

The World's Proudest Man Humbled by God

Text: Daniel 4:1-37

Introduction:

1. This chapter is full of the central theme of the Book – God reigns! Note Vs. 3, 17, 25, 26, 32, 34. The phrase *“the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will”* occurs 3 times in this chapter.
2. Nebuchadnezzar had already been given a lot of light from God. God had given him the revelation found in chapter 2. He witnessed God's miraculous preservation of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego against his murderous attempt to destroy their lives. Yet, Nebuchadnezzar was still a pagan, committed in heart and mind to his idols.
3. Now God is going to touch Nebuchadnezzar's life in a very specific and special way to bring him to repentance and faith.
4. Daniel Chapter 4 really contains Nebuchadnezzar's salvation testimony with most of it written in the first person – “I thought it good to shew...” (Vs. 2)
5. The chapter before us divides neatly into five main sections.

Firstly, we have...

I. Proclamation (Vs. 1-3)

A. The king's Audience (Vs. 1)

1. “unto all people, nations and languages” = this message was to have a wide-reaching influence and impact upon the whole empire. It would have been translated into the main languages of the known world.
2. “peace be multiplied unto you” = an amazing salutation considering Nebuchadnezzar's reputation for war and cruelty. It almost reads like one of Paul's salutations from the N.T. Epistles!

B. The king's Aim (Vs. 2-3)

1. God's Goodness (Vs. 2)
 - a. “signs and wonders” = God's miracle working power
 - b. “toward me” = God had personally dealt with Nebuchadnezzar's life
2. God's greatness (Vs. 3)
 - a. “great...mighty” = God is Great, Almighty and All Powerful.
 - b. “everlasting kingdom...from generation to generation” = God is the King Eternal. Nebuchadnezzar came to realize that God transcended the pagan gods of man.

God Reigns – Daniel Series

II. Vision (Vs. 4-18)

A. The Dream Received (Vs. 4-8)

1. His distress (Vs. 4-5)
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar was enjoying a false sense of peace and security. He was the supreme ruler of a vast and powerful empire and could have all that his sinful heart wished (Vs. 4).
 - b. God, in mercy, disrupted his place of false rest with a revelation.
2. His decree (Vs. 6-8)
 - a. The fact he summoned the pagan wise men first reveals that at this point Nebuchadnezzar was still at heart, a committed pagan. All this was in spite of the fact this same group of religious gurus had failed him miserably the last time (Daniel 2)!
 - b. Religion and human philosophy have no real answers for the troubled soul. What is needed is the Word of God delivered through the man of God.
 - c. Daniel is finally summoned. He makes reference to Daniel's Babylonian name which was based on the name of Nebuchadnezzar's deity – "my god". At this point in time, Nebuchadnezzar was still attached to his false god.

B. The Dream Retold (Vs. 9-18)

In the previous dream a great statue was the symbol in the dream. Here is a great tree. Observe...

1. The description of the tree (Vs. 9-12)
 - a. It was a big tree (Vs. 10-11)
 - b. It was a beautiful tree (Vs. 12a)
 - c. It was a bountiful tree (Vs. 12b)
2. The downfall of the tree (Vs. 13-18)
 - a. The proclaimer (Vs. 13)
 - i. "watcher...holy one" = an angelic being
 - ii. "from heaven" = the heavenly origin of this messenger
 - b. The proclamation (Vs. 14-16)
 - i. The tree was to be reduced (Vs. 14)
 - ii. The tree was to be retained (Vs. 15)
 - c. The purpose (Vs. 17)
 - i. "to the intent" = purpose behind the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar revealed.
 - ii. "the living may know" = God is concerned that men know He reigns. God would demonstrate that by dealing with the most powerful man in the world at that time.

III. Interpretation (Vs. 19-27)

A. Daniel's Consternation (Vs. 19)

1. 'astonied' = old English word meaning dazed, bewildered, shocked.

God Reigns – Daniel Series

2. “one hour” = imagine what this must have been like for the king
3. “his thoughts troubled him” = reveals Daniel’s love and compassion for this evil king. Daniel did not delight in proclaiming a message of judgment to this kind though humanly speaking this would have been the natural reaction of a captive in a foreign land.

B. Daniels Comment (Vs. 20-26)

1. The interpretation of the tree (Vs. 20-22) The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (Vs. 20-22) Note: “It is thou, O king” (Vs. 22)
2. The interpretation of the tree’s devastation (Vs. 23-26). Nebuchadnezzar would be humbled to the level of an animal. He would live like, look like and eat like a beast of the field for 7 years. This reveals just how proud and stubborn this king’s heart was. He would need to be chastised by God for 7 years before he would truly humble himself before Him.

C. Daniels Counsel (Vs. 27)

1. Daniel demonstrates boldness and compassion towards the heathen king. He goes beyond just interpreting the dream to challenging the king concerning his need to turn from his sinful ways.
2. Daniel was clearly burdened for this king’s soul. I wonder how many years Daniel had prayed for his salvation? Are we burdened for the souls of men? Are we prepared to tell them of their sin problem so that they might then run to the Saviour for salvation?
3. Illustration: Caesar Milan challenges young lady concerning salvation

Many years ago, in London there was a large gathering of noted people. Among the invited guests was a famous preacher of his day, his name was Caesar Milan. A young lady played and sang charmingly and everyone was thrilled. After her performance Milan went up to her and graciously but boldly said, *“I thought as I listened to you tonight how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if your talents were dedicated to His cause. You know, young lady you are a sinner in the sight of God, but I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from all sin.”* That young lady was so angry with that preacher that she stomped her feet and walked away. As she was leaving, he said, *“I mean no offence. I pray that God’s Spirit will convict you.”*

Do you know what happened? That young lady went home, but she could not sleep. The face of the preacher appeared before her and his words rang through her mind. About two o’clock in the morning she got out of bed, took a pencil and piece of paper, and with tears rolling down her face, Charlotte Elliot wrote these words,

Just as I am without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me

And that Thou bidst me come to Thee

God Reigns – Daniel Series

O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Charlotte Elliot came to Christ, because Caesar Milan had a love and burden for souls.

IV. Narration (Vs. 28-33)

You will note that there is a shift from the first person 'I' to the second person 'he'. On account of his madness, someone else recorded the events that transpired (likely Daniel).

A. Nebuchadnezzar Arrogant (Vs. 28-30)

1. "at the end of twelve months" = God delayed his act of judgment for a whole year! This reveals the amazing longsuffering and patience of God with sinful man! After all Nebuchadnezzar's stubborn refusal to submit to the light he had received; after all his wickedness; God gives him more time to repent; God delays His judgment! Truly God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9) and therefore gives men space to repent (Rev. 2:21).
2. Look at Nebuchadnezzar's pride filled words – "I have built...my power...my majesty" (Vs. 30) It was at this point that the king "crossed that mysterious boundary between God's mercy and His wrath." (Phillips)
3. Description of Babylon's glory by Phillips

The city was built in the form of a square, about fifty-six miles in circumference. The Euphrates, which flowed through the city, provided the city with an abundance of water. It was spanned by a spectacular bridge. On one side of the bridge stood an enormous temple dedicated to Belus and filled with numerous golden idols. On the other side stood Nebuchadnezzar's grand palace. The outside of the walls of the city were 335 feet high and about 87 feet broad. Chariots could race side by side along these massive walls. The walls were matched by a hundred gates of solid brass, twenty-five on each side of the city. A straight road ran from each gate to the opposite gate. These roads intersected each other, dividing the city into 676 squares. In the centre of the city, 150 pillars, each 88 feet high, supported the chapel of Baal. Inside was a colossal golden image of Baal. There was also the spectacular Hanging Gardens, considered to be one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Successive terraces rose one above another until they reached as high as the walls. They were then filled with soil and planted with every kind of tree and flower.

B. Nebuchadnezzar Abased (Vs. 31-33)

1. Sovereign pronouncement (Vs. 31-32)
 - a. God says what He means and means what He says!
 - b. What God says will surely come to pass.
2. Sovereign fulfilment (Vs. 33)

V. Transformation (Vs. 34-37)

A. A New Praise (Vs. 34-35)

In these words of praise, he speaks of...

1. God's Majesty – "the most High"

God Reigns – Daniel Series

2. God's Eternality – "him that liveth for ever"
3. God's Sovereignty – "whose dominion is an everlasting dominion..."
(Also Vs. 35)

B. A Restored Position (Vs. 36)

1. Restoration of his mind (Vs. 36a)
2. Restoration of his majesty (Vs. 36b)

C. A New Pattern (Vs. 37)

1. 'now' = key word. Every sinner saved by grace has a "then" and a "now". "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see"
2. "praise and extol and honour" = this is clear evidence of a changed life! Nebuchadnezzar now worshipped God as a pattern of his life. Contrast these words of the king with the king's previous words to Daniel (2:47) and Daniel's three friends (3:29). "Do you see those three words in (4:37)? (*praise, extol, honour*) they are active verbs indicating continued action. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar continued praising God long after his restoration, and that would hardly be the action of a pagan." (Denis Lyle)
3. "those that walk in pride he is able to abase" = the heart of Nebuchadnezzar's testimony. Pride was the first sin committed in God's created universe when Lucifer uttered his five "I will" statements (Isaiah 14:13-14) Pride is first on the list of the 6 things the Lord hates (Prov. 6:16-17)

Conclusion:

1. Pride will keep you from salvation. The first step is to humble yourself and admit you are a sinner in need of a Saviour.
2. Pride is a monster which if allowed into the Christian's life will bring breakage and ruin. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)