

## Survey of the Bible Daniel 4:1-37

As we come to chapter 4 of Daniel we are struck with what seems to be a conversion experience on the part of Nebuchadnezzar. Keep in mind that the previous chapter was where Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace at the command of the King because they had not worshipped the golden image nor the gods of Babylon.

But in God's grace and mercy He delivered them from the furnace unharmed.

**Daniel 3:27-30** <sup>27</sup> The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them. <sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." <sup>30</sup> Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar is pretty impressed with the God of these three Jews and as we come to our text it is quite clear that the King concludes that this God is no ordinary God.

**Daniel 4:1-3** <sup>NAU</sup> Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! <sup>2</sup> "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> "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.

This declaration is made by the King himself not just to those residing in Babylon but a decree that was meant to go out to all nations, at least under his rule. And though this particular decree

in our text does not include any punitive sanctions it is probably part of the same decree that we saw earlier.

**Daniel 3:29** <sup>29</sup> "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

And so, in chapter 4 we have the positive aspect of this decree being laid out for people throughout his kingdom.

It is in chapter 4 that Nebuchadnezzar has another dream and as before he seeks out the interpretation of the dream from his wise men, but like before they were unable to satisfy the King's request.

And so, enter Daniel whose God is able to give him the interpretation. But it is at this point we see, that despite the King's acknowledgment of the Most High God, whose kingdom is everlasting and whose dominion is from generation to generation, notice what god with which he identifies himself.

**Daniel 4:8** <sup>8</sup> "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....

We are not given the specific name of Nebuchadnezzar's god but it is not the God of Daniel.

As I've said before, from an intellectual standpoint a person can experience the mighty acts of the Most High God and in his mind can acknowledge that such acts can only be explained by an almighty and omnipotent being, be they the parting of the Red Sea, manna falling from heaven, the turning of water into wine or the raising of the dead.

But none of these things in themselves will necessarily convince a person to repent and believe in the promises of such a God. In fact, we are specifically told of such a thing in the gospel of Luke when conveying the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

**Luke 16:27-31** <sup>27</sup> "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him [Lazarus] to my father's house-- <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers-- in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead,

they will repent!' <sup>31</sup> "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The issue of repentance and faith in the living God has never been a lack of information about the Creator, but a heart problem that naturally hates the Creator, and this is precisely what Paul tells us.

**Romans 1:18-25** <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

This is Nebuchadnezzar. And now, once again, Daniel will impress upon him what the King of kings has to say to him as Daniel is given the interpretation of the dream.

**Daniel 4:19** <sup>19</sup> "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!

What appalls Daniel is that the dream was not about someone in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom who would be judged for coming against the king but rather this was about the King himself and God's judgment on him.

**Daniel 4:24-27** <sup>24</sup> this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: <sup>25</sup> 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 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. <sup>26</sup> '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. <sup>27</sup> '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.'

Imagine having to approach the most powerful man in the world at that time and tell him that Daniel's God was going to reduce the king to a mere beast. But then Daniel goes on to say what God has always said to mankind, "unless you turn from your wicked ways you will surely die."

And it may appear that God is giving the king one more chance to repent of his sins so that he may live. But we would be missing the point if we thought that God was simply giving Nebuchadnezzar another chance to once again figure out this whole "repent and believe thing."

Remember, no one is able to figure out his sin problem because the heart of the natural man is dead and unwilling to turn to God.

**Jeremiah 17:9** <sup>9</sup> "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

God is not hoping that Nebuchadnezzar will finally get it right, rather He is demonstrating one more time how no one will get it right because no one seeks God. In this way God further indicts, not just Nebuchadnezzar, but all mankind.

**Romans 3:10-12** <sup>10</sup> as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; <sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; <sup>12</sup> ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

And so, back in our text, Nebuchadnezzar is told to break away from his sins. The Aramaic word for "break away" is more literally, tear away, as if tearing off a piece of clothing. Nebuchadnezzar, like all men, wear their sin proudly and until we

are clothed with the righteousness that only God can supply our filthy garments will lead us to condemnation.

But is Nebuchadnezzar willing and able to tear away his sin and guilt? Apparently not because our text goes on to say that the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar by God came to pass.

**Daniel 4:28** <sup>28</sup> "All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

This verse is simply a segue to the next scene which takes us to a different time in the life of Nebuchadnezzar which clearly tells us how long the Lord was patient with the King.

**Daniel 4:29-33** <sup>29</sup> "Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof* of the royal palace of Babylon. <sup>30</sup> "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?' <sup>31</sup> "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, <sup>32</sup> 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 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.' <sup>33</sup> "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*.

There's a lot to unpack here but the overall gist is that God's judgment was not slow as some count slowness but rather the Lord showed patience so that the king would repent, to quote Peter in his account of the judgment of the world. (2Peter 3:9)

For an entire year the king was given a chance to repent, but instead of humbling himself, as Daniel encouraged him to do so after interpreting the dream that haunted the king for a time, the king instead boasts in his own power to accomplish that which God had done on his behalf.

It's interesting how we are told that the king reflected, as the NAU puts it, while other translations simply say, he answered or he said. Whether this was a verbal response or merely something the king thought about in his mind, the Lord was listening and responds immediately.

**Daniel 4:31-32** <sup>31</sup> "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, <sup>32</sup> 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 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.'

God judges and Nebuchadnezzar falls from his sovereignty and his dream now becomes a nightmare.

We are not told how long this judgment lasted for Nebuchadnezzar except that it was extended for seven periods or seven times.

The number seven is not chosen by God indiscriminately as it is used many times to demonstrate the completeness of God's will and plan. In this case it could be seven days, weeks or years. We simply don't know. What we do know is that, as always, God's perfect plan will be accomplished in His perfect timing.

By the way, this will also play an important role in the timing of God's redemptive plan as Daniel will later be given this same number seven to identify the coming Messiah and His plan of salvation as we will see in one of the most controversial and confusing portions of God's word.

**Daniel 9:25-27** <sup>25</sup> "So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be seven weeks* and *sixty-two weeks*; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. <sup>26</sup> "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. <sup>27</sup> "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for *one week*, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

When we get to this portion we will find that seven weeks, sixty two weeks and one week, which many reinterpret to mean seven sets of seventy years, totaling 490 years, is not what the text is actually saying.

But that's for later.

In our text for today it is important to note that God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar was the result of his glorying in himself and his accomplishments in contradiction to the fact that God had chosen Nebuchadnezzar to specifically carry out the Lord's judgment on His people Israel and subsequently to allow Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom to flourish.

Remember it was Daniel himself who acknowledged that God is all powerful and His will cannot be thwarted even as He chooses to either remove or establish any king in any time for His good pleasure and will.

**Daniel 2:20-21** <sup>20</sup> Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. <sup>21</sup> "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

In the removing and establishing of Kings, as we see in the verse above, it is in the context of Daniel interpreting the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

Therefore, the context is clear that God is establishing a pagan king to do His bidding. So to suggest that God is not active in the affairs of men, turning hearts where He wills, is not to understand the sovereignty of God.

And so, for Nebuchadnezzar to act as if he didn't know that God had blessed him is something that cannot be ignored as Nebuchadnezzar himself has clearly acknowledged.

**Daniel 2:46-47** <sup>46</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. <sup>47</sup> The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

And so, the Lord immediately enacts judgment on Nebuchadnezzar as he marvels at his accomplishments.

**Daniel 4:33** <sup>33</sup> "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*.

The words, “driven away from mankind” could be literally translated “chased away.”

This does not exclude the idea that the principle agent in this chasing away from mankind is God Himself but it can also include the secondary agents of men who are so put off by the actions of their King that they are forced to get him out of their presence and actually chase him to a place that is suited only for animals since he is driven “away from mankind.”

It is only verse 43 that illustrates the entirety of God’s judgment placed on Nebuchadnezzar as the very next verse shows how that judgment is taken away.

**Daniel 4:34** <sup>34</sup> "But at the end of *that period*, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me,

Again, we’re not told of how long *that period* was, only that it covered a span of 7 times. Not even Nebuchadnezzar seems to know with certainty how long it was.

It certainly would have been a span of time so as to allow the subjects of his kingdom to conclude that his behavior was no small thing and that it was the direct result of Daniel’s God, who in the fullness of times, accomplished His will in the life of Nebuchadnezzar.

And so, seven periods or seven times could be any time that God deemed appropriate to bring to a conclusion to His judgment on Nebuchadnezzar.

The second part of verse 34 to the end of the chapter is revealing, but again, we would miss the point if we thought that after all that Nebuchadnezzar had seen and experienced through Daniel and his three friends, along with the miracles and now with God fulfilling His word in judgment, that finally Nebuchadnezzar figured out what he needed to do in humbling himself before God.

**Daniel 4:34-37** <sup>34</sup> "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. <sup>35</sup> "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as

nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' <sup>36</sup> "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup> "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."

There is nothing in this scenario that suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's condition simply ran its course and that he naturally returned to a state of sanity.

Rather, it is tied to the word of the Lord which stated that after a certain period of time, then and only then would God lift such a judgment, which is to say that God caused Nebuchadnezzar to have his reason returned to him and that God, in the same moment, also caused Nebuchadnezzar to raise his eyes to heaven.

Nebuchadnezzar figured out nothing. In His grace God lifted the veil from the mind and the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and caused him to acknowledge that God alone is sovereign as Nebuchadnezzar blessed the Most High.

Now, some at this point conclude that Nebuchadnezzar's heart was turned by God and that he became a believer in the Most High God. But there's nothing in the text that concludes this. In fact, this is the last time in the book of Daniel that the king is still ruling and reigning in the Babylonian Kingdom.

He most certainly goes out with a glorious ending as God is lifted up on high. But it is God not Nebuchadnezzar who gets the glory.

I would like to think that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact believe, but this last statement, praising the God whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, is also juxtaposed with verse 36 which states: "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me."

No less than 10 times does Nebuchadnezzar refer to himself in ways that magnify himself along with his kingdom and

sovereignty. And though this would not disqualify him from a place with God, and though he may simply be acknowledging that it is God alone who has done this for him, this would not be the first time he gives praise to God when in fact he was holding on to his original gods.

**Daniel 4:2-3** <sup>2</sup> "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> "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."

And of course, it was immediately after this verse that we saw what ended up being the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride.

Will we see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven? I certainly hope so. God can turn the hearts of all He has chosen just as He did with a murderer of God's people known as Saul, later to be renamed Paul.