

Lecture #5

Daniel 4:1-37

DANIEL 4:1-27

Daniel chapter four is an amazing chapter, not only in Daniel but in the entire Bible. Nebuchadnezzar, a Gentile king, gives his own account of how he was proud and arrogant and was humbled by God to the point of being insane and then eventually was restored to his position. The amazing thing about this is his purpose—he wants to give glory to the God of the Bible, the God of Daniel. It is a most remarkable chapter in all of Scripture.

There are many Bible scholars who believe this was a conversion point in Nebuchadnezzar's life—the point when he really came to believe in the Most High God of the Bible.

GOD DOES WHATEVER HE WANTS WITH WHOMEVER HE WANTS IN ORDER TO BRING PEOPLE TO THE REALIZATION THAT HE IS SOVEREIGNLY RULING OVER EVERYTHING.

Those who think logically naturally would desire to be in a right relationship with this powerful, sovereign God. Those who think insanely think and act like beasts.

Daniel 4:1-3 – Nebuchadnezzar declares the greatness of God to the whole world.

Many believe that this episode occurs about ten years after the statue had been erected. Dr. Donald Campbell observed, this is a very odd introduction to the story because the introduction is actually the conclusion.

(Observation #1) - His declaration is to all people . **4:1a**

The emphasis is on all the known world. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the whole world to know that he went insane. He wanted the whole world to know about the greatness of God. Ironside said this is not only wonderful, it is a miracle.

(Observation #2) - His declaration is peaceful . **4:1b**

A common way of introduction even to this day in the east is "shalom," which means peace. Darius does the same thing later in Daniel 6:25. The context of this peace, in both instances, is clearly linked to knowledge of and a relationship with the Most High God. Until one wants knowledge of and a relationship with the Most High God, one will lack peace in life.

(Observation #3) - His declaration is personal . **4:2**

This account is a personal account of what God did with and for Nebuchadnezzar. The words "signs" and "wonders" refer to things that God pointed out ("signs") to Nebuchadnezzar that testified of Him and things which surprised and astonished ("wonders") him. God took him from a proud, arrogant, kingly position and humiliated him to the point of being insane and then brought him back to his position again. Nebuchadnezzar wants to tell this remarkable story.

(Observation #4) - His declaration is about God's power. **4:3a**

The point of telling this personal story is to show how great and powerful the God of the Bible actually is.

(Observation #5) - His declaration is that God's Kingdom is perpetual. **4:3b**

No political kingdom has ever been an everlasting kingdom, but God's kingdom is. In God's kingdom there are no assassinations or usurpations that can bring it to a halt. God continues to sovereignly rule from generation to generation. No one can stop it or cancel it. His will is completely being accomplished throughout the whole world, no matter who is in charge. That is what Nebuchadnezzar learned.

Daniel 4:4-18a – Nebuchadnezzar declares the prophetic vision he received from God.

(Fact #1) - The vision occurred at a time when he was secure and successful. **4:4**

Nebuchadnezzar was sailing through life in the lap of luxury when God brought him down. The emphasis is that he was in "his" house and palace. He had no thought that God was the One who had given this to him. He had no sense of dependency on God. That was the furthest thing from his mind. He was living in a delusional framework of false security. **Just because one is seemingly successful and untroubled does not mean he is safe in his relationship with God.** There are many today living in a delusional framework of thinking that they are okay and safe, when in fact they are heading to eternal collapse.

(Fact #2) - The vision God gave made him fearful and alarmed. **4:5**

This, of course, was the very purpose of the dream. God wanted to scare Nebuchadnezzar. The irony here is that God was going to wake up Nebuchadnezzar to his need of a relationship with Him, while he was sleeping.

(Fact #3) - The vision could not be interpreted by any heathen wise men. **4:6-7**

A heathen king wanted to know the meaning of God's Word, especially biblical prophecy. Nebuchadnezzar is turning to the wrong source for comfort and help. He should have been turning to men of God, but instead he first turns to secular wise men and counselors who could not interpret the dream. People today turn to wrong sources to put a Band-Aid on their fears and problems, when in fact they should go to people of God who can tell them the truth of God.

(Fact #4) - The vision could be interpreted by Daniel. **4:8-9**

Now even before Nebuchadnezzar presents his dream, he wants all peoples to know that there was a man of God who could unravel truth. There was a man of God who could unravel the mysteries of God. His name was Daniel. One would have thought after his first dream had baffled the wise men, he would have bypassed them and went immediately to Daniel. However, he has not learned the important lesson—the wisdom of the world is nothing compared to one who knows the wise ways of God.

Carefully notice **verse 8** says, "...finally Daniel came in before me." It is possible Daniel waited until all others had failed and then he went in. Belteshazzar (vv. 8-9) was the Babylonian name given to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar brings out the fact that he gave Daniel the name of his god, but it was not his pseudo-god who could interpret the dream. It was Daniel the Jew related to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When you are faithful to God, those who are in trouble will eventually come to you if they want a true resolution to their problems.

(Fact #5) - The vision is presented to Daniel by Nebuchadnezzar. **4:10-18**

Part #1 - He saw a great tree which stood in the middle of the earth. **4:10**

His previous dream was a giant statue, now this one is a giant tree.

Part #2 - He saw the tree grow to be very large, beautiful and productive so that the whole world and all things in it were nourished by it. **4:11-12**

When you first see this tree it appears to be so impressive and so needed.

Part #3 - He saw a holy angel descend from heaven and cry out to chop the tree down. **4:13-14**

The angel does this without any warning or explanation.

Part #4 - He saw the stump was to be left with its roots and protected so he could share grass with the beasts of the earth. **4:15**

I want you to notice that the tree changes from an "it" to a "him."

Part #5 - He saw his mind changed from a man to a beast's mind for seven years. **4:16**

Seven periods of times refers to seven years because of the length of his hair (4:33). This concept of seven years will become critical to the book of Daniel and to prophecy. As the Gentile age winds down, people will become more and more beastly and one beast will rule seven years.

Part #6 - He saw the purpose of this happening—to show that it is God who rules over all of mankind and He elevates and humiliates those He desires. **4:17**

This is a decree from heaven and it will not be overturned.

Daniel 4:19-27 – Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream.

Daniel apparently knew what the dream meant, but was in no hurry to tell him.

Revelation #1 - The great tree which stood and nourished the earth was Nebuchadnezzar. **4:20-22**

Trees are often used in the Bible to symbolize political authority such as kings, nations and empires (Hosea 14:5-7; Zechariah 11:1-2). It is interesting that Jesus predicts that as we near the end, religion will grow to become a monstrous tree filled with evil birds (Matt. 13:31-32).

Revelation #2 - The chopping down of the tree and the leaving of the stump and the grazing of the grass refers to Nebuchadnezzar who will eat grass like the beasts but afterwards will have his kingdom restored by the Most High God. **4:23-26**

Psychologists say there is a type of insanity called zoanthropy in which a person thinks he/she is an animal; lycanthropy in which a person acts like a wolf and kunanthropy in which a person acts like a dog.

God is the One who controls the time of humiliation and the time of exaltation. One might ask—how long does the humiliation last? Until we learn the lessons God wants us to learn.

Revelation #3 - Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar is to break away from his proud sin and pursue the righteousness for Kingdom prosperity. **4:27**

Daniel doesn't just give a lesson on prophecy. He makes it personal. He advises Nebuchadnezzar to make some immediate changes—namely turn from his sin. Prophecy is, in part, designed to purify. But Daniel's prophetic admonition fell on deaf ears.

Truth is there are many who are living in a delusional fog of a false sense of security. There are those who think they are okay and that God will never pull the plug on them. All need to realize God is in control of our lives. Those who believe on Jesus Christ and live their lives humbly and honestly before Him have nothing to fear. However, those who don't believe on Jesus Christ need to realize they are on shaky ground. Our world can cave in at any moment and in one instant we can be in eternity. If the Lord tarries, there will come a moment when some angel will be given the job of cutting us down, ending our life and taking us into eternity. When this decree is given it will be too late to respond. Believe on the Lord and be saved. Do not let your pride get in the way. Humble yourself to God and He will exalt you. If you know Him, humbly and honestly obey Him.

DANIEL 4:28-37

History is filled with many accounts of leaders who began the day ruling over millions of people and by the end of the day was either in exile or dead. For example, Herod Agrippa was at the height of his power, at the height of his prosperity when his day began. In fact, according to Acts 12:21-23 he put on his royal clothing and went before thousands of people to address them, and they cried out that his was the voice of a god, not the voice of a man. As a result, God struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died.

There is an interesting verse in Ecclesiastes 8:11 which says: "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil."

The point of the verse is that God typically does not bring His sentence on someone quickly. He typically gives them an opportunity to repent, but as evil progresses and becomes worse and worse, He finally says—"I have had enough." He eventually steps in and levels the proud.

After Daniel predicted what God would do (4:19-27), God gave Nebuchadnezzar a year to repent, but he did not repent. In fact, he became more and more arrogant. As the days moved forward, Nebuchadnezzar forgot about Daniel's warnings. **This is the way God typically works when it comes to judgment—He gives time for repentance before He sends it.**

For example, God waited patiently for 120 years during the days of Noah and gave the world plenty of time to repent before He sent the flood (I Peter 3:20; Genesis 6:3). God gave Jerusalem almost forty years to repent after she killed His Son, then the Romans came and destroyed the city and the temple. God has given this present evil world over 2000 years to repent and she refuses. In fact, this world gets worse and worse (II Peter 3:9).

AFTER GOD GIVES A PERSON A GRACIOUS PERIOD OF TIME TO REPENT, ONE MAY BE CERTAIN THAT GOD WILL LITERALLY FULFILL HIS WORD IN ANY DISPENSATION AND HUMBLE AND BREAK THE PROUD BY HIS JUDGMENT.

Whether it is Nebuchadnezzar who lived nearly 600 years before Christ or whether it is a person today who lives over 2000 years after Christ, God will only grant His grace so long and then comes His literal judgment.

Now I want you to notice what **verse 28** says—“All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the King.” In other words, **God fulfilled prophecy literally**. This is not symbolic; He literally did what He said He was going to do. All the specifics and details of what Daniel told him (**4:24-26**) were literally fulfilled. We may be sure this is still how God fulfills prophecy.

Daniel 4:29 – The time of the fulfillment of the prophecy.

The fulfillment of the prophecy occurred one year after the prediction was made (**4:24-26**). Nebuchadnezzar was walking on top of the roof of his royal palace, which was to him the most secure place he could be. When you think of the roof of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace, don’t think in terms of the roof of your house. Thomas Robinson (p. 87), who gets his information from Herodotus, says the walls surrounding Babylon were 350 feet high and 87 feet wide. In fact, it has been observed that you could put four chariots side by side on these walls, which were 15 miles long. There were 25 streets which ran parallel in lines from north to south, which were intersected by 25 other streets which ran from east to west. The Euphrates River flowed through the middle of Babylon and the population was about two million. Nebuchadnezzar’s palace was spectacular. In fact, according to historical accounts, his palace featured a “Hanging Gardens” which was 4,000 square feet, which the Greeks called one of the great wonders of the world. He apparently had this built in his palace because his wife was from Media and he wanted her to be able to look at a scene that would remind her of her homeland. He could go out and walk on his roof and look over all of this, thinking he was totally secure, totally untouchable. But that all changed in a moment. God said this is the day I fulfill my Word and you will go down. God’s judgments **always** come in His time and they come no matter where a person is or how secure he may think he is.

None of us know when God will say this is the day I am going to deal with your pride. Those who know what is right and true and persist in proud rebellion have a day coming when God will say this is the day, this is your day to go down.

Daniel 4:30 – The reason for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Of all the sins that can anger God and bring about His judgment, none are more dangerous than pride. James Montgomery Boice said this is “the sin God will not tolerate.” God absolutely hates pride and when people become proud, He will step in and do something about it.

Here we get in this one verse in capsule form precisely why God did what He did. Nebuchadnezzar was an arrogant, proud man who was boasting about Babylon and his palace and his power and his glory and his majesty. He was proud of himself and he was proud of his accomplishments. God was nowhere in his thoughts. He was taking full credit for all he had and for all he had built.

Daniel 4:31-32 – The judgment response of God to Nebuchadnezzar.

While Nebuchadnezzar was speaking so highly of himself, God literally and suddenly spoke out of heaven and said it is time for you to pay for your proud rebellion. God does not usually react instantly, but when He does act it is suddenly. For example, when Paul was speaking of the Rapture and the Tribulation, he said, “While they are saying peace and safety, then destruction will come upon them suddenly ... and they shall not escape” (I Thessalonians 5:3).

(Reality #1) - Sovereignty has been taken from you. **4:31**

Whatever we have or wherever we are has been given to us by God and it can be taken from us by God.

(Reality #2) - You will be driven away from mankind. **4:32a**

God was driving him away from acting human. You could hire the best physicians and psychologists and psychiatrists, but you could not reverse this mental condition.

(Reality #3) - You will eat grass like cattle. **4:33b**

I believe there are many people who act beastly because of an edict of God. They have reached a point in which God gives them up. They do not have an appetite to eat the meat of God’s Word because God has taken the appetite away.

(Reality #4) - You will eat grass for seven years until you admit the truth about God. **4:32c**

God operates according to His time schedule, not ours.

Daniel 4:33 – The immediate, literal fulfillment of the judgment prophecy.

(Observation #1) - Nebuchadnezzar was driven from mankind. **4:33a**

(Observation #2) - Nebuchadnezzar began eating grass like cattle. **4:33b**

R. K. Harrison says that he personally observed a young man in his twenties who was in a British mental institution in 1946 who was afflicted the same way as Nebuchadnezzar. He said the man spent the entire day outdoors. He describes the man’s behavior in the following way: “His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of grass as he went along. ... He never ate institutional food with the other inmates and his only drink was water.” The writer was able to examine him cursorily and the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickening condition of the fingernails. Without institutional care, the patient would have manifested precisely the same physical conditions as those mentioned in Daniel 4:33 (R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 1116-1117).

If you have more of an appetite for other things rather than God's Word, check yourself and make certain you are not in proud rebellion, for you may be under a judgment of God.

(Observation #3) - Nebuchadnezzar's body was drenched with dew. **4:33c**

(Observation #4) - Nebuchadnezzar's hair grew long like eagle's feathers. **4:33d**

(Observation #5) - Nebuchadnezzar's nails grew long like bird claws. **4:33e**

Daniel 4:34-35 – The repentance of Nebuchadnezzar.

After seven years Nebuchadnezzar was finally humbled. This is the same amount of time it will take to humble the world during the Great Tribulation. There are four main purposes of the Great Tribulation found in Revelation 6-19: 1) Humble proud man; 2) Pour out God's wrath on a God-mocking and rejecting world; 3) Regather Israel; 4) Prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus Christ. God will humble the world in the Tribulation.

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes toward heaven and he started offering proper praise to God. This is all it takes, one look to heaven for help. God says time and time again, "look unto me and be saved." Nebuchadnezzar finally looked up. The first thing he did when he was right with God was offer praise to God.

(Acknowledgment #1) - God lives forever. **4:34a**

(Acknowledgment #2) - God reigns forever. **4:34b**

(Acknowledgment #3) - Compared to God everything else is nothing. **4:35a**

All peoples of the earth, including himself are a nothing.

(Acknowledgment #4) - God does whatever He wants in heaven and on earth. **4:35b**

One writer said it is too bad that amateur Bible students don't have the accurate perspective of God that Nebuchadnezzar has. So many want to quibble about God's sovereignty, but Spurgeon said mark it well because the thing men want to complain about in God is what they want to love about themselves. They don't want to yield to the fact that God is sovereign. They want to be sovereign.

Daniel 4:36 – God lifts the judgment from Nebuchadnezzar.

As soon as Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged this truth about God—his reason returned and he was restored to an even greater level of greatness. Now the reason why God lifts this judgment is because this was all part of the predicted plan of God (4:32). In other words, it was the Word of God which gave Nebuchadnezzar a second chance. He did this for His purposes, namely that Nebuchadnezzar would exalt God and testify of His greatness and majesty, which Nebuchadnezzar did do.

Humbling ones self before God will always lead to a greater level of greatness.

Daniel 4:37 – Nebuchadnezzar exalts God.

Here is, as Dr. Wiersbe said, a great compendium of both theology and doxology. God is able to humble the proud and that is exactly what He will do. One who humbles himself before God will be exalted by God. One who is proud will be humbled.

God is a patient and longsuffering God. He gives people ample opportunity to change in their relationship with Him. But know this; there will come a moment when God says–time is up, time for judgment–and when that moment comes, nothing will stop it. There will be no second chance for those who reject Jesus Christ. People in our world are honored if they are proud. But they will be broken down just as sure as we are here—we have God’s Word on that.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1. It is God’s sovereignty that lets us be who we are and have what we have and it is an abomination to God to take credit for this ourselves.**
- 2. God has the sovereign ability to humble the proud in body and mind, in circumstances and situations.**
- 3. God is very merciful in giving proud, rebellious people time to repent.**
- 4. We should live our lives in daily gratitude to God for all the good things He has done for us and given to us.**

STUDY QUESTIONS – LECTURE #5
(Daniel 4:1-37)

1. Why is Daniel 4 such an amazing chapter in the Bible?

A Gentile heathen king gives his own story as to how proud and arrogant he was against God and how God humbled him.

2. How may we conclude contextually that the “seven periods of time” (4:16) refers to seven years?

Because of the length of his hair (4:33).

3. How are trees often used symbolically in Scripture?

To refer to political power (Hosea 14:5-7; Zechariah 11:1-2).

4. When we read the words in verse 28 that “all this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king” what do we learn about Biblical prophecy?

Biblical prophecy is fulfilled literally.

5. What four wonderful acknowledgments about God does Nebuchadnezzar admit?

God lives forever; God reigns forever; Compared to God everything else is nothing; God does whatever He wants to do.