

THE GREATEST STORY NEVER TOLD

Nebuchadnezzar's Fall To Grace

A Study through Daniel
Spring Series 2024

Texts: Daniel 4:1-37; James 4:6-10; 1 Peter 5:5-7; Prov 3:34 Isaiah 66:1-2; Psalm 145:13

This morning, we return to our journey through Daniel.

I am mindful that no one enjoys long, extended reviews that drag out the journey even longer. Bearing that in mind, I do think there are four quick reminders that will help properly situate us as we come to the stunning story we find in Daniel 4.

1. Daniel is a Wisdom book –to ***help God's people live faithfully, joyfully, confidently and hopefully in the kingdoms of the world.***
2. The Aramaic Portion of Daniel (1-7) **announces God's Wisdom for the Nations – “God Rules!”**
3. The Hebrew Portion of Daniel (8-12) communicates **God's Wisdom to His Chosen Nation – “His Kingdom Matters More!”**
4. The final paragraph of the book (12:8-13) – **contains wisdom from God for you and me – “Live faithfully to the faith you embraced when you became a committed follower and devoted worshiper of the true God of Heaven!”**

Which brings us to one of the most amazing chapters in the book.

The story recounted in chapter 4 is truly amazing and one that is rarely told and even more rarely understood by modern believers such as us. ***In many ways, it is the greatest story never told!***

This is a grand gospel story – in which a great sinner receives a gracious salvation and is made part of a glorious kingdom!

And in the middle of the story is the wisdom God wants us to see, understand, and embrace – *“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!”* (4:17)

I. Stunning Communication (4:1-3)

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

A. It is stunning because of its subject – “King Nebuchadnezzar” (v.1)

B. It is stunning because of its content – His Divine Humbling (v.2)

C. It is stunning because of its scope – (v. 1)

D. It is stunning because of its message – (v. 3)

E. It is stunning because of its effect – (5:20-21)

There is corroborating evidence that God’s mighty work in Nebuchadnezzar’s life had a lasting spiritual effect. Thirty years later Daniel spoke of this event to Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson and reminded him that Nebuchadnezzar had finally come to know and embrace that God ruled on earth and not just in Heaven!

“But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. . . until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom He will.” (5:20-21)

II. Divine Confrontation (4:4-18)

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.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.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

Beltshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.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.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.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.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.'¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, and 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.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.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.'**¹⁸ This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, Beltshazzar, 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."

A. The timing of God's Communication:

B. The content of God's Communication:

C. The conviction of God's communication:

D. The concern for God's communication:

III. Compassionate Exhortation (4:19-27)

Then Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Beltshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Beltshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies. The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth,²¹ whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under whose shade the beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived—²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, and let seven periods of time pass over him,'²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, **till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.²⁷ **Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."****

A. Here are the facts: You are the highest of all and so the dream is about you! (v. 22)

B. Here is your true spiritual condition: You will be brought low before all! (v. 24-26)

C. Here is my counsel (v. 27)

Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

IV. Merciful Humiliation (4:28-33)

*All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my might and power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, **until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.**" ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.*

A. Heaven's Patience – manifested in gracious delay (v. 29):

B. The King's Pride – manifested in personal complacency (v. 30):

C. Heaven's Decree – executed exactly and swiftly (v. 31 -33):

D. The King's Demise – total and merciful with a view to repentance:

- God's judgment lasted for its prescribed time (v. 31-32)
- God's judgment followed its predicted course (v. 33)
- God's judgment accomplished its pronounced purpose (4.17)

V. Genuine Salvation (4:34-35)

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to 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; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

A. His Repentance – I lifted my eyes to Heaven (v. 34a):

B. His Reflection (v. 34b-35)

- Expressed in Biblical theology
- Derived from Biblical Texts (Psalm 145:13) *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.”*

VI. Gracious Restoration (4:36-37)

A. His Restoration (v. 36)

At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

B. His Response (v. 37)

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Conclusion: So what are we to do with a narrative like this?

It doesn't matter who you are, when and where you live, or under whose authority you suffer – you (and I) need to know four things:

1. God rules over the kingdoms of men . . . including the one where you are called to live redemptively and where you might be suffering or facing oppression.
2. God gives those kingdoms to whom he wills. . . so instead of spending your life resisting the rulers over you or expending your life strength to undermine them or replace them . . . pray for them, serve God before them, and live redemptively around them.
3. God will ultimately set humble and lowly men over the kingdom that matters most! One day, God will give a kingdom to His Son before whom every knee will bow, and every tongue confesses that He is Lord! Daniel will be there; Nebuchadnezzar will be there; Belshazzar (who we meet in chapter 5) will be

there; and you and I will be there! And every one of us will bow and confess – some will do so as willing subjects of King Jesus; others will be forced to kneel as and acknowledge the sovereignty of King Jesus as defeated enemies who continue to rage against Him and refuse to receive His grace. Which group you and I will be in depends on how we respond to God when He confronts us and humbles us personally.

4. God is able to humble us even when we are deeply snared by pride . . . if we will heed His warning and respond to His word.

Has God humbled you? Have you responded in true repentance and in joyful response to God? Have you acknowledged what Nebuchadnezzar announced to the world of his day – That whatever God does is right; His ways are just; and He mercifully humbles proud people so that He can bless them? Or are you still ruling over the kingdom of you?