

Daniel 4

Daniel 4—the King’s Personal Testimony

According to Wikipedia, clay tablets were discovered in the ruins of ancient Babylon that give the history of King Nebuchadnezzar from his rule in Babylon from 605 BC until his death in 562. In one inscription it alludes to a difficult time in his life in which, “His life appeared of no value to him”, and “he does not show love to son or daughter and his family and clan does not exist” to him. There was also a notable absence of any record of his acts or decrees by the king during a seven year period from 582 to 575 BC. Therefore, this would fit the events portrayed in Daniel 4 in which the great proud king was humbled by God by striking him with insanity for seven years. When he was brought back to his senses, he humbly recognized the God of Israel as The Most High God, and personally confessed his allegiance to and belief in the Most High God

In Daniel 2-3, Nebuch threatened Daniel and his Jewish friends with death repeatedly. To prevent this, God came through with miracles that astounded all, especially King Nebuch. He was so amazed he praised the God of Israel as a “god of gods”. Nevertheless, it was clear that the king himself did not commit himself to God or change his own ways, his religion, or his character. He just recognized the God of Israel as powerful, but did not embrace Him as his God. King Nebuch continued to be an evil tyrant, a pagan idol worshipper, and a man filled to the brim with arrogance and pride. Even though it was clearly revealed to him in chapter 2 that all his success was God given, he suppressed the truth and magnified himself as a god. This fault is dramatized at the climactic point in Daniel 4:30 when the king is walking in a high place on his great palace, and he looked down at all the great wonders of the great city of Babylon 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?” God chose this perfect time at the peak of the king’s arrogance and vanity to bring him down hard. All people need humility, and some if they are very fortunate have humility forced on them. Nebuchadnezzar was warned but he ignored it, and he would never be humbled unless God completely broke him.

Personal Testimony

Daniel chapter 4 was actually written by King Nebuchadnezzar and included in the Book of Daniel by Daniel. It is the king’s personal testimony of being broken by God, repenting, and coming to God as a new believer. Every good testimony about believing in the one true God has three important parts that are emphasized: who you were before you believed, what happened to convert you, and then the difference in your life as a changed person. The value of your personal story is that it is true, and can’t be denied because it is your story, the change in you is apparent, and it has a positive recommendation for the listener. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “God has committed to us the word of reconciliation, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were entreating through us.” Most people fear doing personal evangelism, or believe you must be very knowledgeable, but all believers should be ready, willing, and able to tell their own story. When you have a minute, just jot down some notes about your own story in three categories. Who were you before Christ became your Lord and Savior, what happened for you to believe in Him, and what difference did it make in your life. You may be thinking you believed when you were a kid, or you may think your story is dull, or maybe you don’t know exactly when you believed---no matter, just consult the Bible and it will tell you. Romans 3:23 and a wealth of other passages make it clear that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Therefore even if you were a youngster, you were still a lost sinner in need of a Savior, so in your own words portray yourself that way. If you don’t know exactly when, God does, so you can just say something like “When God came into my life”. The Bible is clear that when Jesus came into your life changes were made by God, and you continued to change progressively. Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony is classic. He was a proud boastful tyrant, God afflicted him with mental illness, and he repented and humbled himself and submitted completely to God’s authority.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream and its Interpretation

In Daniel 4:5, we are told the king had a very fearful dream that was troubling him. Apparently it was reoccurring because it “kept alarming” him. In a repeat of chapter 2, he first brought in all his “wise men” to interpret but they could not. It was a dream about the future, and just as they had said in ch.2, no one can foretell the future but God. Now the proud king was aware that Daniel was blessed by God to interpret his dreams so he had to bring Daniel in as his last resort. The king described the dream to Daniel as a great tree that grew and was visible to the entire earth, and had abundant foliage and fruit. All the creatures of the earth lived in its shade and fed from it. An angel from heaven shouted to cut down the tree, but leave the stump. The angel then spoke of the tree with the human pronoun “him”. His mind would be changed to that of a beast who lived in the fields for seven years. The purpose of this according to the angel was that all the living may know that

the "Most High" is ruler over the realm of mankind.

When God made Daniel aware of what the dream meant, he was appalled and scared for Nebuch. If you are like me, you may think that the king's demise would be a good thing, but think again from Daniel's perspective. The king had made this young Jew his Prime Minister, and from that position he could help himself and his people. If a new king came in, it could change everything. Daniel told the king that he wished the interpretation of the dream could apply to his enemies, because it was bad news.

The tree in the dream was an image of the king because he was great and his dominion covered the known world. The order to chop down the tree meant that King Nebuch would be driven insane, and removed from mankind to dwell in the fields and eat grass like cattle for seven years until he recognized God's authority over him. In v.27, Daniel gave the king some valuable advice to humble himself and repent in hopes that God would show mercy. We don't know the king's immediate reaction, but we can guess that he probably was fearful and apprehensive for a time, but like all of us, when he returned to business as usual, he forgot all about it, and returned to his normal life of believing the world revolves around him. I am reminded of 1 Peter 5:5, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you."

Maximum Humiliation for a Vain Man

In Daniel 4:29-33, twelve months later, King Nebuch was strutting around like a peacock admiring his kingdom and thinking vain selfish thoughts, when the dream interpretation of Daniel was fulfilled. He was driven away from mankind to live as a beast in the field, and in his madness he believed he was an animal, and ate grass like cows. There is actually a mental disorder called zoanthropy in which one behaves like an animal. Whether he had this or some other disorder, he was insane for seven years until God graciously restored his senses and reason returned to him. At that time, he was truly a different person as he humbled himself before the one true God, and praised and worshipped "the Most High". We can only imagine what his family did during those years, and who ran the kingdom. They probably covered it up, and protected him with some published story, and let no one see him as the family and closest advisors ran the kingdom. Imagine their great surprise when he showed back up as a transformed godly man who was converted to Judaism.

His first order of business was to send out the proclamation recorded in Daniel 4:34-35 praising the God of Israel, and professing his belief in Him alone. What had really happened to Nebuch appeared terrible to his family, but we can see it as the grace of God. The Most High had graciously, lovingly broken the king. Sometimes the only thing that can impress people is pain, and the king got seven years of it. In Nebuch's case, the best thing God could do for him was to crush him, humiliate him, and degrade him below the human race. This is what it took for the king to submit to God's authority and be saved. Therefore, because God broke him, we will see him in heaven. Now I must admit I am not voluntarily signing up for any painful lessons, and would not wish upon anyone what happened to Nebuch, but if it meant eternal salvation, then yeah let's do it.

I heard a guy's testimony years ago who had been an avowed atheist. He said he used to believe that religion was just "a crutch that weak people needed to get by". He went camping and got hit by lightning. One month later, a gas leak blew up his house when he turned on the lights. The neighbors reported seeing a man running through the neighborhood with smoke coming from him looking like Wile E. Coyote in those cartoons. He was yelling "God is talking to me!" In his testimony he said that if Christ is a crutch, that's good, because we are all cripples. If we are really fortunate, God uses extreme measures to get through to us. Just ask Nebuchadnezzar when you see him.

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