

Daniel 4 • An Old Fashioned Testimony

Introduction

The truly remarkable thing is that this chapter of Scripture is actually an official Babylonian document written by the king of Babylon himself. It is his personal account of his conversion, something that not long ago you used to hear people share publicly in the course of not just witnessing to others, but even in church services proper. Since v.1-3 and 37 were written by Nebuchadnezzar after what transpired between him and God, we will study those verses at the end of this lesson after we fully understand the dream, its meaning, and how it was fulfilled.

⁴“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵I 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. ⁶So 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. ⁷Then 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. ⁸But 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, 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.

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.

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.

¹²Its 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.

¹³I 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.

[Read v.4-18] The Dream Received

Q: How does v.4 set the tone for this event?

A: It was a time of peace and prosperity. Nebuchadnezzar felt secure, but it would turn out to be a false security.

Q: What might be significant about the mention that Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon was “flourishing in my palace”?

A: His was not just one of the largest palaces ever, but the site of the famous “hanging gardens of Babylon” which were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was at the height of his reign as probably the richest man in the known world at the time.

Point: When the world is resting in “peace and safety” God’s judgment often falls because in reality the only true peace and safety that anyone can rest in is with Christ. There is no peace without the Prince of Peace.

While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:3–6

Q: How does this dream compare in terms of its general theme to the previous great dream Nebuchadnezzar received from God?

A: Both dreams provide insight into the future of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and kingdom. Whereas the first one was void of any specific bad news for Nebuchadnezzar personally, this second one is dramatically different in that respect.

Q: Why is it sort of amusing that the king’s wise men could not interpret his dream?

A: Because during his demand that these same experts interpret his first dream they claimed, “Tell us the dream and we will explain it”. (Dan. 2:4) When it comes to God’s Word these non-believers were incapable of properly interpreting whether or not they knew the specifics. The king told them this second dream but they still could not explain it.

Q: How is it possible that they did not want to actually interpret it for the king in the first place?

A: Since the king admitted that the dream made him “fearful” and obviously anxious in every negative way imaginable, they may not have been enthusiastic about giving him “bad news” anyway.

¹⁴He 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.

¹⁵Yet 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.

¹⁶Let 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.

¹⁷This 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.”

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.”

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

— 1 Corinthians 2:14–15

Q: If Nebuchadnezzar called in “all the wise men of Babylon” (v.6), why did Daniel not immediately come in with them but separately?

A: Because Daniel is neither a “magician”, a “conjurer”, a “Chaldean”, nor a “diviner”. He does not associate with them nor assume any semblance of their titles. This is a very important characteristic about the true prophet of God. In Daniel’s case we can see in v.9 that this was an issue between Daniel and the king because the king calls Daniel, “chief of the magicians”.

Application: We should never allow the confusion of using worldly terms and categories to describe our service and/or relationship with the One True God. It is important to remain distinct both personally and publicly.

Q: How does v.8 provide the most revealing information about Nebuchadnezzar’s true spiritual state?

A: He confesses that at that time his god was Bel, the meaning of the Babylonian name given to Daniel. (“Bel protect his life”.) In spite of his past encounters with God, in spite of believing in His existence and even acknowledging Him, Nebuchadnezzar never changed his heart. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar still does not fully understand and recognize the true character and authority of God because he describes Daniel in v.9 as having “a spirit of the holy gods in you”.

Application: Nebuchadnezzar is like those we might categorize as “nominal” believers, people who say they believe in God and might even have some kind of regard for Him, but who in spite of that knowledge continue to live in exactly the way they want and blending their beliefs with other false religious practices.

Q: What is the contrast between the positions and spiritual states of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel that is being taught in these verses?

A: It is the contrast of the earthly king on his earthly throne surrounded by earthly power, riches, and glory who in reality is spiritually bankrupt compared to the Believer who is far richer and more powerful because of possessing God’s Word and ways. Even the poorest Christian on earth is more powerful, rich, and at peace than the most powerful unbeliever.

Q: How does v.17 explain what is the greater spiritual message behind the “signs” mentioned in the dream?

A: “In order to know the Most High is ruler of the realm of mankind”. Judgment always works for of two results: to save the soul choosing to change, or to destroy the soul refusing to do so.

Q: What is contained in v.17 that is a personal message from God to Nebuchadnezzar?

A: God “bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men”. Nebuchadnezzar only has what he has on earth because it came from God and not by anything Nebuchadnezzar did or inherited. And it is God’s to give to anyone He chooses, even “the lowliest of men”.

Application: We could draw a lot of parallels between Nebuchadnezzar and that drawn by Jesus in the Parable of the Rich Farmer:

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Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

— Luke 12:15–21

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 replied, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!

²⁰The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth ²¹and 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— ²²it 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. ²³In 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,” ²⁴this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵that 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

[Read v.19-27] The Dream Revealed

Q: Overall, how does Daniel exemplify a true prophet where the message is concerned?

A: A true prophet has sympathy for the message and always speaks the plain truth faithfully whether it is good news or bad news. He does not take it lightly nor deliver the message in a careless fashion.

Q: Overall, how does Daniel exemplify a true prophet where the intended recipient of the message is concerned?

A: A true prophet has sincere sympathy for the recipient even though he feels the burden to deliver the truth.

Application: Some may hold to the idea that spiritual wisdom and knowledge always produce joy and the inability to hold back sharing the message, but sometimes it actually leads to sorrow and silence. Although biblical love is defined by the biblical truth, the speaker of such truth is still operating under the burden of love. What might be indicated in a person who is all truth and no love?

Q: Why is the use of a tree as a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom not surprising?

A: This has often been the symbol of an earthly kingdom throughout Scripture. (See Ezek. 31 & Mt. 13:31-32). It is something that is rooted in the earth and depends on the earth for its nourishment and stability.

Q: What is the significance of the mention in v.23 of “an angelic watcher, a holy one”?

A: Later in Daniel 10 we learn that angels are very active in the affairs of the nations of the world and shows the greater spiritual authority and working behind them. It clearly shows that such kingdoms are God’s to give and that the earthly head is ultimately subject to God whether they do so willingly or not.

Q: Why does the intended punishment fit the crime?

A: In Daniel 3 in the king’s first vision Nebuchadnezzar was depicted by God as the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar made an **ENTIRE** image of himself out of gold so he could be deified and worshipped. This judgment simultaneously addresses the issue of the king’s pride and God’s sovereignty.

wishes.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.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.’

²⁸“All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.²⁹ Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.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?’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,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.’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.

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.

³⁵All 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

Q: If we sneak a peek at Daniel 7, what might be particularly telling about God showing Nebuchadnezzar that he is actually a beast at heart?

A: The vision in Daniel 7 depicts **EVERY** kingdom of the earth as wild beasts.

Q: How does Daniel exemplify a true prophet of God in v.27?

A: True prophets of God always call people to repentance.

Q: What sin does Daniel suggest needs to be most urgently addressed?

A: The king’s treatment of others.

Application: The proof of unfaithfulness to God Himself is most often proven in our treatment and lack of love for others. The commandments to love God are in fact broken when we forsake the commandment to love others.

[Read v.28-36] The Dream Realized

Q: What is probably the greater lesson where the timing of the dream coming true is concerned?

A: God still provided the opportunity to consider the warning and repent from sin.

Q: How did the king use the time given him?

A: He actually became even more proud of himself and his achievements rather than humbling himself and seeking God.

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.

— Ecclesiastes 8:11

*A man who hardens his neck after much reproof
Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.*

— Proverbs 29:1

Observation: The account of this happening while Nebuchadnezzar was “walking on the roof of the royal palace” might have a familiar ring about it. This is very similar to what Satan did in tempting Jesus by taking Him to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem to show and offer Him all the kingdoms of the world. (Mt. 4:5-7)

Q: How does what happened to Nebuchadnezzar teach us something about what it means in Scripture when judgment is said to come “quickly”?

A: Because God’s grace allows the execution of His judgment to linger in order to provide an opportunity for repentance, it does not come “quickly” in terms of taking place immediately at the time warns of it. However, once it is initiated, at that very point in time it happens with terrifying speed.

Q: What was the first step to the king’s recovery?

A: “I...raised my eyes toward heaven”. (v.34) It is a visible, physical acknowledgment of God’s authority and sovereignty as the King of Heaven over the king of the earth.

Q: How was this followed up?

A: “I blessed the Most High and honored Him”. (v.34) It was an expression of having learned the right lesson from judgment that he was

Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

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.

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

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.

³⁷Now 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.”

nothing and God was everything and expresses spiritual acknowledgment of God.

Q: What are the specific lessons that Nebuchadnezzar learned?

1. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion...His kingdom endures from generation to generation”. (v.34)
2. “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing”. (v.35)
3. “He does according to His will”. (v.35)
4. “No one can ward off His hand” (v.35)

They are all lessons of God's authority and sovereignty.

Application: The purpose of judgment is to either change hearts or bring to destruction those hearts refusing to be changed. Can you see the difference between Nebuchadnezzar being **judged** by God and Job being **tried** by God? What might be the difference for you in what you are personally experiencing at the present time?

[Read v.1-3 & 37]

Q: What is probably the first, most remarkable indication in Nebuchadnezzar's address to all the people that proves he has been profoundly changed?

A: He first addresses them sending them peace. This was someone with such a reputation (proven through his actions) of a cruel man of war who was never known for his “peaceful” activities. It reflects a serious change in his personal treatment of others. (Remember Daniel's advice to him in v.27?)

Q: How is Nebuchadnezzar's declaration in v.2-3 a summary of the effects of God's judgment?

A: Just seven years before he had been boasting about his own power and majesty as king of the earth; now he is a personal witness to the power and majesty of the King of Heaven.

Q: How is Nebuchadnezzar's change reflected in his summary of these events in v.37?

A: It is no longer about the king of the earth but entirely about the King of Heaven.

Q: Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that God has performed “signs and wonders”, but in what context does he place them?

A: In the context of the greater overall spiritual message to change one's heart. Signs for believers affirm faith, for unbelievers it condemns them for their unbelief, both proven by what they do from the heart.

Q: What might be Nebuchadnezzar's ultimate testimony?

A: “He is able to humble those who walk in pride”. (v.37)

Overall Application

1. God gives ample and detailed warning.
2. God gives ample time to heed His warning and repent.
3. God's judgment comes on those who steadfastly refuse to repent.
4. God's judgment works to either change hearts or destroy those hearts refusing to change