

## A Second Opportunity to Shine

April 25, 2021

Daniel 4:1-18

We are studying the book of Daniel. We've completed 3 chapters. So far, what have been the lessons? Well, the setting is that the people of God have been exiled to Babylon, modern day Iraq. The Babylonian people, led by king Nebuchadnezzar was the top dog of the day. They ruled the world (or so they thought!). Their technique was to take the best and brightest young men, train them in everything Babylonian, convince them of the supremacy of the Babylonian culture and thereby ensure that the conquered people gave them no trouble.

So, among the Hebrew young men selected for such a program was Daniel and his three friends. They were given new names: Belshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were taught all things Babylonian. There, that is the setting for the book.

The first test/lesson happens when Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that no one is able to tell and interpret. Yet, Daniel was able to do so. And the point of the dream was that Nebuchadnezzar was the top dog of his day, but there would come after him others, other kingdoms. His dominance would not be lasting. And then, in the 4<sup>th</sup> kingdom would come a Kingdom of God's making that would crush all other kingdoms and over time engulf the whole earth. So, the lesson for King Nebuchadnezzar was that there was a God who knew and could control the future.

The next lesson came from the three friends. They wouldn't bow down to the image made of gold that the king had put up. They were thrown into the fiery furnace, where their God, the God of Scripture rescued them and protected them from harm...and Nebuchadnezzar was the witness. The lesson? The God of Scripture is able to deliver His people from the king's hand.

And so, now we come to chapter 4. This is a most fascinating chapter. Here we have another lesson for King Nebuchadnezzar. And this lesson will be costly for him, it will cost him 7 years of his life! But the chapter is written in a very unusual form. It is written from the perspective of the king. King Nebuchadnezzar is writing to us, telling what happened. Can you think of another passage in Scripture that is written from the perspective of a pagan, a foreign king? Does Pharaoh write about his encounter with Moses? Does Pilate or Herod write about what they learned from Jesus? No. But here, King Nebuchadnezzar tells us what He learned.

Then we have the timing of it all. It is written from the perspective of after the 7 years of lost life has been lived and his position restored. He is writing it as a report. In fact, this aspect is so confusing that one of the most reliable Hebrew texts has it connected to chapter 3, as if it summarizes the lesson learned from the fiery furnace. But I take it as written in connection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> dream of Nebuchadnezzar, chapter 4.

So, listen as we begin our study of Daniel 4. Once more, know that the story is too long for one lesson. Indeed, it will take 3 weeks to make it through the story. So hang in there, and know that the story ends with Nebuchadnezzar being restored to his place as king. . .and we have before us his report. READ Daniel 4:1-18.

Main point: Yahweh has proven that His kingdom is the only one that will endure.

As a subset of this, Yahweh has proven this by causing the falling down and the rising up of other kingdoms, great kingdoms. Not only can He see and know the future, not only can He rescue His own people, but He can bring down or raise up anyone to any position of leadership at any time. This was the lesson that King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn.

This lesson is really about pride, pride in power, in achievement, in importance. King Nebuchadnezzar had all these things. And so, God had to show Him that he was not all that, that there was a God who was sovereign over

him, raising him up or tearing him down as He so pleased. If pride comes before the fall, this king filled with pride was destined to fall hard. And yet, God raised him back up. We know that because of what we read here at the beginning of chapter 4. (2 parts)

I. The lesson learned is that our great God is the King who rules over every generation. vv. 1-3

King Nebuchadnezzar here testifies that the God of Scripture, our God is sovereign over all, for all time. Can you see how huge is this lesson? Not only is He better than all other gods, not only is He able to deliver His own, but He actually rules over all other kingdoms, raising them up and chopping them down as He pleases. I cannot adequately express how huge of a lesson this would be for the world's greatest king of his day, especially one who was so far from the God of Scripture!

v.1- King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!

As I've already suggested, here in these first three verses we have perhaps the most intriguing, important, and challenging verses of the text. This is written in the hand of the king. The words which follow are his. The telling of the following story is from his perspective. It is quoting him throughout. And the lesson learned here, the message conveyed here in these first three verses is right and good, as if written by a man after God's own heart! He is speaking truth.

In fact, it seems so out of place that some have put it in chapter 3 and attached it to the story of the fiery furnace. This must have been his reaction to seeing God deliver the three from the fiery furnace. But no, I agree with the way it is laid out in our Bibles. It is a summary statement to the FOLLOWING story. It will be followed by how the king came to this place in his thinking. But the lesson learned is given at the outset.

It would be like saying, "I want you to know that God is real! One day I was in desperate need of help..." We can see it in the text when we compare v.

3 and vv. 34-35 at the end of the story. They read the same, they bracket the story. Even the primary lesson learned will be given at the end of the story, that those who are prideful He humbles. So, as a good author, Nebuchadnezzar gives us his main point before telling us the story. Then he summarizes the story by giving the main point again.

So, in v.I, we see that this is from the king and intended for all peoples, all nations, all languages on the whole earth. So, not only did he learn this lesson, but he wants everyone everywhere to learn the same lesson. This almost (but not quite) reads like a decree. The second lesson (ch. 3) ends with a decree. But the third lesson begins and ends by a proclamation of truth. King Nebuchadnezzar is teaching us. That alone ought to blow our minds!

2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

Again, what are the signs and wonders? The fiery furnace? True, but more than that. The interpretation of the first dream? True, but more than that. The interpretation of the second dream, the dream of this passage? Yes, but even more than that. The signs and wonders here encompasses not only the interpretation of the dream but more than that the living out of the dream: Nebuchadnezzar was completely humbled and then completely restored, just as the dream foretold. It is the miracle that God did in Nebuchadnezzar's life that is in mind here. God humbled me, God raised me up. God is great. That is the gist of the message. Notice the emphasis on "done for me." It is not what he saw God do in the lives of the three in the furnace. It is not that Daniel was able to interpret this dream. It is a statement about what He did for King Nebuchadnezzar. He humbled me completely and then restored me completely and I want everyone, everywhere, for all time to know it! King Nebuchadnezzar is preaching!

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

This is what he has learned. His testimony (v.1-2) is what God has done for him. Here in v. 3 we are told that the lesson learned is that this one God is sovereign over all, over all generations. He rules with wonder working power! He is the King of kings! He has proven it to the satisfaction of the greatest king on earth of his day. He came in a skeptic, a man set on showing these conquered Hebrew people that his god was greater, more powerful, and superior to their God. And yet, here we are, after this situation, he opens by declaring that the Hebrew God is sovereign over all, ruling with wonder working power. What a powerful statement! Can you see why this section of the text was written in Aramaic, the trade language of the day for the whole of his kingdom? This message was not intended for the Hebrew people, written in their language. This is a message intended for the whole world, written in the world's language, intended to be spread to all people of every nation and tongue. Again, these are the words of king Nebuchadnezzar!

Pause for a second: I trust that some of you remember that Saddam Hussein had dreams of becoming Nebuchadnezzar. This was his dream, his intention. These were his people. In other words, the king penning these words was not some obscure man who lived somewhere long ago. The man who penned these words was one of the greatest kings who ever lived. He has inspired his people ever since. Just as the Jews hold up the reign of King David, so the people of Babylon hold up Nebuchadnezzar. And here he is lifting up the name of our God! Amazing!

II. The God of heaven has raised up and will chop down the greatest of kings to prove He is God. vv. 4-18

These are the signs and wonders mentioned in the last verses. There is one God who alone can and does raise up and chop down leaders. He deals with their pride by bringing them low. The interesting part to this section is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar gets this point BEFORE Daniel interprets the dream. He gives the point of the dream before Daniel explains it. What Daniel has to interpret is which king is going to have to learn that lesson. Who was the intended target of the dream? It could not be King Nebuchadnezzar, O King live forever! But that's for next week. This week it's just the dream.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. 5 I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.

Just as before, the king was alarmed by a dream. Notice his perspective that he was safely tucked in his own bed in his own house contemplating all of his prosperity. Or, he was laying in bed counting his riches! But then, some thoughts came to his mind that were not his own, alarming thoughts, disturbing thoughts.

6 So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation.

Again, just as before, all of the “wise men” of the culture, all of the king’s advisors were called to interpret the dream. This time he told them the dream. They didn’t have to tell the dream and then interpret. He went easy on them. But none of them could interpret it. I suspect, the dream was clear enough that it might have been interpreted. But who would want to tell the king he was at the center of the dream, especially if you got the interpretation wrong? Who would be so brave and confident of their interpretation that they would tell the king that it was him who would be cut down and forced to eat grass for 7 years? Would you be willing to go out on a limb for that message? So, they all claimed ignorance. But just as before, there was someone who was willing and able to interpret the dream: Daniel (or Belteshazzar).

8 At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, 9 “O Belteshazzar, (\*\*Daniel\*\*) chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.

Hint, hint. I gave him a name meaning “protect his life,” likely attached to the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god, Nebu, or perhaps Bel. I gave him the name “O MY god, protect this man’s life.” And yet, I’ve come to understand that it is HIS God who protects. HIS God is sovereign. So, his name is ironic, says king Nebuchadnezzar.

This man, Daniel, has the Spirit of God living in him. Again, can you appreciate the magnitude of this statement? I have all these advisors, who claim a connection to our great gods. And then I have this one advisor, who has the Spirit of a different God living in him. None of them could interpret the dream. So I asked this one guy, Daniel if he could interpret the dream. I already know the Spirit of his God lives in him. Maybe he can tell me the dream. I already know that he is able to interpret dreams no matter how difficult they might be. I’ve already learned that lesson! Daniel, tell me the meaning of my dream. Remember, this is all told from his perspective, not Daniel’s.

10 The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. 11 The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

Given what we already know, is there any doubt what or who this tree is? I think we’ve seen this image before. The clues are that it has grown, it is strong, it reaches up to the heavens and everyone on earth can see it. I think it might just be a vision of Nebuchadnezzar himself! It fits the truth and the image of his rule.

12 Its leaves were 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 heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

Isn’t that beautiful!!! This tree is prospering. The tree is beautiful. All of creation is benefiting from this tree. It is good for shade, for food, for all creatures great and small. Every creature on earth can see that this truly is a wonderful tree! If you owned such a tree, wouldn’t you be proud??? What a

good tree! It reminds me of what Nebuchadnezzar was thinking about right before he fell asleep!

13 “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.

Uh oh. There is a complicating factor to the dream. There is someone with a heavenly perspective, who sees this tree from above. He is described as a holy one, in other words He is not like all others, His opinion matters, His powers superior. He is a watcher. That is an unusual word, some might have angel or messenger. The core meaning of this unusual word is to be on watch. So, this is a Holy One who is on watch. He is watching all and now comes down. “This can’t be good!”

14 He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

This Holy One orders someone to cut down the tree, strip it bare, throw out its fruit. Let the creatures who have been gathering under the shade of this tree scatter. All of the good of that tree is coming to an end, the Holy One who has been watching has here decreed.

15 But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

Remember, this is all part of the dream Nebuchadnezzar is telling Daniel. Here we see that the stump is to be left, protected even. In other words, there is an intended future for that stump of the tree. The tree may be gone, but the stump remains, the field remains, the green grass of the field remains. The water of heaven will continue to nurture the grass and the stump of the tree. In other words, the Holy One will continue to show care for what remains of the tree. Are you catching this?

But then we see the image shift. Instead of a tree, there is a “he,” a “his.” This stump of a tree has turned into a person, who is given the same provision as the beasts of the field. He will eat grass like a cow, no meat, only green plants, lettuce and the like. The Holy One watching it all here decrees that the beautiful tree is to be cut down, yet preserved, yet allotted the role of a beast of the field. It has gone from the highest to the lowest.

16 Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.

Oh, this is even worse. He is going to lose his mind for a period of seven. It is going to last for seven cycles, seven seasons, here seven years. This chopped down beautiful tree will think like a beast of the field for seven years. This can’t be good!

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 decree has been handed down by the Holy One of heaven so that all everywhere will know who actually rules over the kingdoms of men. He is the One who sets people up and tears them down. He is sovereign over all. Are you seeing how powerful is this message? And Daniel hasn’t even interpreted the dream yet! This is just the king telling the dream (from his newfound perspective of wisdom I might add!)

18 This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

There, the table is now set. This is the dream. Now it is up to Belteshazzar (O god, protect him!) to give the proper interpretation of the dream. That comes next week, but I think we all know enough to know what it will be!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will acknowledge that even people who do not know God personally can speak His truth.
- 2) We will remind ourselves of who is really sovereign over all.
- 3) We will see God as the watchman, who can and does intervene in world events.
- 4) We will remember all of His signs and wonders.