

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S CONCEIT

Chapter 4



This fourth and final incident from the life of Nebuchadnezzar belongs to the period when his great building projects had been completed (4:30). He tells the story about what happened to him as a testimony of how the living God dealt with his conceit and brought him to acknowledge God's sovereignty. This chapter has been viewed by some as an edict, but it makes no law; perhaps it would be better to think of it as a confession made in a kind of open letter.

A. WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Notice who actually wrote this chapter and why the author wanted to document his experience. Follow the worldview of King Nebuchadnezzar from the beginning of this calamity to the end where the powerful king realized the true source of his successes.



While Christians today aren't kings it is still very possible that they can fall into the same mindset as Nebuchadnezzar by pushing God's sovereignty into the background.

B. BACKGROUND

Around 626 BC, Babylonian independence was finally won from Assyria by a leader

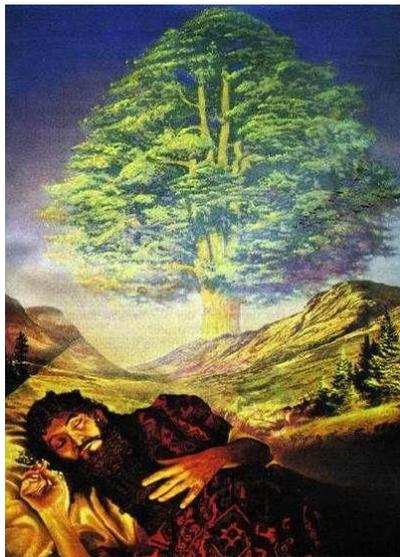
named Nabopolassar. Under his leadership, Babylonia again became the dominant imperial power in the Near East and thus entered into her "golden age." In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II, the son of Nabopolassar, became ruler and reigned for 44 years. Under him the Babylonian Empire reached its greatest strength. Using the treasures which he took from other nations, Nebuchadnezzar built Babylon, the capital city of Babylonia, into one of the leading cities of the world. The famous hanging gardens of Babylon were known to the Greeks as one of the seven wonders of the world.

C. DANIEL CHAPTER 4 (NIV)

NEBUCHADNEZZAR PRAISES GOD (4:1-3)

"King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! ² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. ³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S SECOND DREAM (4:4-18)



I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. ⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Beltshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) ⁹ I said, "Beltshazzar, 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. ¹⁰ These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. ¹³ "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. 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. 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. 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. 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 all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.' 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."

DANIEL INTERPRETS THE SECOND DREAM (4:19-27)



Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds-- ²² Your Majesty, you 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. ²³

"Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, 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 with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.' ²⁴ "This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox 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 all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. 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. ²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, 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."

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S HUMILIATION (4:28-33)

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 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?" ³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³²



You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." ³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. 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 RESTORED (4:34-37)



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. 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?" 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. 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. "

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY



Daniel 4 tells how King Nebuchadnezzar learns the lesson of God's sovereignty, "who is able to bring low those who walk in pride." Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a great tree that shelters the whole world, but in his dream an angelic "watcher" appears and decrees that the tree

must be cut down and that for seven years he, Nebuchadnezzar, will have his human mind taken away and will eat grass like an ox. This comes to pass, and at the end of his punishment Nebuchadnezzar praises God. (Daniel's role is to interpret the dream for the king).

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the author of this first part of the chapter, and to whom is he writing (4:1-3)?
2. How did Nebuchadnezzar's dream affect him (4:4-5)?
3. From whom did he first seek help in interpreting this dream, and were they able to help (4:6-7)?
4. From whom did he finally seek help (4:8-9)?
5. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's dream (4:10-18)
6. What was the purpose of the dream (4:17)?
7. What was Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar (4:27)?

8. How much time did God give Nebuchadnezzar to repent (4:29)?

9. What was Nebuchadnezzar's view of himself before God took away his royal authority? (4:30)

10. How did God show his grace to Nebuchadnezzar? (4:34-36)

11. What was Nebuchadnezzar's conclusion from this whole experience? (4:37)

12. In what ways does this chapter relate to Christians today?

F. CHAPTER WRAP UP

The message of Nebuchadnezzar's madness is that all earthly power, including that of kings, is subordinate to the power of God. It forms a contrasting pair with chapter 5: Nebuchadnezzar learns that God alone controls the world and is restored to his kingdom, while Belshazzar fails to learn from Nebuchadnezzar's example and has his kingdom taken from him and given to the Medes and Persians

1. Arrogant self-pride brings _____ (Dan. 4:30-32a).

"...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?" Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox..." (Dan. 4:30-32).

2. Don't take credit for something wonderful you _____
(Dan. 4:34-35).

"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. 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?" (Dan. 4:34-35)