

The Book of Daniel²²

Lesson 4

Daniel Chapter 4

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree

After 585 BC

Some time after 585 BC, and after the image of gold fiasco found in chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a tree. From the beginning of the dream to its fulfillment takes eight years. Beginning in verse 1, as Nebuchadnezzar recounts his experience, the eight years are over and he has finally seen fit to proclaim to his entire kingdom the great thing that the True God has accomplished in his own life.

Nebuchadnezzar will die in 561 BC, so the timing of the fulfilled prophecy could begin as early as 585 BC or as late as 569 BC, or over a 16-year period. No one knows the exact timing, but because the summary at the end of the chapter indicates that Nebuchadnezzar received "surpassing greatness" in his kingdom after the prophecy was completed, the incident must have begun closer to 585 BC than later.

Nebuchadnezzar's Declaration

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

At this point in history, Nebuchadnezzar has had an encounter with the living God, the Most High God and Nebuchadnezzar has made Him his God. It has not been an easy lesson for Nebuchadnezzar. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar's encounter with Daniel and his dream of the golden image would have turned his heart to God, but that did not happen; perhaps it was just a nudge in that direction. Twenty years later, it seems that the incident with Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the blazing furnace would have driven him to God, but perhaps it was also just a nudge.

Nebuchadnezzar did not have a personal stake in either of those events; his well-being was not in line with either. But in this encounter, Nebuchadnezzar has literally been knocked to his knees and he has nowhere to look but up. He must call out to the Most High God to rescue him, and, when he does, God answers. Now, after his rescue and conversion to the Most High God, Nebuchadnezzar feels that it seems good to tell his story to all the inhabitants. It seems good for him to declare all the signs and wonders that the Most High God provided for him. It is his testimony after the fact.

The basic purpose of a sign from God is to point people to Him and Nebuchadnezzar extols those signs from God. The wonders performed by God are His supernatural activities that drive people to Him, seeking to bring belief but not compelling a person to believe. Without a doubt, by this time, Nebuchadnezzar understands that his kingdom is not the ultimate kingdom of the world that God's is and it is infinite.

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Nebuchadnezzar's dominion, although vast in earthly terms, pales in comparison to the empire of the living God. He understands that his domain will last for one or two generations but God's domain lasts from generation to generation, a kingdom without end.

Nebuchadnezzar's Memory

Daniel ^{4:4} "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ^{4:5} "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and *these fantasies as I lay* on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.

As Nebuchadnezzar begins his testimony, he rolls back the story to the time when life was wonderful as he flourished in his palace, a happy man, at ease and without worries. His conquering days were complete and his kingdom was firmly established. But just as the dream of the golden statue had bothered Nebuchadnezzar, so does the dream of the tree. The dream does not occur just one time, it is a repeating dream that he finally cannot stand any longer and he must have help to understand it.

Nebuchadnezzar's Order

Daniel ^{4:6} "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ^{4:7} "Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans, and the diviners came in, and I related the dream to them; but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

As he did with the dream of the golden statue, Nebuchadnezzar calls for the wise men of the kingdom. It is the same group of men that he called more than twenty years before. It is the same group that could not help him then and it cannot help him now.

Daniel's Arrival

Daniel ^{4:8} "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, *saying*, ^{4:9} 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell *me* the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.'

"But finally Daniel" arrives, answering the call of the king to come to the palace. Nebuchadnezzar has a great respect for Daniel, knowing from past experience that Daniel has "a spirit of the holy gods" within him. Surely Daniel will be able to help him. Surely, no mystery will baffle Daniel. Surely Daniel will succeed. Nebuchadnezzar can not wait to tell Daniel his visions.

Nebuchadnezzar's Vision

Daniel ^{4:10} 'Now *these were* the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, *there was* a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ^{4:11} 'The tree grew large and became strong, And its height reached to the sky, And it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ^{4:12} 'Its foliage was 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 sky dwelt in its branches, And all living creatures fed themselves from it. ^{4:13} 'I was looking in the visions in my mind *as I lay* on my bed, and behold, an *angelic* watcher, a

holy one, descended from heaven. ^{4:14} 'He shouted out and spoke as follows: " Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the beasts flee from under it, And the birds from its branches. ^{4:15} "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze *around it* In the new grass of the field; And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ^{4:16} "Let his mind be changed from *that of* a man, And let a beast's mind be given to him, And let seven periods of time pass over him. ^{4:17} "This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers, And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes, And sets over it the lowliest of men." ^{4:18} 'This is the dream *which* I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell *me* its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.'

Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel the dream and asks him to interpret it. From experience, the king must have known that Daniel could tell him the dream and interpret it, but he trusts Daniel and is willing to tell him the dream and accept that Daniel's interpretation will be accurate.

Daniel's Alarm

Daniel ^{4:19} "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 answered and said, ' My lord, *if only* the dream applied to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries!'

When Daniel hears the dream, he is appalled. Nebuchadnezzar knows Daniel well enough to see that the vision has worried him greatly. The king tries to comfort Daniel, but Daniel is visibly distressed. However, in Daniel's style, he kindly and graciously expresses his own personal concern. "... if only the dream applied to those who hate you," it would have been easier for Daniel to deliver the bad news to the king. But the interpretation is not against the enemies of the king, it is against the king.

Daniel's Interpretation of the Tree

Daniel ^{4:20} 'The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth, ^{4:21} and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged-- ^{4:22} it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.'

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he, the king, is the tree.

Daniel's Interpretation of the Angel

Daniel ^{4:23} 'And in that the king saw an *angelic* watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, " Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze *around it* in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven

periods of time pass over him"; ^{4:24} this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ^{4:25} 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.

The angelic watcher will declare when the tree is to be chopped down to the ground. All who rely on the tree will be displaced but the stump is to be left and the roots are not to be disturbed. An iron and bronze band is to be put around the stump and it will occur when there is new grass in the field (spring). The stump will "be drenched" or dipped "in the dew of heaven." The stump is the man, Nebuchadnezzar, who will share the grass with the animals and his mind will be changed to that of an animal. "For seven periods of time," seven years, he will live as an animal while time passes over him.

Daniel's Assurance

Daniel ^{4:26} '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.

There are two purposes for this decree. First, it is to assure Nebuchadnezzar that everything on earth will know that the Most High God rules all mankind and that God will keep Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom safe until his encounter is complete.

Daniel's Warning

Daniel ^{4:27} '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.'

The second purpose is to warn Nebuchadnezzar to turn from his sins and show "mercy to the poor." By doing so, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's plight will be delayed and his prosperity will be prolonged.

Writer's Summary

Daniel ^{4:28} "All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

The unknown author stops at this point in the Scripture to assure the reader that every part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream has already occurred just as he saw it happen in his vision, according to Daniel's interpretation. Now the author tells how each point of the encounter occurred.

Nebuchadnezzar's Sin

Daniel ^{4:29} "Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof* of the royal palace of Babylon. ^{4:30} "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?' ^{4:31} "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,' ^{4:32} 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.'

One year later, in the spring, when the new grass is on the ground, Nebuchadnezzar climbs the stairs to the roof of the palace. He admires his great city of Babylon and his royal residence and boasts to himself that he has built it all with his own power, glory and majesty. It is Nebuchadnezzar's sin for which heaven has been waiting. While he is talking to himself, the angelic watcher declares that the encounter is to begin and it will last until he puts his trust in the Most High ruler of all creation.

Nebuchadnezzar's Curse

Daniel ^{4:33} "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.

In the previous chapters, Daniel and God make it explicitly clear that God had given Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom. However, Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten this fact and gives himself the credit for it. Immediately the dream is fulfilled and he becomes like an animal, "eating grass ... drenched with dew ... growing hair like eagles ... and nails like bird's claws" for seven years.

Nebuchadnezzar's Blessing

Daniel ^{4:34} "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. ^{4:35} "And 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 hast Thou done?'

At the end of the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar has the opportunity to look to the Most High God and put his trust in Him. He raises his eyes toward the sky and his senses return to him. He regains his sanity. His focus is on the Most High God Whom he blesses, praises, and honors. He recognizes that God is everything, doing everything according to His own wishes. What God wants, God will do! "No one can ward off His hand." No one can ever question God's goodness toward men. No one can ever question how God interjects his hand in man's affairs.

Nebuchadnezzar's Reason

Daniel ^{4:36} "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.

God keeps his promise to Nebuchadnezzar by returning all his previous "majesty, splendor," and "glory" in the kingdom of Babylon. The counselors and nobles do not fear Nebuchadnezzar even though he has crawled the earth on his hands and knees like an animal for seven years. His wisdom has returned to him, greater than before. His trust is in the true God and not any other god. Wherever this chapter fits in time, the facts indicate that his kingdom is greater after his encounter with God and his conversion than it was before.

Nebuchadnezzar's Conversion

Daniel ^{4:37} "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."

Never again will Nebuchadnezzar give himself credit for the works of God. From here on, Nebuchadnezzar will personally testify that "His works are true ... His ways ... just," and "He is able to humble ..." the proud.