

DANIEL 4



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Daniel 4
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Cover art: Rembrandt, *Daniel in the Lions' Den*

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Daniel 4: Introduction

Nebuchadnezzar's journey to faith arrives at its destination – the hard way.

God warned the Babylonian king – first through a dream and then through Daniel – to repent of his hubris and injustice, and He gave him a whole year to do so. But Nebuchadnezzar grew even more haughty. Only severe judgment would get this king to where God wanted him.

And after the judgment was over, Nebuchadnezzar declared his faith in God throughout his empire. He is a lesson for us both in how people come to faith in Christ, and in what we who have come to faith should be doing in our world.

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1 What God Has Wrought

Introduction

Right away we notice something odd about this chapter. It is written by King Nebuchadnezzar as a proclamation to all peoples and nations subject to his jurisdiction. This must be really important.

Read Psalm 51.

Read Daniel 4.1-3.

Think it Through

1. Let's linger on that greeting in verse 1. What was Nebuchadnezzar's wish for the people under his authority? What do you suppose he meant by that? Does this sound like the Nebuchadnezzar of 2 Kings 25 or Daniel 3? Explain. How does this proclamation compare in tone with that of Daniel 3.29?

2. Nebuchadnezzar laid his cards on the table right up front: His proclamation was a witness to God, His Kingdom, and His dominion. How does this differ from the Nebuchadnezzar we saw in chapter 3? What does this lead you to think about Nebuchadnezzar's understanding of God and his relationship to Him? How do you suppose this would have been received by people of his empire?

Meditate

"There are kings ... who reign on earth, yet not without power from on high. This, of old, Nebuchadnezzar knew from experience when he said, 'his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.'" *Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD)*

"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." Acts 26.9-11

Lord Jesus, You have power to transform even the chief of sinners, even the most violent of Your enemies! Let that power be at work in me today, Lord, to...

Pray Psalm 51.12-15.

As you pray these words, let the Spirit search your soul, and lead you to confess and repent of any sin. Then praise God for His grace, and go forth to serve Him.

Psalm 51.10-13 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;
Thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

2 A Man in Process

Introduction

In today's verses, we can already see that Nebuchadnezzar is a changed man, or at least, one who is in the process of becoming a changed man. God has been working on him by His grace, wooing and nudging him to a new understanding of God, and a new appreciation of His greatness. It will take a little more than wooing and nudging to get the king where He wants him, and that's what this chapter records. His journey is somewhat like that which Job made, who grew from one level of relationship with God to an even deeper level, as God led him by His trials, grace, and truth.

Read Job 42.1-6.

Read Daniel 4.4-9.

Think it Through

1. Compare verses 4-7 with Daniel 2.1-5. What differences do you see? Does it seem to you that something was happening within Nebuchadnezzar's heart? Explain. Let's think about dreams for a minute: God is sovereign over all things, at all times, even while we are asleep. When dreams come to us, they do not come without His knowledge and permission. While dreams no longer serve as vehicles for authoritative revelation from God – that is, they are not *normative* for all believers (Heb. 1.1, 2) – still, dreams may be *significant* for those who have them. In light of this, is it a good idea to think or talk through our dreams? Keeping in mind that dreams are not *normative*, what benefit might we gain from paying closer attention to our dreams?
2. We notice (vv. 8, 9) that Nebuchadnezzar referred to Daniel by his Hebrew name first, only after that explaining that he had another name “according to the name of my god”. What does this indicate about Nebuchadnezzar's level of respect for Daniel? How did he describe Daniel here? How did he refer to Daniel's God? Let's remember that he was thinking back to *before* what he described in the rest of this chapter, and the conclusion he reached at the end. How can you see that his view of God was growing? How should what we see in Nebuchadnezzar encourage us in working with the people in our Personal Mission Field? Evangelism, it is clear, is not an *event*, but a *process*. Explain.

Meditate

“We are not capable of glorifying God on our own; only in the Spirit is this made possible. In him we are able to thank God for the blessings we have received. To the extent that we are purified from evil, each receives a smaller or larger portion of the Spirit's help that each may offer the sacrifice of praise to God. If we offer glory to God, in the Spirit, we mean that the Spirit enables us to fulfill the requirements of true religion.” *Basil the Great (330-379 AD)*

*“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.” Acts 2.16-18*

As You filled Daniel with Your Spirit, Father, and those first believers as well, fill me today, and I will...

Pray Psalm 51.10-13.

One way you can be sure you are filled with the Spirit is in your readiness to speak to others about Jesus. As you pray these verses, ask God to give you an opportunity to bear witness for Christ today.

Psalm 51.10-13 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!

Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.

Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;

Thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

3 The One True King

Introduction

Nebuchadnezzar reports his strange and troubling dream to Daniel. He surely had an idea that this dream was about him, but he could not interpret the meaning of what he had seen. His vision reminds us of an earlier attempt to reach the heavens and create a place of power and security. Jesus would borrow on Nebuchadnezzar's dream to teach about the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13.31, 32. But whereas Nebuchadnezzar's dream presented a kingdom frail and faltering, the Kingdom Jesus declared never ceases to increase.

Read Genesis 11.1-9.

Read Daniel 4.10-18.

Think it Through

1. Summarize Nebuchadnezzar's vision. What did he see? Why was this tree of great height a good way of thinking about Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom? What similarities can you identify between the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the tower of Babel? Do you think God still judges hubris, whether of men or nations? Explain.
2. We note the mention of "a watcher, a holy one" (v. 13) and "watchers" and "holy ones" (v. 17) as involved with conveying this dream. Who are these beings? What seems to be their purpose? Why are they called "watchers"? Are they still active today? What did God want Nebuchadnezzar to learn from this vision? Is that lesson still valid?

Meditate

"This is what the angel means, that the fate of the tree will come to pass for this purpose, for everyone to know through this that there is one God, Lord and King, who appoints kings on the earth and entrusts the kingdom to whomever he wishes." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Matthew 13.31, 32

Lord Jesus, only one Kingdom, and only one King will never fail, and I am a citizen and ambassador of that Kingdom! Thank You, Lord, and help me show my gratitude today by...

Pray Psalm 51.1-4.

We do not know the half of our sins, so it's good to confess and seek cleansing from any pride or other sin that can keep us from knowing the presence and power of the Lord (Ps. 66.18).

Psalm 51.1-6 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin;
Look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Against You only, Savior have I become unclean;
Thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;

Daniel 4

To wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

4 Friends Don't Mince Words with Friends

Introduction

We see a special intimacy, even a friendship, between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, as Daniel leads the king to understand the meaning of his dream. It clearly pained Daniel to report this message, but we sense in him a hope that this season of judgment is not the end of Nebuchadnezzar's story. Daniel is Nebuchadnezzar's Nathan in this part of chapter 4, just as we may be called to be Nathan – or Paul – to one another from time to time.

Review 2 Samuel 12.1-15.

Read Daniel 4.19-27.

Think it through

1. We sense a friendship developing between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. How can you see that a special kind of intimacy has grown between them (v. 19)? At this point, remember, Nebuchadnezzar has not expressed personal trust and submission to God. He sees himself more as God's defender rather than His devotee. Still, this friendship seems real, even though Nebuchadnezzar knows Daniel's faith and character (cf. v. 18). How does this happen? How should we be encouraged by this?

2. Daniel did not beat around the bush. Summarize his message to Nebuchadnezzar. He told the king exactly what his dream portended. How does one find the courage to proclaim such a Word of judgment against one's friends? Is this a loving thing to do? Should our witness to the Gospel include a warning of judgment? Explain. Notice that Daniel leaves a door open for repentance (the end of v. 25 and v. 27). What is repentance? Is Daniel clear to Nebuchadnezzar concerning what he needs to do to be restored to favor with God? What does the Gospel require of those who would find favor with the Lord?

Meditate

"After countless sins, after so many transgressions, he is promised that he will be reconciled with him whom he has had conflict with if only he will show kindness to his own fellow servants.... So we have shown you five ways to repentance: first the condemnation of sins, next the forgiveness of our neighbor's sins, third that which comes of prayer, fourth that which comes of almsgiving, fifth that which comes of humility. Do not then be lazy, but walk in this day by day." *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed... Galatians 2.11

Let there be no sin in me, Lord, to keep me from serving You effectively. Lead me to confession and repentance, then lead me to...

Pray Psalm 51.14-17.

Confess your sins to the Lord, asking Him at the same time to open your mouth in praise and witness for Him.

Psalm 51.14, 15, 18 (*He Leadeth Me*)

Deliver us, from guilt, O Lord,
You Who have saved us by Your Word;
And let our tongues Your mercy bless,
And sing of Your great righteousness!
Lord, open now our lips to raise
To You sweet songs of joyous praise!

Daniel 4

Thus let Your favor on us fall,
And build and strengthen Zion's wall!

5 Like He Said

Introduction

All that Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar came to pass, a dreadful judgment from the Lord against the hubris, cruelty, indifference to others, and self-centeredness of a man not all that different from you and me. As Saul was brought down because he considered his will and ways to be better than God's, so Nebuchadnezzar would know a similar plight. And what about us?

Read 1 Samuel 13.1-14.

Read Daniel 4.28-33.

Think it Through

1. What finally triggered God's act of judgment against Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 28-30)? Note the pronouns: "I", "my", "my". Compare this with Saul's act of disobedience, and with Ecclesiastes 2.1-17, where Solomon reflected on all his achievements. How many different forms of the first-person pronoun do you find in Solomon's account? Why is this so particularly objectionable to God? Many writers have commented that ours has become an age of narcissism. What do they mean? Do they have a point? Is this hubris and self-centeredness visible even in our churches? Is it still objectionable to God?

2. Summarize the judgment that befell Nebuchadnezzar (the reference to *seven* in v. 32 may mean simply the complete or appointed time – tuck that away for later). Note also that what Daniel threatened did not immediately come to pass (v. 29). God gave him an extended period of grace to repent. Paul says the wrath (judgment) of God *is now being poured out* against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, who suppress the truth by their unrighteous deeds (Rom. 1.18-32). But does His judgment always take the kind of drastic forms we see with King Nebuchadnezzar? Explain. What was the purpose of God's judgment against Nebuchadnezzar (the last part of v. 32)? What is the purpose of the discipline God brings against His own people from time to time (Heb. 12.7-11)? What does God's judgment have to do with the Good News that He gives His Kingdom "to whomever He chooses"? (We'll see whom He chooses to give it to in due course.)

Meditate

"Then the king became even more insolent, even as God was patient and had shown magnanimity by endeavoring to lead him to repentance." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12.7-11

Lord, take away all pride and self-centeredness, and give me a heart of compassion and service toward others, so that...

Pray Psalm 51.5-9.

We must never forget that we are sinners, and that we do not *naturally* live according to God's Word. We need His cleansing and renewing power to blot out our sins and fill us with Jesus.

Psalm 51.4-9 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean;

Thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.

Daniel 4

Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;
To wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

In Jesus' blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.
Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

6 The King's King

Introduction

In the midst of his suffering, Nebuchadnezzar found the saving mercy of the Lord. His confession of faith is compelling, and particularly when we remember that he wrote this tract and distributed it throughout his vast domain (v. 1). Nebuchadnezzar's faith continues the line of Old Testament Gentiles to whom God extended His favor, as a token of greater blessings to the Gentiles yet to come.

Meditate on Isaiah 49.1-8.

Read Daniel 4.34-37.

Think it Through

1. Four verbs outline Nebuchadnezzar's return to health (v. 34 – the last two are a pair). What are they, and why is this order important? How is the grace of God evident in Nebuchadnezzar's restoration? How can you see in Nebuchadnezzar's profession of faith (vv. 34, 35) that God's purpose for his abasement was fulfilled (cf. vv. 25, 32)? Note also that it was only *after* this profession ("At the same time", v. 36) that Nebuchadnezzar's "reason returned" and he was restored to his kingdom (v. 36). How does this further help us to believe that Nebuchadnezzar's profession was genuine? In what ways does Nebuchadnezzar's confession resemble Job's in Job 42.1-6? Does God sometimes use abasement to convert sinners or lead believers to a stronger faith? Explain.

2. How did Nebuchadnezzar describe "the Most High" in these verses? How can you see that he embraced God as his King, and that he finally and truly submitted to His will? Note the three verbs of worship in verse 37. What's the difference between these? Why is each important in worshipping God? In what ways do you see these three verbs reflected in your own worship, and that of your church? What do we learn about the Kingdom of God from Nebuchadnezzar's confession (we'll want to keep this in mind as we look at chapter 7)?

Meditate

"Had he not raised his eyes toward heaven, he would not have regained his former intelligence. Moreover, when he says that his intelligence returned to him, he shows that he had lost, not his outward appearance, but only his mind." *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

*"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.*

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6.9, 10

Lord, I praise You because...

I extol you, testifying that...

And I will honor You today by...

Pray Psalm 51.14-19.

As you praise the Lord and confess your sins, plead with Him also for an opportunity today to extol and honor Him by a work of love or a word of witness. Think ahead to the people you will see today, and prepare your heart to praise the Lord before them.

Psalm 51.14-19 (*He Leadeth Me*)

Deliver us, from guilt, O Lord,
You Who have saved us by Your Word;
And let our tongues Your mercy bless,
And sing of Your great righteousness!

Refrain vv. 15, 18

Lord, open now our lips to raise
To You sweet songs of joyous praise!
Thus let Your favor on us fall,
And build and strengthen Zion's wall!

No sacrifice, no offering
Would You have us, Your people, bring;
But broken spirits, cleansed of lies,
And pure hearts You will not despise.

Refrain

Now build Your Church, raise high the wall
Of those who on Your mercy call.
And take our lives and let them be
Sweet sacrifices, Lord, to Thee!

Refrain

7 Royal Herald

Introduction

Brought low because of hubris and injustice, Nebuchadnezzar received grace and restoration. In telling his story, he declared the power, justice, goodness, mercy, salvation, and Kingship of God. Unlike his former attempts to mandate religious practice, this tract (Daniel 4) celebrates the greatness of God and announces Nebuchadnezzar's commitment to Him. No threats or demands on his people, only testimony, worship, and witness. He is God's herald, a royal herald, just as God intends us to be His royal heralds as well.

Read Deuteronomy 4.1-10.

Read and Meditate on Daniel 4.

Think it Through

1. Nebuchadnezzar has been on a journey toward faith. Review what we've observed about this journey from 2 Kings 25 through Daniel 4. What steps of progress can you discern? What was Daniel's role in this? How would you describe Daniel's witness to Nebuchadnezzar? What was the final result of Daniel's faithful, patient, lived witness? How should this encourage us in our Personal Mission Field? What is one thing you can begin to do today that will bring your witness for the Lord more into line with Daniel's?
2. Previously, when Nebuchadnezzar wanted to affect the religious lives of the people in his empire, he built an impressive edifice, organized a classy band, assembled a lot of dignitaries and other beautiful people, and commanded the world to come to him to worship. How is what he did in chapter 4 different from what he tried to do in chapter 3? We might call chapter 3 a "come/see" effort, while chapter 4 is more of a "go/tell" effort. Which of these is more like what Jesus commands of His churches, which He has appointed as heralds of His Kingdom? Which is more like what your church does? What warning is there for us and our churches in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's journey to faith?

Meditate

"He says, "There is no one who will oppose his hand or say to him, "Why did you do that?" to bring out the invincibility of God's power. One must accept gladly what is done by him, whether it is pleasing or distressing; resisting or criticizing what is wisely ordained by him is a rash endeavor." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2.9, 10

Lord, You have appointed me as a royal herald, to proclaim the praises of Jesus to one and all. Today I will...

Pray

Pray through Psalm 51. Let the Lord search you thoroughly. Be open to His convicting and His leading, and, like David, commit yourself to some specific corrective action where needed.

Psalm 51.1-13 (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin;
Look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean;
Thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;
To wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

In Jesus' blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.
Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
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Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;
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Deliver us, from guilt, O Lord,
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Lord, open now our lips to raise
To You sweet songs of joyous praise!
Thus let Your favor on us fall,
And build and strengthen Zion's wall!

No sacrifice, no offering
Would You have us, Your people, bring;
But broken spirits, cleansed of lies,
And pure hearts You will not despise.
Refrain

Now build Your Church, raise high the wall
Of those who on Your mercy call.
And take our lives and let them be
Sweet sacrifices, Lord, to Thee!
Refrain

Daniel 4

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How has Nebuchadnezzar changed over the course of our study? How should we be encouraged by this?
2. Does God use judgment and abasement to bring people to Himself? Is it important that we warn people about God's judgment? Explain.
3. How can you see that Nebuchadnezzar came to a true faith in God? What can we learn about serving God from his confession?
4. What's the difference between a "come/see" witness and a "go/tell" witness? Which are you?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.