tragic. All of his subjects and wise men kind of back up and say, “Tsk, ts, ts, tragic.”

I am very glad the story does not stop at this point. Nebuchadnezzar continues in his autobiography. Look at Daniel 4:34.

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Look at Daniel 4:37.

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

Nebuchadnezzar’s story reveals to us that sooner or later, judgment comes. We can flirt with sin; we can flirt with danger, and hear no voice from heaven. We think, “I’m safe. I don’t hear a thunder clap. I guess I’m all right.”

However, the Bible says,

. . . your sin will find you out. (Numbers 32:23)

I remember, as a little boy, my father often fed our family with savvy. I do not know where he got it, but one day, he came home and had on top of the van that he drove as a missionary, a huge bunch of bananas. The bananas were on one stalk that must have been five feet in height. It looked as if it had just come off the boat. There must have been 150 bananas. He took the thing off the van and lugged it down to our basement, where it was cool. In the area underneath the stairway, he hammered a nail into the stud and hoisted that stalk of bananas up on it and

closed the door. He then said to my three brothers and I, who were looking at all those bananas, “Okay, boys, stay away from the bananas.”

That week, my neighborhood buddy came over. We were probably eight years old at the time. I just had to go down to the basement and show my friend, whose name was Ronnie, the stalk of bananas. I opened the door to that old closet and said, “What do you think of that?”

Ronnie’s mouth dropped open. He got me in so much trouble. We looked at that huge stalk of bananas and he said, “Hey, do you think we could try one?”

I answered, “Well, Dad said not to touch it, but he’s not even here. Let’s go ahead and try one.”

My friend and I began devouring bananas. In fact, we began racing to see who could stuff a banana in the fastest. We had a great time and soon, there were twenty-five banana peels at our feet.

Then, the thought hit us, “We’re dead.”

We had an old piano – the piano on which I learned to play. It was a ten dollar antique. The thing was a huge white upright; a big old antique with all the ivories missing. It was in the corner, so I said, “Let’s dump the banana peels behind the piano. Dad will never know.”

My criminal mind had a lot to learn!

We put all the banana peels behind the piano. I can still remember that night. It was the first time I ever turned down banana pudding in my life. My parents knew something was up.

All was well for a week, until my parents decided to relocate the piano. They pulled the thing away from the wall – and there were all the dried, shriveled up, black banana peelings. Judgment fell!

This story is kind of funny, now that we are adults. However, we do things now and kind of put them in the corner where nobody can see. We think, “It’s all taken care of. It has been a week. I’m still reading my Bible. I’m still praying. There has been no thunder clap.”

However, in the corner, we have about twenty-five dried, old, shriveled-up peelings. It is sin – and God’s judgment will come.

Application

Let me point out two lessons.

1. First, let me give a lesson to the unsaved; to those who do not know Christ – pride and salvation never mix company.

Salvation does not come until we are on our knees, realizing that in ourselves, there dwells no good thing and that only God can save us. In fact, the most prideful statement that an individual can make is, “I’ll do something to gain God’s favor. I’ll pull myself up by my bootstraps. I’ll go to church. I’ll be good.”

This is a statement of hideous pride because we are nothing before God. We come in humility accepting His Son as our Savior.

2. Secondly, let me give a lesson to the Christian – the right to rule your life belongs to God alone.

I think the church is filled with “Nebuchadnezzars”; with people like you and me, who say, “Okay, God, just let me rule. I know there is a Most High, but You must be napping. Let me handle this one.”

Whatever the problem is; whatever the situation – perhaps a problem in the home or a difficulty at work – there is a God in heaven who has a right to rule and He is at work, even though He is silent. The problem is that we misinterpret His silence. God is at work, so be encouraged.

One poet wrote,

*One by one God took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Till I was empty handed;
Every glittering toy was lost.*

*And I walked earth’s highway, grieving,
In my rags and poverty,
Till I heard His voice inviting,*

“Lift your empty hands to Me!”

*So I turned my hands toward heaven,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches,
Till they could contain no more.*

*And at last I comprehended
With my stupid mind and dull,
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full!*

In our lives, if we are flat on our backs; if we are on our knees, we need to look to the God of heaven, who is at work.

If you have never accepted Jesus Christ, look to the God of heaven, who will accept you into His family forever. However, you have to come just like you are. Do not bring your hands full; do not say, “Okay, God, I need to be saved. Lord, I’ll do this; I’ll accept You, but I’ll work. Lord, let me come along and accept Your salvation, but I’ll help You work it out.”

This past week, I read the story of a woman who battled with this. She wanted to help God out, until finally, God brought her to her knees. She realized that she had to come to the Lord just like she was. She would sit down, at a later period of her life when she looked back over that salvation experience, and write the words,

*Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

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