

Daniel Interprets The King's Second Dream

Daniel 4

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Today we study one of the most wonderful chapters of the Old Testament, the story of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, the dream of the great tree. The Bible is the storybook of God's gracious endeavors to save man from the pit of sin. What's the point of knowing what God's plan is for the future if our hearts aren't changed so that we can participate in it? With the tender pity and love of a father, He stretches out His hand to rescue us. But so many times His efforts are received with opposition and resistance!

There is a reason we study and rely on this Book, the Bible, and that is because it addresses the basic and important issues of life, which affect men and women in all ages in all places. The fourth chapter of Daniel addresses the issue of pride and ego, and it doesn't matter if you drive a car or a chariot; if you wear a toga or a turtleneck; if you write on clay or a computer, that issue remains the same.

I remind you that the greatest battle ever fought was not Napoleon at Waterloo, nor Custer at Little Big Horn nor Gettysburg. It is the battle that is waged in the human heart over the issue of sin or righteousness, pride or submission, Satan's way or God's way. Whether we were born in "Jerusalem," as was Daniel, or "Babylon" like Nebuchadnezzar, the conflict is fought in every heart. The "lust of the flesh and the pride of life" are the inducements offered by the archenemy Satan, who encourages the elevation and worship of self, while Christ holds out forgiveness, restoration and immortality, though self and ego

must die. Which choice will be made? Who will reign in the heart? The angels watch with keenest interest as the war continues in human hearts.

Did you know that long ago, during the America's civil war, spectators sat on hillsides and observed the conflict below as they ate their lunches from picnic baskets. Today we observe the battle as it developed in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, and wait as God's Spirit teaches us lessons of humility and submission.

This chapter uses a technique we call an "envelope" structure, in that it opens and closes with the same thought. The king's declarations of praise to the Almighty in the opening and closing verses are like "bookends" which tie the story together. The first three verses open with an address of praise to God, then verse four and onward tell you how the king came to think that way.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation." Daniel 4:1-3.

Here we read the king's personal testimony. Notice how he refers to the "signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked **for me**." This is the most powerful type of witness there is. No one can argue against what you know to be true in your own life! Nebuchadnezzar wants to share his story with everyone in the realm, "to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth."

Listen as the king tells us what happened. "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." Daniel 4:4, 5. We'll discuss in a minute the significance of his "flourishing" in

his palace. Remember that in the story given in chapter two, the king had a dream but couldn't remember it, let alone understand it. Now he can remember the dream, but doesn't know what it means.

What did he do? "Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream." But even though he could tell them the dream (which he wasn't able to do in chapter two), they couldn't tell him what it meant.

As we are on the hillside looking down at the battle in Nebuchadnezzar's heart, turn your spyglass in the direction of a little phrase in verse eight that will reveal the shape of the conflict. It's the little phrase "at last Daniel." When Nebuchadnezzar had said that "all" the wise men of Babylon had been summoned, that wasn't quite true. There was one who had been excluded! Why do you think that was? It was pride; it was ego. Nebuchadnezzar had an ominous premonition that the dream went against his plans and designs, and he wasn't anxious to hear what God's representative would tell him.

But Nebuchadnezzar was left without a choice. His counselors couldn't come through for him. So, "at last Daniel" came. Nebuchadnezzar was fighting it; he was fighting it hard. He was like Israel's King Ahab who told King Jehoshaphat of Judah, "Yes, there's one more prophet we can consult before we go to war, but I hate him; he tells me things I don't want to hear." (See I Kings 22:8.) Sometimes we're like that. We're like that when we plunge into assembling that toy and ignore the directions until we're forced to consult them. We're like that when we forge our way down the highway, and only get the map out when we have to admit we're lost. We're like that when the Bible sits gathering dust because we're afraid we'll read something that conflicts with our lifestyle or plans. Someone once told me, "No, I don't want to attend your evangelistic meeting. I might hear

something I don't want to hear, and then I'd be responsible." The battle rages in our souls just as it did in Nebuchadnezzar's heart. What we need to remember is that God loves us and is on our side, and tells us what we need to know because He wants to save us, as He did Nebuchadnezzar!

God is in the saving business. He delights in rescuing those from the prison of sin and restoring them to characters of righteousness. There is no pit so deep that He cannot save from it. This is not to glorify or encourage sin, but to praise God's great power and love!

Think about this! I want you to see something. One of the passages in the Bible that provides the clearest insight into the heart of Satan is found in Isaiah 14:12-14, which begins with the well known phrase, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Bible scholars agree that this is indeed speaking of the devil, the one who first rebelled against God. And yet, take careful notice that this chapter begins by addressing not Lucifer, but someone else. Who was that? "Take up this proverb against the **king of Babylon**." Isaiah 14:4.

In other words, the "king of Babylon," who at one time was Nebuchadnezzar, was so much like the devil in his thinking that Isaiah's message moves seamlessly from talking about him to speaking about the one whose mindset he echoed, Lucifer himself. The Bible has a habit of making use of spiritual metaphors, and moving from person to person, from object to object, or from event to event if the similarity is strong enough to warrant that type of comparison. In the case of the "king of Babylon" and Lucifer, it was!

Here's the point: God can redeem even someone who reflected the thinking of Satan so closely that in Isaiah's prophecy he is used as a direct comparison of Lucifer. So I wonder: is there hope for me? Absolutely! Is there hope for you? Without question! He can save "to the uttermost" all who come to Him. Though we may struggle with pride and ego as did

Nebuchadnezzar, God can change our way of thinking and save us, if we will let Him.

What did the king dream? "These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

"I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of an animal, and let seven times pass over him. This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.'" Daniel 4:10-17.

What did the dream mean? In the Scriptures, trees were used on occasion to represent people. The first Psalm contains the line, "He shall be as a tree planted by the rivers of water." Daniel was at first astonished and hesitant to give to the king the dream's meaning, because he sensed it would be met with resistance. But with the king's encouragement, Daniel told him that the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and his glorious kingdom, placed as a trust in his keeping from God, to the end that he would use those gifts placed in his hand as an opportunity to serve Him and His children. The dream also showed that a Holy Watcher was observing him, and noting how the opportunities

were being used, and that if not used properly, an accounting would be required.

Remember that this book is about God. We've talked about the four themes of Daniel and what they teach us about Him: God knows, God cares, God is involved and God rewards. We see these four themes woven into the fabric of Daniel 4. God was watching and knew of the king and his activities. He cared about him and hoped that he'd make choices that would lead to salvation. This story is not about God humiliating the king out of revenge or jealousy. God knows that a life of persistent selfish gratification will lead to banishment from His kingdom, and so He took action, He became involved in the life of Nebuchadnezzar to save him from himself. At the end, we see how God rewarded the king when he repented.

Daniel concluded his interpretation with an appeal for repentance. "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity." Daniel 4:27. Take a look at the emphatic action-verb "break." The Bible's counsel is not "taper off" in evil doing! It's not "slow down" your wickedness. It's "break off" your sins!

Because God's warnings are conditional, Daniel hoped that this prophecy would never come true, like the averted punishment on Nineveh predicted by Jonah. But like so many of us, the light of spiritual impressions faded away when not nurtured. This is what happened after the statue dream, when later Nebuchadnezzar made his own image entirely of gold.

So it was about a year later that the king was touring his palace, feasting his eyes on his accomplishments that the words escaped from his lips, "Is this not great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" Daniel 4:30. Notice the three personal pronouns, "I," "my mighty power," and "my majesty." It was the elevation, the

glorification, the worship of self. It was denial that God had placed these gifts in his hands. It was satanic thinking. It was the reason Isaiah 14 goes from the "king of Babylon" to "Lucifer."

Daniel's contemporary, Jeremiah, was inspired to write these words, which carry a message Nebuchadnezzar needed to hear. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD." Jeremiah 9:23, 24.

From a human point of view, the king's observation, "Is this not great Babylon that I have built," was completely appropriate. There was a reason the king had said he was "flourishing" in his palace. We live in an age in which we're conditioned to take credit for ourselves without shame or hesitation. Ego pumping and chest thumping are very much in vogue today. "If you can do it, it ain't braggin'." "If you got it, flaunt it." And Babylon had it, lots of it. It's called a "golden city" in Isaiah 14:4. Listen carefully to these physical descriptions:

- Babylon was a **city of gold**
- It was thought to be **eternal** (That was the whole point of Nebuchadnezzar's image being entirely of gold in chapter three.)
- It was constructed roughly in the **shape of a square**
- It had the Euphrates **River flowing right through it**

Do these descriptions ring any bells with you? A city of gold, lying "four-square," with a river running through it that would last forever? Isn't there something like that described in the Book of Revelation? Yes there is! It's God's capital city, the New Jerusalem! Could it be that Babylon represented Satan's capital, his "counterfeit" New Jerusalem? It represented his concepts and philosophies; the exaltation of self, the use of force to get what

you want, trampling on others to get to the top, denying God and His ways and wisdom. That's how you get the gold!

They had gold, and plenty of it. "Babylon was a golden cup in the hand of the Lord." Jeremiah 51:7. Just the penthouse Marduk temple on the very top of the Etemananki, the ziggurat built on the ruins of the tower of Babel had 18.5 tons of gold in it. The southern palace alone, one of three enjoyed by the king, was large enough to encompass all the Acropolis and its temples outside of Athens.

Color coordinated glazed bricks graced the city, with the glistening white of the temples, the rose red of the palaces, the azure blue of the gates and regal yellow of the walls. The walls were actually a set of double walls, estimated to be between 22 and 26 feet thick at the top, sufficient to ride several chariots abreast on top of them. The walls embraced the capital in protection, as did the River Euphrates, making ample water available to withstand any siege brought by an enemy. Food storage was in abundance, enough to last 20 years, we're told.

A unique well system operated within the city and palaces. They had indoor plumbing. (See <http://www.theplumber.com/history.html> if you have further interest.) One of Nebuchadnezzar's wives was from Media, where trees and greenery were everywhere. Because the area surrounding Babylon was not the same, and not wanting her to miss her homeland, Nebuchadnezzar had his engineers and architects design a special indoor garden system, which became known as the famous "Hanging Gardens," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Machines powered by slaves elevated water from the river by means of buckets attached to a chain, and irrigated an abundance of trees and plants situated in terraces in arched vaults rising to a height of 75 feet. The tops of the tallest trees could be seen above the walls from a considerable distance. Bouchard Gardens had nothing on Babylon!

Yes, from a human point of view, there was much of which to be proud in Nebuchadnezzar's accomplishments. It was yesterday's Dubai. The trouble was, it was all about self. It was for him and through him. There was no room for acknowledging God as being the One Who supplied his energy and opportunities. When Moses delivered his final speech to Israel, he told them to be careful when they entered Canaan and enjoyed the benefit of her bounties. At that point, they might say in their heart, "'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' You should remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth." Deuteronomy 8:17, 18.

By the way, you don't have to be a king of Babylon with Hanging Gardens to have this problem. "Is not this great Babylon" can also be "Isn't this a successful business I put together," or "Isn't this a great house I built," or "Isn't this a great meal I cooked," or "Isn't this a great sermon I preached." We don't even have to say the words out loud, if we cherish them in our hearts. Any time self is elevated, ego is inflated and credit for myself is treasured, we walk in the footsteps of Nebuchadnezzar. There was a reason the statue of chapter two was doomed to fall: *it was top-heavy and its feet were made of clay*. Centuries before, Solomon the wisest man of all had said, "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will restrain honor." Proverbs 29:23.

No sooner had those fateful words escaped the king's lips, a Voice spoke from heaven. "While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.' That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; he body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had

grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws." Daniel 4:31-33.

For a period of time, the king was going to live like an animal. There's actually a term that can be found in some medical psychological books that describes a disorder; a certain animal-like behavior resulting from advanced psychosis called "lycanthropy," which means literally "wolf-man."

If you look at this story from a certain point of view, there's irony in it. Think of it this way: Human beings were the crowning touch of God's creation. Human beings were created in God's image and set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. I know that animals can be very clever, and we enjoy our pets as much as anyone. But God made mankind special, with a spiritual nature, a capacity to love and worship their Creator unlike the rest of the animal world. There is a "God-space" built into every soul.

But God also made man with the freedom to choose whether to cultivate and nurture that spiritual nature, or deny it and live purely on the physical level. When humans deny God and take glory to themselves and live entirely for the gratification of their physical desires, they lower themselves to the level of the rest of the animal kingdom. It's spiritual "lycanthropy"!

This pretty much describes the way that many humans live today. Fill their stomachs, throw a little entertainment at them to dazzle their eyes and ears, allow them to satisfy their physical desires, and that's all they care about. Little Bobby watched his uncle, not a Christian, sit down to eat. The plate was put in front of him, and without so much as pausing to say "Grace," the uncle began eating. Bobby commented, "You're just like my dog; you dive right in." Denying God, denying that spiritual part of our being, puts us on the same level as the rest of the animals.

God was trying to communicate this truth in the example of Nebuchadnezzar. God was saying, in effect, "if you want to live

like an animal, then I'll let you." I've often wondered where he lived. Did they have a special royal pen for him? Did he run wild in the pasture? What did the officers say when people asked what had happened to their dignified monarch? Can you imagine someone seeing him out in the field eating grass and asking about him, and hearing them say, "Oh, that's our king. He's a little crazy right now." Talk about a royal embarrassment, a skeleton in the closet!

Who kept the machinery intact while he was on furlough? It would have been most unusual, even miraculous, for a king to have vacated his throne for a period (most think the "seven times" represents "seven years") and have it waiting for him when he returned. I have to believe that Daniel played a large part in holding the kingdom together. I believe that Daniel was the "band of iron and bronze" that "bound" the stump and roots of the tree during the king's absence.

During this time, the king lived like an animal. His outward appearance now accurately **reflected what his soul had become in living for self**. His hair grew, unwashed and uncut, till it was matted and spiked (he'd fit right in today!). His nails were untrimmed and looked more like bird's claws.

The beauty of this Book is that it reveals a God Whose delight it is to save and restore. Justice would have left Nebuchadnezzar forever in the pasture. But this Book reveals a God of justice *and* mercy. It's about our failures and His recovery. It's about Samson's foolishness but his strength returning to accomplish one last act of triumph. It's about a prodigal son's callous stupidity, but also his welcome when he "came to himself" and returned home.

Nebuchadnezzar is the prodigal son of the Old Testament. The wayward son feeding pigs is the New Testament Nebuchadnezzar foraging in the field. But there was hope for both! Listen as he shares his story. "And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my

understanding 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 is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done.' At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase." Daniel 4:33-37.

God knows, God cares, God is involved and God rewards. We see these themes in this chapter. God wanted desperately to save Nebuchadnezzar from final ruin, and so He took desperate measures to try to win him. How about us? Are we like the "first" Nebuchadnezzar, building our own private "Babylon's," lifting our hearts in pride, taking credit for our accomplishments, like the Pharisees trumpeting our good deeds so everyone can know what good people we are? Someone pointed out that a sea turtle lays a thousand eggs on shore, and then slips quietly back into the ocean, while a hen lays one egg and wakes the neighborhood! Which is it for us? Is it "Is not this great Babylon that I have built"? Or, "Now I extol and honor the King of heaven." The choice is ours.

One day soon we'll meet Nebuchadnezzar. He'll be there. You may have to wait in line to shake his hand, because a lot of people will want to hear his story, how God saved him. We'll live in **that** city of gold foursquare, that "eternal city," and enjoy the river of water of life that flows from His throne. Are you looking for that day to come? Are you surrendering your will to Him? Are you letting Him conquer pride in your heart?