

The Book of Daniel

Chapter Four



Chapter 4 of Daniel is unique. It is the only portion of the Old Testament written by a Gentile.

Chapter 4 is an open letter written by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, to everyone on the face of the earth. By God's grace, the Lord allowed it to be included in His Word, thus insuring its perpetuity and publication in the most prolific book of history, the Bible. In Chapters 1 through 3 of Daniel, we see Nebuchadnezzar softened as God performs each miracle before his eyes. In this chapter, we will witness the final blow from the Spirit of God and the salvation of Nebuchadnezzar's soul.

4:1-3 – An Open Letter

“Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 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..”

Letters like this were common to ancient kings. We see Nebuchadnezzar address a similar letter in Chapter 3 when he invites all of the leaders throughout the land to Babylon to bow down before the golden image. What is Nebuchadnezzar's attitude toward God at the writing of this letter?

How is this amazing, given the circumstances that have transpired over the last 7 years of his life?

What is amazing about a king of his stature and prominence writing this letter?

What do we read in Nebuchadnezzar's comments that shows a dramatic attitude change from Chapter 3?

4:4-7 – Another Restless Night

“Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise [men] of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.”

We do not know exactly when the events of this chapter occurred. Some historians place it at the middle of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, perhaps shortly after Chapter 2. Others place it at the end of his reign and date this letter (Chapter 4) at the last year of his life. A likely scenario is that these events transpired between the 30th and 35th years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, about 20 years after the events of the fiery furnace. Daniel would be in his upper 40's at this point.

The beginning of this passage offers us a glimpse into the situation in Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's state of mind. Nebuchadnezzar was “at rest” and “flourishing”. What do these words mean?

At rest –

Flourishing –

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At this point in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Babylon was at the peak of its size and glory. The wars and rebellions that characterized the first part of his reign were past and he was now enjoying a time of peace and prosperity. As we will see later, at this point Nebuchadnezzar was focused on the building of Babylon.

Where did Nebuchadnezzar first seek advice on the interpretation of his dream?

Look at the following Scriptures and determine why the worldly counselors were unable to provide an accurate interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 – “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.”

Matthew 11:25 – “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

What is the difference between the way Nebuchadnezzar relays his vision in Chapter 4 versus Chapter 2?

4:8-9 – Daniel to the Rescue

“But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name [was] Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom [is] the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, [saying], O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods [is] in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.”

What comment does Nebuchadnezzar make about Daniel's name?

Twice in this passage we see Nebuchadnezzar state that the “spirit of the holy gods” dwelt in Daniel. The word “gods” is translated in the plural in the King James Version but the original Aramaic can be translated in either the singular or the plural based on the context. The King James translators chose a plural translation because they did not believe that Nebuchadnezzar, a polytheist¹, would recognize a singular God.

Does Nebuchadnezzar recognize the identity of Daniel's God? How would we know? In this passage, we see Nebuchadnezzar use an adjective to describe Daniel's God: holy. Define the word, “holy”.

¹ Polytheist – one who believes in many different gods

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Holy -

It is interesting that Nebuchadnezzar would refer to Daniel's God as holy. The Pagan gods served by Nebuchadnezzar were no more holy than the men who worshipped them. Within the pagan lore, we often find them committing sinful acts and warring against one another. Nebuchadnezzar knew something about Daniel's God. He wasn't like that. He was holy, or without any sin. How did he learn this?

I believe that if Nebuchadnezzar knew so much about God's holy character, He also knew that He is One God. For that reason, I believe that these passages should be translated as "the Spirit of the Holy God".

How is it that no secret troubled Daniel?

4:10-18 – A Startling Dream

"Thus [were] the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof [was] great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof [were] fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it [was] meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and [let] his portion [be] with the beasts in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter [is] by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise [men] of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou [art] able; for the spirit of the holy gods [is] in thee.."

The Flourishing Tree

The first part of Nebuchadnezzar's vision is that of a growing, prosperous tree. Describe the characteristics of the tree.

What do you think that this tree may represent, given what we have learned so far in Daniel?

Hint: Remember the definition of the word, "flourishing" and re-read Daniel 2:37-38



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Judgment: The Stump

During Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he saw "a watcher and an holy one" come and declare that the tree should be cut down. First, define the word, "watcher" and then discuss who this was that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

Watcher –

Describe the Watcher's pronouncement upon the tree. Was it simply to be cut down or was there more to it?

The Watcher declared that the stump was to be left in the grass with the dew of heaven and its portion (nourishment) was to be the same as the beast's: grass. We know that as long as the root system is preserved, the tree itself is still alive. But, without its trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit, the majesty and beauty are gone. This was the prophecy of the Watcher toward Nebuchadnezzar. The Watcher also stated that a band of iron and brass were to be placed around the stump of the tree. Why?

After describing the band, the Watcher leaves the illustration of the tree and states that the heart of a beast would be given to Nebuchadnezzar until "seven times" had past. How long is this?

This passages states that the decree of this vision was made by the Watcher and the demand by the Holy Ones. Does this imply that they have authority over men? Make sure to harmonize this passage with Daniel 4:24 and Jude 1:9.

What is the purpose of the trial that the Lord is going to inflict upon Nebuchadnezzar?

4:19-27 – The Interpretation

"Then Daniel, whose name [was] Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream [be] to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves [were] fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it [was] meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the

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heaven had their habitation: It [is] thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and [let] his portion [be] with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; This [is] the interpretation, O king, and this [is] the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity”.

Apparently Nebuchadnezzar’s newest vision wasn’t what Daniel expected to hear. He was so shocked that he could not even speak for a period of time. Surely, his head was reeling at what the Lord was about to bring upon Nebuchadnezzar and how he could convey the interpretation. Why was he shocked by the vision?

What was Daniel’s initial response to Nebuchadnezzar? What is ironic about this? Do you do this?

What was Daniel’s hope and advice to Nebuchadnezzar?

Was this good advice? Read Micah 6:8.

4:28-33 – One year later....

“All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word [was] in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, [saying], O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling [shall be] with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ [feathers], and his nails like birds’ [claws].”

Why did the Lord wait 12 months until He brought this vision to pass? Read Revelation 2:20-21.

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What was the state of Nebuchadnezzar's heart while walking on the roof of his palace?

What happened to Nebuchadnezzar is rare but it has actually been observed before in other humans. It is a mental disorder called lycanthropy. Under this condition, a man's mind becomes like that of an animal. The biblical scholar R.K. Harrison recounted this personal experience:

"A great many doctors spend an entire, busy professional career without once encountering an instance of the kind of monomania described in the book of Daniel. The present writer, therefore, considers himself particularly fortunate to have actually observed a clinical case of [lycanthropy] in a British mental institution in 1946. The patient was in his early 20's who reportedly had been hospitalized for about five years. His symptoms were well developed on admission, and diagnosis was immediate and conclusive. He was of average height and weight with a good physique, and was in excellent bodily health. His mental symptoms included pronounced anti-social tendencies, and because of this he spent the entire day from dawn to dusk outdoors, in the grounds of the institution...

His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. On observation he was seen to discriminate carefully between grass and weeds, and on inquiry from attendant, the writer was told the diet of this patient consisted exclusively of grass from hospital lawns. He never ate institutional food with other inmates, and his only drink was water...

The writer was able to examine him cursorily, and the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the finger-nails. Without institutional care, the patient would have manifested precisely the same physical conditions as those mentioned in Daniel 4:33"²

Why do you think the Lord used such a drastic measure to reach Nebuchadnezzar.

4:34-37 – Seven years later . . .

"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion [is] an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom [is] from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth [are] reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and [among] the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works [are] truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

Nebuchadnezzar's last coherent statement before losing his mind is completely the opposite of his first recorded statement upon the return of his mental faculties. What was his new view of God and man?

To what extent did Nebuchadnezzar regain his kingdom?

² Introduction to the Old Testament, Harrison, R.K., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969, pp. 1116-17

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What is Nebuchadnezzar's final statement about the Lord in this chapter? Is that a conciliation to you?

If Nebuchadnezzar had to pick a new theme song out of our song binder, what would it be?

Items for Discussion:

Have you witnessed the Lord using a circumstance to break the pride of the lost?