

Daniel – Chapter 4

Gentile King writes a portion of scripture

Daniel copies a memo or decree addressed to everyone in the world. This memo was originally authored by Nebuchadnezzar, so here, we have a message preserved for us in the Old Testament from a gentile king.

Daniel 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly!

A statutory edict

This statutory edict was written in approximately 562BC and copies thereof sent by courier, to all parts of the Babylonian empire. It was written in the year he recovered from insanity imposed upon him because of pride.

• *All things had been given to him*

This chapter is really all about pride, because Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten that all his royal authority and power were given to him by God. We read about that in our previous study in Daniel chapter 2.

Daniel 2:37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;

Daniel 2:38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

• *Most high God*

Daniel 4:2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

Daniel 4:3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

The king in the prolog to his edict tells about the most high God singular, in sharp contrast to all the lesser gods commonly worshiped in Babylon. He takes the actions that this God has performed very personally and recognizes that this most high God has final authority and has delegated to the king a large measure of that authority.

• *Another dream*

Daniel 4:4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

Daniel 4:5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

Daniel 4:6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.

Daniel 4:7 When the magicians, enchanter, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.

• *The educated elites fail again*

Once again Nebuchadnezzar calls all the guys who supposedly have the ability to interpret dreams and once again they fail. It seems, that the king could have known better and stop wasting time by calling Daniel in the first place.

• *Enter Daniel*

Daniel 4:8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

Daniel, summoned by the king is asked to interpret the dream. Nebuchadnezzar calls him by his Hebrew name, a great honor to Daniel and his God, for as was common with the Hebrews, the name of God was often part of their names. In the case of Daniel, his name means: "God is Judge". However, his Babylonian name by which Daniel was known throughout the empire is also so explicitly given so that there might be no mistake who the king is writing about.

- *The king has confidence in Daniel*

Daniel 4:9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.

Addressing him by his Babylonian name, the king acknowledges that Daniel is the boss, in charge of the group of people whose professional titles are usually translated as magician, sorcerer, and other similar appellations. The words translated this way have their roots in the Aramaic word for stylus which means scholar or learned man having the ability to read and write. In our world he might have been addressed as professor Belteshazzar.

- *Nebuchadnezzar tells the dream*

Daniel 4:10 These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

Daniel 4:11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.

Daniel 4:12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

Daniel 4:13 "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven.

Daniel 4:14 He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

Daniel 4:15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth.

Daniel 4:16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

Daniel 4:17 "'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

Daniel 4:18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

- *The symbol of a tree*

The main object the king saw in his dream is a tree, a huge tree. Because the Holy Spirit is very consistent in the patterns and symbols he uses throughout the Holy word, we are going to take a little side trip to study how the Spirit uses the picture of a tree to communicate truth to us. Theologians have a fancy word for the consistency throughout Scripture called "expositional constancy".

- *A good man*

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Psalms 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1:3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalms 52:8 But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.

- *A wicked man*

Psalms 37:35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil,

Psalms 37:36 but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.

- *A fruitful man*

Jeremiah 17:8 He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

- *An unfruitful man*

Isaiah 56:3 Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree."

- *A tree symbolizes man*

So what is common in the scriptures using this symbolism of a tree? It is evident, that the Holy Spirit uses a tree to picture man. The man may be good, evil, bear much fruit or be barren; nevertheless a man is likened unto a tree.

- *Tree a symbol for group or nation of men -- Assyria*

In the symbolism we have seen so far the picture of a tree is applied to an individual. It is not confined to that however but can also be applied to nations. The nation of Assyria is compared to a tree or more accurately a whole forest trees.

Ezekiel 31:3 Consider Assyria, once a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches overshadowing the forest; it towered on high, its top above the thick foliage.

Ezekiel 31:4 The waters nourished it, deep springs made it grow tall; their streams flowed all around its base and sent their channels to all the trees of the field.

Ezekiel 31:5 So it towered higher than all the trees of the field; its boughs increased and its branches grew long, spreading because of abundant waters.

Ezekiel 31:6 All the birds of the air nested in its boughs, all the beasts of the field gave birth under its branches; all the great nations lived in its shade.

Ezekiel 31:7 It was majestic in beauty, with its spreading boughs, for its roots went down to abundant waters.

Ezekiel 31:8 The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor could the pine trees equal its boughs, nor could the plane trees compare with its branches-- no tree in the garden of God could match its beauty.

- *Tree a symbol for group or nation of men -- Israel*

The Apostle Paul likens the nation of Israel as an olive tree into which we Gentiles are grafted in.

Romans 11:16 If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,

- *The man Nebuchadnezzar is the tree*

After our little side trip into the symbolism of a tree, we can see that in this specific application the tree stands for Nebuchadnezzar. Notice that after verse 14 the pronoun changes from an "it" of the tree to him or he. Daniel tells us this next.

- *Daniel is troubled*

Daniel 4:19 Then Daniel (also called Beltshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Beltshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Beltshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!"

Daniel was perplexed and troubled not because he did not understand the dream, but because he did and did not really want to give this terrible news to the king. The king sensed this unease in Daniel and tried to calm him. It seems evident that Daniel liked Nebuchadnezzar, for after all he had been good to him and did not relish being a messenger of such bad news. It is not only evident that the Daniel liked the king, but that there was a very special place in the king's heart for Daniel. We will see further evidence of the close relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel in the next chapter.

- *Daniel interprets the dream*

Daniel 4:20 The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,

Daniel 4:21 with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air--

Daniel 4:22 you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

Daniel 4:23 "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

Daniel 4:24 "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:

Daniel 4:25 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.

Daniel 4:26 The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.

- *Earthly powers determined by God*

The main theme in this chapter is to teach Nebuchadnezzar and us, that all earthly power derives from and is instituted by God. Another strong point is that human pride always causes God to take decisive action. God is not passive when it come to dealing with pride, human or angelic.

- *Some important advice*

Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Daniel 4:28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel knows that sin is a serious business and strongly advises the king to repent and thereby possibly avert or at least to delay the decreed judgment of God.

- *A year later*

Daniel 4:29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,

Daniel 4:30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

- *Babylon was indeed great*

Babylon had its origins with Nimrod, the world's first dictator. The pride of man first reaches a peak at the tower of Babel we read about in Genesis 10. Herodotus, the Greek Historian writes that Babylon had a wall around it 15 miles on the side, 350ft high and wide enough so that six chariots could race around on it side by side and included 250 watchtowers each 100 ft. higher than the wall. The river Euphrates bisected the city roughly North to South, supplied water for the moat that protected it as well as agricultural and drinking water thus allowing the city to withstand an extended siege. The hanging gardens of semiramis was one of the wonders of the ancient world and engineers today are still trying to figure out how they were irrigated since pumps as we know them today did not exist then.

- *The city of Man and the city of God*

In a sense, the Bible can be thought of as a tale of two Cities, one the city of man, Babylon and the other the city of God, Jerusalem. The former is finally destroyed and the latter lasts forever.

- *A major problem with ego*

Because of all this grandeur over which the king reigned supreme, it was easy for him to get a swelled head and become proud. Time goes by and Daniel's admonition to repent is either forgotten or ignored and Nebuchadnezzar gives himself rather than the God of heaven credit for all that he was clearly told was given to him by God.

- *God can't stand usurpers of His glory*

Isaiah 48:11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

God is upset, and rightfully so when a mere human, even a great king, takes credit for something God has done and He alone can do. He tells us this quite unmistakably in the book of Isaiah.

- *Instant judgment*

Daniel 4:31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.

Daniel 4:32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

Daniel 4:33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

Nebuchadnezzar is instantly reminded of his dream of a year ago and is given seven years in exile with wild animals to think about his pride and to understand that he as well as all the kings of this earth obtain their rule from the God of heaven.

- *Mental Illness*

The king was afflicted with a mental illness where he thought he was an animal, in his case an ox.

Lycanthropy: (Greek: lykos, "wolf"; anthropos, "Man")

Mental disorder in which the patient believes he is a wolf or some other animal. Stimulated by the once widespread superstition of a supernatural condition in which men actually assume the physical form of werewolves or other animals. Linked with belief in animal guardian spirits, vampires, totemism, witches, and werewolves. Folk-lore, fairy tales, and legends of many nations and peoples show evidence of lycanthropic belief. Romans called anyone who was supposed to have been turned into a wolf by means of magic spells or herbs versipellis ("turnskin"). Widely believed in Europe during the Middle Ages. (p46)

Boanthropy: an ox... Raymond Harrison observed a case in British mental institution in 1946. Early '20s; hospitalized for 5 years; fitted description in 4:33.

- *The sin of pride*

A central lesson of this chapter is for us to understand that God hates pride. God is not content to be number one on a list of 10, but wants to be and must be number one on the list of one. I don't know how God classifies sin, but because this was the sin of Satan rising against God, I believe that pride is at or near the top of the list of sins that God hates most.

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

Isaiah 14:13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

Isaiah 14:14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

Isaiah 14:15 But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

- *A list of sins*

God does give us a list of sins in what I believe to be in the order of severity in His estimation.

Proverbs 6:16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

Proverbs 6:17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

Proverbs 6:18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

Proverbs 6:19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

- *Riches foster arrogance*

Nebuchadnezzar was surrounded by royal opulence and great and splendid riches which were no small contributor to pride that led to his downfall.

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

- *Many scriptural warning against arrogance*

Leaven, because it puffs up is used consistently in Scripture as a picture for sin. The Bible is full of warnings against arrogance and pride. Here are a few of them

1 Corinthians 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

James 4:13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

James 4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

James 4:16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

- *Nebuchadnezzar learned his lesson*

Daniel 4:34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Daniel 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Daniel 4:36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

- *Nebuchadnezzar praises is the God of heaven*

It is only by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, that anyone can bring praises to God.

Daniel 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

After seven years Nebuchadnezzar's chastisement was complete and God restored him to even greater honor than he had previously.

- *Daniel - friend of Nebuchadnezzar*

Talmudic tradition has it that Daniel during this time was more than a servant or Prime Minister in the king's service, but a true friend to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel ministered to him because he knew that God would restore the king at the end of seven years.

- *Nebuchadnezzar saved by faith*

I believe that Nebuchadnezzar came to a saving faith in the God of Daniel, for no one can bring such praise and exaltation to the creator God without faith and the working of the Holy Spirit. He gives written testimony sent throughout the entire Babylonian empire in exaltation of God and acknowledges that the God of heaven is eternal, all powerful, righteous and just and able to humble the proud. He no longer refers to God as Daniel's God, but addresses Him personally (v34) and is answered by of the return of his sanity.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 12:8 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.

Luke 12:9 But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.

- *Nebuchadnezzar lives about one more year*

After his restoration to power Nebuchadnezzar lived only for about another year and His son Evil-merodach succeeded him as Babylon's next ruling monarch.

- *Put away pride*

The main lesson we learned here is that God hates pride and will actively oppose it wherever it may be found. Even though Daniel was beloved by God, highly educated, and favored by the king of Babylon he was a humble man. Nebuchadnezzar received a seven year lesson from God in humility after which he was able to appreciate who this one true God that Daniel worshiped is and worship that God himself. Chapter four is his testimony and was preserved for us by Daniel through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

We all should pray that the Lord would gently show us areas of pride in our lives so that we may humble ourselves before He has to humble us.