

Daniel: King's don't rule, God does!

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[0 : 00] So, Daniel chapter 4, and starting in verse 1. King Nebuchadnezzar, to the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live in all the world, may you prosper greatly.

It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders.

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His dominion endures from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.

When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners came, I told them to dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence, and I told him to dream.

[1 : 10] He is called Belteshazzar, after name of my God, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him. I said, Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians. I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you.

Here is my dream. Interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed. I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

The tree grew large and strong, and its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all.

Under it, the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches. From it, every creature was fed. In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one coming down from heaven.

He called in a loud voice, cut down the tree, and trim off its branches, strip off its leaves, and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it, and the birds from the branches.

[2 : 21] But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth.

Let his mind be changed from that of a man, and let him be given the mind of an animal till seven times pass by for him. The decision is announced by messengers.

The holy ones declare the verdict so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to anyone he wishes, and sets over them the lowliest of men.

This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me.

But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you. Well, please keep your Bibles open at this wonderful chapter, Daniel chapter 4, and a really quite bizarre, strange dream that he has.

[3 : 40] We're going to look at it together. And, well, we need to pray and ask for God's help to understand it. Let's do that now. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the stories, these true stories of real people, people like King Nebuchadnezzar, and his encounter with the true and living art.

And it's our desire and our prayer that as we read your word and think about it together, that we also would encounter the true and living God, who is King, eternal, and reigns over all people and all things.

And as we come to meet you, O King, we ask that you would change our hearts and teach us what it is to live in submission to a King like you.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was king was really undisputed.

[5 : 04] After all, he was king of Babylon, that great empire, the world's supreme leading power. And as a show of his mighty strength and his great power, if you look back in chapter 3, verse 1, we read that King Nebuchadnezzar set up an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide and set it up on the plain of Jura in the province of Babylon.

This enormous, big statue. And he called all the nations and all the people of every language to come and worship and bow down to this image.

We read in verse 6, whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into the blazing furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled with an iron fist. But Nebuchadnezzar was soon to learn that he was not the kind of king he thought he was.

Through this dream, God made it crystal clear that he was the only true king. So look at verse 17. Chapter 4, verse 17.

[6 : 31] The decision is announced by messengers. The holy ones declare the verdict. So that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.

This was something the king would have to learn, that God Most High was the sovereign king. And he would have to learn it whether he liked it or not.

So look at verse 25. The second part of verse 25. He says, Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.

This was the lesson the king must learn, that he is not king, but that God is king. In fact, this is something all of us need to learn as we build our own little kingdoms and be king of our own lives. Now, chapter 4 is something that is very personal because this is Nebuchadnezzar's testimony. It's actually a retelling of his story of faith, of how he came to love and honour the true king.

[7 : 59] And he wants us also to love the true king. So go back to verse 1 of chapter 4. King Nebuchadnezzar.

This is my story saying, this is how it was for me. To the peoples, nations, men of every language who live in the world, may you prosper greatly.

This is a universal message. Do you see it? To all the peoples, of all nations and language, to every person in every age. And here's the message.

Verse 2. It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders.

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom. His dominion endures from generation to generation. So he wants us to read his story and to learn about who the true king is.

[9 : 02] So we're going to learn three things. First, living as if we are the king. Living as if we are the king. Whether we're a nation's leader or whether we're a member of our local community, I think we all live as if we are king.

This was a role that Nebuchadnezzar played very well. As his vision made clear. Verse 10. He's recounting the visions or the dreams that he's had.

Verse 10. These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed. I looked and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land.

Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong. Its top touched the sky. It was visible to the ends of the earth.

Its leaves were beautiful. Its fruit abundant. And on it was food for all. Under it, the beasts of the field found shelter. The birds of the air lived in its branches.

[10 : 06] From it, every creature was fed. But what did it all mean, this great big tree that provided food for all the animals and the people?

Well, look at verse 20. Here's where Daniel gives the interpretation. Verse 20. Verse 22. His rule was powerful.

Everybody looked to King Nebuchadnezzar for all they needed. He owned the lands. He owned the people. He provided them with everything. He was the undisputed reigning king.

And King Nebuchadnezzar really believed it. Look at verse 29. Twelve months later, so this is a year after he'd had the dream, the king was walking on the roof of his royal palace of Babylon.

[11 : 23] And he said, Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence? By my mighty power?

And for the glory of my majesty? We can imagine him as he walking on the roof, surveying his great city, and as he looks out to the horizon.

Archaeology tells us that the city which housed his palace, measured 27 kilometers in circumference, and it was designed so carefully that the river Euphrates ran right through the middle of it.

The city itself was protected by a moat that was 200 feet wide, and inside that he had built a series of double walls. These walls were 20 feet wide, 40 foot high, and every 60 feet along the walls, he built these enormous lookout towers.

These walls, these double walls, were big enough for his chariots to ride along. And every single brick that he used in the construction of the city and palace had his name and royal title printed on it.

[12:40] There was a great big road that led up towards his palace that was a kilometer long, a highway leading up to his throne. And to cap it all off, he had the hanging gardens, purposefully built forest garden for his wife, who had missed the lush green mountains of her home.

And we can see him there as he surveys this enormous city in his palace. I did all of this, all these lands, all these nations, all the people worship me.

I own everything. I rule everything. Now we may be no king, but how often do we make such proud boasts?

We achieve good results in our exams. We get a good place in college, a job that's well paid, and we look from the palace of our homes and we say, is not this the life that I have built?

We survey our family. We look at our children's ability and successes and how well they've done. We revel in our position at work and we say, by my mighty power, we invest our savings for retirement.

[14:02] And as we get a bit older, we spend it on holidays and luxuries and we say, and for my pleasure, I have done all this. You see, the palace of Nebuchadnezzar may be bigger than our homes.

His wealth greater than our savings. But playing the role as king is really no different. We all live as if we are king of the castle. We take pride in little kingdoms that we've built for ourselves.

Is this not the great life I have built? By my mighty power? By my power? By my skills and my ambition? All for my pleasure?

Look at all that I have done. In the words of William Ernest Henley, who wrote the famous poem Invictus, Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how straight the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

[15:19] We all live as proud little kings, Building our own little kingdoms. So first, We live as if we are king.

Second, We must learn who is the king. Now we might not be gifted in vision interpretation, But Daniel, God's servant, God's man in God's place, Has been given insight, And he's the one who comes with the interpretation to the king.

He's God's voice to the king. Verse 23, You, O king, Saw a messenger, A holy one, Coming down from heaven and saying, Cut down the tree and destroy it, But leave the stump bound with iron and bronze In the grass of the field, While its shoots remain in the ground.

Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, Let him live like the wild animals, Until seven times or seven years pass by for him. This is the interpretation, O king, And this is the decree, The Most High is issued against the Lord, The king.

You, Nebuchadnezzar, Will be driven away from people, And will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle, And be drenched with the dew of heaven.

[16:48] What was a dream, Was soon to become a living nightmare for the king. This proud, Stubborn king, Who boasted in all his ruling power, Was about to be humbled.

Verse 31, The words were still on his lips, This is as he was looking out on his great vast nation, When a voice came from heaven, This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar, Your royal authority has been taken from you.

You will be driven away from the people, And live with the wild animals, And you will eat grass like cattle. Verse 33, Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled, He was

driven away from the people, And ate grass like cattle, His body was drenched with the dew of heaven, Until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle, And his nails like the claws of a bird. At God's command, This great king Is reduced to behaving like a farm animal. It's a tragic sight. One moment, Surveying his vast empire, The next, He's mooing like a cow. Now, As we read this, I'm sure you're probably quite interested with this eating grass.

[18 : 26] And before we dismiss this eating grass episode as nonsense, And treat scripture as complete stupidity, It's good to know that this eating grass is an actual condition.

Psychologists call it boanthropy. And according to one medical journey, You can go and look it up yourself, Boanthropy is a psychological disorder In which the sufferer believes he or she is a cow. And there are instances where people are on all fours, Crawling around and eating grass. And Nebuchadnezzar quite clearly has been struck down with a severe case of it.

But here's the point, Why does it actually happen? Well, look what it says in verse 32. The second part of verse 32. Seven times will pass by for you, Until you acknowledge, That the Most High, Is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, And gives them to anyone he wishes.

Nebuchadnezzar, I want you to learn, Who is your king? But let's not get so focused on the grass, That we fail to see, The grace, In the story.

[19 : 54] We might feel some sympathy for Nebuchadnezzar, Being struck down with this psychological disorder, He's gone a bit crazy, He's out with the wild animals, He's no longer tending to his kingdom, But let's not forget the grace of chapter 2, When he learned about how God revealed his future.

And don't forget the grace of chapter 3, When he learned about the God who rescued his three servants, From the blazing fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar had all these signs and wonders, But still, He refused, To worship God.

Now at this stage, We wouldn't really blame God, If he were to give up on King Nebuchadnezzar, He's given him chance after chance. But that's not the kind of God we have, He doesn't give up. He's patient with us, He pursues us, He persistently seeks after our hearts. So rather than see a king grazing in the fields, We are to see a God who is gracious, Towards his people.

Striking Nebuchadnezzar with philanthropy, With God's means of grace, To soften his hard heart, And to break his stubborn will, He was to learn the lesson that he was not king, And that God was king.

[21 : 20] Now I wonder, What does it take for us to learn who is king? What will it take for us to learn who is king?

I'm not going to limit God, How he will work, The things he allows into our life, To soften our hard hearts, And to break our stubborn will.

Sometimes, It's only in our utter helplessness, And in the brokenness of our own lives, That we begin to see that, You know what?

I'm not the master of my fate, And I'm not the captain of my soul. You see, It's better to face God's gracious discipline now, Than to face his just judgment, To come.

It's true, We might not have to eat grass, To learn who is the king, But do not despise his grace to you, Each and every day.

[22 : 26] The grace as he provides you, With the food that you've eaten already, The shelter of the homes in which you live, The skills and the abilities you have, To do the work you do every single day, The health and strength that we have, To walk into this building, The very breath that we breathe today, All comes from God's gracious generosity, Everything that we are, All is a gift to you, It comes in so many surprising ways, And all for the reason, So that we might learn, Who is the king?

Do not despise, His grace to you today. So, We are people who live as if we are king, Second, We have to learn who is the king, And then third, What it is to love, The only true king.

You see, We mustn't confuse God here, As some mindless tyrant, Who unleashes his annoyance, On some unsuspecting subject. Now this is a God, Who has been acting consistently, With grace and mercy, And he enacted this grace, In Nebuchadnezzar's life, And look at his response, Verse 34, At the end of that time, So after the end of seven years, Of this disorder, I, Nebuchadnezzar, Raised my eyes towards heaven, And my sanity, Was restored, I praised the most high, I honoured, And I glorified him, Who lives forever, His dominion, His dominion, Is an eternal dominion, His kingdom, Endures from generation, To generation, All the people of the earth, Are regarded as

nothing, He does as he pleases, With the powers of heaven, And the peoples of the earth,
No one, Can hold back his hand, Or say, What have you done? Nebuchadnezzar bows, In humility,
Before the one true God, Because God has graciously intervened, In Nebuchadnezzar's life, So
that he might know, Who God is, That he might love God, That he might treasure God, More than
all his earthly power, And wealth, Verse 37, Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, Praise and exalt, And glorify
the king, Of heaven, Because everything he does, Is right, And all his ways, Are just, Are just, You
know what, This is the same God, The same God, Who intervened into, Nebuchadnezzar life, Is the
same God, Who has come, And intervened, Into our life, John's gospel,
John's gospel, John's gospel reminds us, Of this so clearly, In John's gospel, Chapter one, Jesus
Christ, God's true king, Comes, To pursue people like you, And me, It tells us in John's gospel, That
God, In Christ, Made his dwelling, Among us, He came from the father, Full of grace, And truth, And
from the fullness, Of his grace, We have received, One blessing, After another, And the greatest, Of
all these blessings, Towards us, Is that this king, Jesus Christ, Comes to us, To die for us, To
forgive us, Of our sins, And to give us a place, In his eternal kingdom, And the final blessing, Which
is yet to come, Is when the risen, Jesus Christ, Comes again, To renew, And restore, All things, For
us, Did you notice,

[26 : 26] That that's what God, Did in Nebuchadnezzar's life, He restored him, Look at verse 36, At
the same time, That my sanity, Was restored, My honour, And splendour, Were returned to me, For
the glory, Of my kingdom, My advisors, Advisors, And nobles, Sought me out, And I was restored,
To my throne, And became even greater, Than before, One day, The true king, Is going to come
again, And he's going to restore, Everything, He will make everything right, He will correct, Every
injustice, He will remove, All suffering, And evil, He will put an end, To all the wars, And all the
violence, He will put an end, To all the struggles, Of sin, And temptation, Everything will be
restored, To its beauty, And perfection,

Just as God, Intervened in Nebuchadnezzar, And restored his life, So we look forward, To the
coming king, To restore, This world, In which we live, From the fullness, Of his grace, We have
received, One blessing, After another, What's our response, To such a gracious, And loving king,
How do I express, My love to him, How do I love this king, Well it starts, With repentance, Look at
verse 27, We should do, What Nebuchadnezzar, Should have done, In the first place, Verse 27,
Therefore O king, Daniel says to him, Be pleased to accept, My advice, Here's what you should do,
Renounce your sins, By doing what is right, And your wickedness, By being kind,
To the oppressed, It may be that then, Your prosperity, Will continue, Renounce your sins, Stop
living, Nebuchadnezzar, As if you're the king, Stop pretending, That we are the master, Of our fate,
And the captain, Of our soul, Stop building, Our own little kingdoms, And playing king, Of the castle,
Instead, Bow your knee, Surrender, Submit, To our gracious king, Of course we can reject, All of
this as nonsense, We can go on, Living our own lives, Our own way, We can say, Well I give a bit of
my time, I give a bit of my effort, Or I give a little bit of my life, To this king, But you know what, The
rest of it, I keep for myself, I don't really want to submit today, Well that's what Nebuchadnezzar did,
And look how he reminds us, At the very end of his story,

The very last line, Those who walk in pride, He is able to humble, Do not refuse his grace today, Do
not reject his kindness, And his generosity to us, In our lives, Repent, Submit, Bow down and give
your life, To the control, Of the one true king, Let him rule your hearts, Your decision making,
Everything about your life, It has been given to you by God, Love him, As the true king, Treasure
him, As the one who gives you all things, Let's pray together, Our father God,

We are humbled this morning, Because we come to realize that, We are not king of our lives, We
cannot control our destiny, We cannot control our life, Everything we have comes from you, And so
in response, And in our hearts, We bow to you as our king, Please forgive us for the times, Where
we wander and do our own thing, And live as if, We are kings of our own lives, We submit to you, We
honour you, We declare that everything you do, Is right and good and just, And therefore we want
to live for you, We want to love you,

[31 : 39] We treasure you above all things, We treasure you above all things, Please father God,
Help us, To worship you, As king, In Jesus name, Amen, Amen, We're going to sing together,
thunderstorms over there, As we finish, We declare your majesty's assurance, In■, We declare
your majesty's assurance, And as we finish, As we finish, We declare your majesty's assurance,