

“NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S SECOND DREAM.”

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 4:1-18

Introduction.

Chapter 4 of Daniel is the last chapter of Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 5 will begin with a new king. So this is a crucial chapter, up to now the king has been surrounded by God’s people and God’s wisdom and good counsel but he doesn’t yet get it. His end is approaching, his opportunities to know the one true God and to love Him and worship Him are almost past. There is an end to God’s grace.

Opening doxology.

Daniel 4:1-3 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! 2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Chapter 4 begins upside down, with a doxology at the beginning. He puts the conclusion in his introduction.

If you read the end you will see it sounds familiar. This is being written after the fact, he starts with the praise that ends it all, as a way of saying, “let me show you how I got to this point.”

The rest of chapter 4 is basically a flashback to what happened in his life that led him to this conclusion. Notice the words are very personal, this is what God “has done for me.”

Are these the words of a truly converted man? There is much controversy about that among commentators. We shall leave off judgment on that until the end of the chapter. Let’s look at what happened to produce this kind of fruit in such a pagan man.

The setting for the dream, vss. 4-9.

Nebuchadnezzar is in the latter years of his life and of his reign. He has subdued all the nations around him, he is master of all that the eye can see. He has finished all his great building projects, he has made a great name for himself in all the earth.

Daniel 4:29-30 ... he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

Nebuchadnezzar is basking in his own glory and the glory of all his accomplishments. He is living the dream, in the golden years of life, his work is done and he is enjoying some well-deserved luxury, at ease in his great palace. He is relaxing in the beautiful hanging gardens that he built. Both personally and politically all is well, what could possibly go wrong now.

For all his greatness he never saw the great danger of ease, comfort, prosperity, luxury. It makes one complacent and worse, proud, thinking “this is all my doing and I deserve this.” In this it is so easy to take God for granted or even to forget God all together.

We are reminded of the parable of the rich man who tore down his barns so he could built bigger ones and was impressed with himself and all his success and greatness.

Luke 12:19-21 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

This reminds us how fragile we are and life is and our successes and prosperity are. They are fleeting, gone in a moment. Don’t trust any idol that can be toppled with just a single stroke from the finger of God.

As dangerous as success and achievement and prosperity were to this pagan king, they are even more dangers to those who believe in God. The temptation for successful and prosperous Christians is to believe that all we have is a sign of God’s being pleased with us and that there is something basically good or right about us that He would give us all of these things.

For the pagan, prosperity creates a false sense of security, life is good.

For the Christian, prosperity creates an inflated sense of favor or blessing, I am good.

It causes us to forget the truth about ourselves and our sinful hearts and how easily we turn blessings into idols and think we are better than we really are. We forget how quickly we can become proud and self-absorbed and self-sufficient.

So it is a sign of God’s grace and mercy when He removes these things from us.

This dream is a mercy from God, meant to reveal truth to his soul. This is another sign of God's patience and long-suffering toward Nebuchadnezzar which has stretched now over decades of his reign.

Once again God is stirring his conscience awake. How long can he ignore God's efforts to get his attention? How long can he remain in spiritual lethargy? When God seeks to bring us to repentance, He often must repeat His blows. And too often even when He gets our attention, it's only a matter of time before we are back in our former ways and old habits.

The wise men of Babylon.

Just like in the chapter two dream, Nebuchadnezzar orders an assembling of all the king's horses and all the king's men, all the paid pagan professionals, the best in the land. This time he goes ahead and tells them the dream, but it still doesn't help.

He still doesn't get it does he? They failed him in chapter two about the last dream. They failed him in chapter three when they tried to turn him against his best and godly counselors. How quickly we fall back to our own ways, our own secure habits and old mindsets.

Once again this dream is above their pay grade, none of them can figure it out. Or none of them had the guts to say what it might be. Certainly they could tell something bad happens in the dream. Even Daniel will pause before giving the interpretation (4:19).

These wise men are frauds. They have fancy titles and they profess to be skilled in the magical arts and sciences. They want to be acknowledged as learned men, knowing mysteries and deep things. There is no science or even art to what they do. They boasted of having wisdom, when they had none.

We are reminded of the failure of paganism and of other religions and cults. This reminds us of the failure of astrology and psychics and palm readers and tea leaf readers. All of this is dark and leaves us in the dark, it is at the root satanic.

Nebuchadnezzar is like us in trying every human means before seeking God. Too often God is the last resort, when things really get bad or we are really desperate.

At last Daniel came.

The first mercy the king receives from God is the dream. The second mercy God sends is someone to interpret it for him.

Before him stood the man he should have been. To his shame he has not yet learned how to inquire of the Lord on his own.

It is commendable that Nebuchadnezzar speaks so highly of him. This is a man in whom is the Spirit of God, a man who knows the truth and speaks the truth, a man in whom his words and his actions were congruent and consistent. He feared God not man, so he spoke plainly without regard for the consequences.

Make your counselors godly men and women, people who know the Word of God and have the Spirit of God and will tell you the truth and not just what you want to hear. Oh how we all need friends like this, who speak the truth we don't want to hear.

Proverbs 27:5-6 Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Notice how Daniel is a picture of what a Christian should be. He is different, he stands out, he isn't like everyone else or go along with what everyone else goes along with. The Spirit of God is in him and in the end people seek him out over those who are of the world.

The Tree Dream, vss. 10-17.

Nebuchadnezzar describes a tree as tall as the heavens and as wide as the ends of the earth. The fruit of the tree feed the whole earth and the branches provided shade for all the living creatures and a resting place for all the birds of the heavens. This is a world tree, a tree of universal scope, the inhabitation of all the living.

Trees in Scripture are often symbolic and can represent people or nations. There is a tree in the prophetic vision of Ezekiel 31 that represents Assyria and one in Ezekiel 17 that foreshadows the Messiah and His kingdom. Remember the Mustard Seed tree in Matthew 13 that describes the spread of the Christian church.

Matthew 13:31-32 "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

This tree is both Nebuchadnezzar himself and his kingdom, the king and his kingdom in one image. This is a picture of a great vast empire upon which everyone else is dependent.

There is a sense in which governments are to be like great spreading trees. They are to provide for the general well-being of the people under them, to protect them from harm. Kings and rulers are God's blessing to us, they are grace. Even tyrants have some use and some good. It is better to be governed than to have no government.

We profit from political order. However bad our government is or may become, our lives flourish here more than anywhere on earth. We shouldn't grumble or complain.

The second part of the dream.

Up to now everything is beautiful and wonderful. Life is good, everything is golden.

Then a holy one, probably an angel comes down with a frightening message. The angel is called a watcher, reminding us of the interest angels have in what God is doing in all the earth. They are spirits who never sleep and who can move from place to place quickly.

This messenger from heaven orders the tree chopped down and not just chopped down but stripped of all its bark and fruit, destroyed until it is no good to anyone. It's stripped of all its glory.

But the stump is ordered to be left. It is not to be torn up from the roots. It will flourish again. We will see God's mercy in this. He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

At this point in the vision things get personal, it's about a person with a mind (heart). This tree person will become a beast like the beasts that rested under the tree for seven periods of time, days, weeks or years we don't know. He will act like a beast and have the mind of a beast.

He will be stripped of his empire and of his human sense for a time. He will go from the highest place to the lowest place.

The lesson begins, vss. 17-18.

Daniel 4:17 The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, ***to the end that the living may know*** that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.

This dream has a reason, a purpose. It has been decreed by the courts of heaven ***to the end that the living might know***:

First, that God is the Lord Most High.

Chapter 4 is a long chapter. It would be better if we could actually read the whole chapter straight through, because then the theme of the chapter would become clear to us. The repetition of the words the Most High would stand out.

In this last chapter in the life of Nebuchadnezzar the Most High God reveals Himself in a personal way and makes Himself so clear he is finally humbled to the point of acknowledging and perhaps believing in the Most High God.

Like the first dream, God shows Himself to be the supreme God, the God above all Gods, the God who rules over all rulers and all nations. God will continue to do this until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is the Most High God and He will share His glory with no other. He will not have His glory diminished by man's pride. Whatever detracts from God's glory will not stand. He will not be defrauded. This is why the proud will always be brought down.

Second, that He will raise up whomever He will and He will bring low whomever He will.

Luke 1:51-53 He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

The rule and reign of every ruler and king and president and leader is fixed by God in heaven. He will give rule to whomever He wills. Don't forget this, don't lose sight, don't despair.

God doesn't just exercise His power and authority in heaven, He does so on earth as well. He governs every aspect of the human race.

Third, that in His inscrutable and sovereign will, God will often use the lowest of men, pagans, and wicked men. He has done it all through history, Pharaohs, evil emperors, Caesars, dictators, despots, men truly unfit to lead or rule.

Even the worst of the worst are all instruments in His hand for His glory to execute His will and bring about the consummation of all things in His time. We must never panic, but earnestly pray.

Psalm 86:8-9 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. 9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. 10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.