

Daniel 4

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture reading is Daniel chapter 4, which is on page 740 of the provided Bibles. You may remain seated for the reading of God's Word.

King Nebuchadnezzar, to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in the earth, peace be multiplied to you. It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

How great are his signs! How mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.

I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed, the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. At last, Daniel came in before me, he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my God, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods.

[1 : 20] And I told him the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw in their interpretation.

The visions of my head, as I lay in bed, were these. I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heaven lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. I saw in the visions of my head, as I lay in my bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven.

He proclaimed aloud and said thus, Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it, and the birds from its branches, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amidst the tender grass of the field.

[2 : 40] Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him.

The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets it over the lowliest of men.

This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make it known to me, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream or its interpretation alarm you. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies. The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to the heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven lived.

[4 : 04] It is you, O King, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field till seven periods of time pass over him, this is the interpretation, O King.

It is a decree from the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you till you know that the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to you from the time that you know, and as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots in the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that heaven rules.

Therefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable to you. Break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your inequities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, and the king answered and said, Is this not the great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?

[5 : 46] While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, O King Nebuchadnezzar, for to you it is spoken, the kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagle's feathers, and his nails were like bird's claws.

At the end of days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever.

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand or say to him, What have you done?

At the same time, my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and my splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

[7 : 17] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right, and his ways are just, and those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Dave, you didn't see that. I had a little bounce in my step getting on the stage this morning.

Let's pray. Lord, we love you. Thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you for your word before us. May you be glorified in the proclamation thereof.

In Christ's name. Amen. William Ernest Henley, born in England, 1849.

At the age of 12, he contracted tuberculosis of the bone, and the disease progressed to the point that, by the time he was 17, his leg had to be amputated right below the knee.

[8 : 27] That didn't stop him from living an active life. He passed away at the age of 53. The following words are his.

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.

In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced or cried loud. Under the bludgeonings of chance, my head is bloody, but not unbowed.

But unbowed. Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms the horror of the shade, and yet the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid.

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

[9 : 38] Inspirational words, aren't they? The poem Invictus. Henley's words, however, can be taken a bit too far.

And we as people are in danger of being inflicted and afflicted what could be called the Invictus Syndrome, thinking that we are the ones who ultimately are in control. Having been told how much we can accomplish and achieve in this world almost from the time that we made our way into the world.

And many indeed have excelled, achieved beyond their or their parents' wildest imaginations, in looking to conquer the very next mountain.

Henley's words could have been Nebuchadnezzar's words today in our text. They could have been assigned to him. We see him described in Daniel chapter 2 as the very head of gold.

[10 : 50] We see him described this morning as this cosmic towering tree. He was a man of accomplishment. Had he been in the military, he may have had those different ribbons on his chest and medals that would be chinking along because of his accomplishments.

Oh, we see his testimony in our text today, don't we? He starts out there and what happens is that he begins and he ends this particular chapter with doxology.

He begins it with a word of praise. It is as if it is a personal testimony recounting what God had done in his life.

Doxology frames the entire chapter. We don't have time to go verse to verse and through everything that's here. It's really not necessary. Let me give you a few highlights of verses 1 through 27 for you.

Verses 4 through 26 could be a revelation that reflected reality. A revelation that reflected reality.

[12 : 09] Nebuchadnezzar gets into that after his brief introduction in verses 1 through 3. He proceeds to share his experience.

In the midst of the good life, he had a not-so-good dream. This was his second in the book. In the first dream in chapter 2, the king saw an image that represented world powers.

And there, Babylon, the nation, he as the king, was depicted as the head of gold. Under Nebuchadnezzar's rule, it had indeed flourished.

The dream of chapter 4 is actually very consistent with what we see in Daniel's interpretation in Daniel chapter 2. The image that we see here is a magnificent, towering tree that had far-reaching, positive impact on the entire world, on the earth.

Look at verses 20 through 22. Daniel's interpretation now. The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to the heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found saved, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven live.

[13 : 34] It is you, O king. You have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to the heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.

The chapter 4 dream. A great tree had been marked out for God to be chopped down. Look at verse 14.

As David was reading, it was hitting me pretty hard. Listen to what it said. Chop down the tree. Lop off its branches.

Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Wow. What a judgment from God. This was a dispatch, as it were, from heaven, handled by a watcher, probably an angel of some sort, and in the dream, God revealed to the king what the future held for him.

He revealed it to him, and the lesson that was to be learned from this, we see it, don't we? The Lord wanted the king to know who it was that's really in charge.

[14 : 42] You ever ask that? Who's at the controls? Some people may be asking that about in Washington, D.C. these days. Who's really at the controls up there, seeing things are not progressing as fast and far as we may have liked them.

But ever ask that question? Who is it that's really in control? So we had this dream that reflected reality, verses 1-26, 4-26, but then a warning to adopt a new reality in verse 27.

You see that? Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you and break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

He got something, that is, the king did that he really did not ask for. He got counsel from Daniel. Seeing, telling him what was in store for the king and therefore counseling him in view of that.

Respectfully, but boldly gave him counsel. In other words, what the king needed to do. The king was challenged to reorder his life and kingdom in ways that reflected heaven's values that included showing mercy to the oppressed.

[16:06] Here we have Daniel speaking in the king's life encouraging him to do what was right in view of his position. And how easy it is for power brokers to cater to power and to neglect other people, to neglect others, especially those who were on the margins.

The press in that day could have well been, included the exiles of Judah and other, from Judah and other places. But here is yet another indication that God's people had not been forgotten.

Again, on the one hand, God had ordered their judgment. He had not necessarily ordered the oppression under the hand of the cruel king while they were in the land. So much for the overview. What I really want to look at on this morning is really what follows the dream and the warning that we see in the remainder of the chapter. Three things actually come into view.

First thing you see in verses 28 through 33, we see the humiliation of a haughty king. Followed by that, we're going to see the exaltation and even the exaltation of a humble king.

[17:22] Then in the last verse, we see, though it's over the entire passage, but it really comes into view the triumph of the heavenly king.

First of all, the humiliation of a haughty king. Look at verse 28. All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of 12 months, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon.

Fast forward a year. We're not told what actually transpired during the year, but we are told what happens afterwards. Do you hear the king's boast in verse 30?

The king answered and said, it's not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power and is a royal residence for the glory of my majesty. King's feeling pretty good about himself at this point.

Strolling on the roof, perhaps looking at some of the things that he himself had instituted and put into building projects there in the city. Everything that he may have desired was at his disposal.

[18:29] He's having a self-approving, self-congratulatory conversation with himself. Babylon indeed was great.

He had labored long and hard for its prominence. Nebuchadnezzar had ruled for 43 years, 605 to 562 B.C.

and he was a man of absolutely remarkable achievements. His military victories had included the capture of Jerusalem, 586 B.C.

He was known for repairing and enlarging other buildings of Babylon as well as conducting great building projects of his own. Temples and walls lined the great street that he had built for processions.

The hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was a project that Nebuchadnezzar constructed to please his wife. How's that for a gift, if you will? The famed Ishtar Gate was credited to him.

[19:31] On one inscription, he boasted, the fortifications of Esogila, this was the temple of Marduk, and Babylon, he says, I strengthen and establish the name of my reign forever.

Babylon was a monument to his greatness. We see the king's words in verse 30, but then there is another voice.

If you know, sometimes in family, and Shirley and I had a discussion about this on last week, sometimes we have a way of talking over one another, you know, sort of getting in on one another's conversation.

Well, that's what happens here. While the words were still in the king's mouth, verse 31, God, the very one who has the right to talk over and to talk in and to talk through and to talk to your life and mine.

words fail. Here is, friends, a voice from above, a voice from above. Fourteen times in this chapter alone, the word heaven is used, and here it is for the eleventh time.

[20:40] Heaven, the ultimate place of power, huh? As Dave read earlier, Isaiah 61, 66 and 1, thus says the Lord, heaven is my throne, huh?

The earth is my footstool, huh? Earth's words, final, or, uh, friends, are not final, whether they come from D.C.

or Moscow or wherever. Earth's words uttered by earth's powers are not ultimately final. They're not supreme, huh? If we have an earthly king's boast in verse 30, in verse 31, we have a heavenly king's correction, huh?

judgment, on the one hand, against the king had been delayed, but had not been diverted. Here it is, at last, the final grain of sand has fallen from the hourglass of mercy, and life came crushing down on this earthly king.

Huh? Anybody here know anything about life come crushing down? huh? And you feel a little bit crushed and under the weight of life and its various ways that that happens in life, huh?

[22 : 01] What a judgment this was. But it was judgment with a purpose. It was not simply punitive. It was both corrective as well as redemptive.

And here we see it in verse 32 yet again. What was the purpose uttered? What was the purpose? You see it there? Until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Until you know ultimately who is the one who is actually in charge. That's the shortened version of it. It was if he were handcuffed here, led away, under arrest by God himself, you shall be driven.

Huh? What was his sale? It was not the padded minimum security cushion situation for white collar criminals. Huh? His time away was not to be with those who had committed simply misdemeanors. Huh? You're going with the beast. What's going to be his diet? Huh? Not palace delights or even dainties of the field. Not the simple rations of bread and water.

[23 : 09] This guy was going to be a true vegan. You shall be made to eat grass. Huh? That was the real deal. Huh?

How long? Huh? How long was he going to... The text says till some interpreters convinced that he had a seven-year sentence in the wild.

There's another way to see this. The way that we understand the phrase seven periods of time. Seven, of course, is the Hebrew number of what? Completeness. And thus the phrase can mean a complete period of time.

If not seven years, how long? Simply put, long enough. Long enough to accomplish the completeness of God's purposes for him.

Huh? The Lord who has a perfect sense of justice and he knows how long, long enough he is. Huh? Not like earthly authorities.

[24 : 11] Uh, didn't you hear the news this week? Man rapes 14-year-old. This was some years ago and he gets what? 30 days in jail?

You hear about the woman in Florida who fired a warning shot at an abusive husband and guess what she gets? 20 years. Justice in both of those cases?

Huh? Not hardly, at least from this vantage point. Huh? Nebuchadnezzar says sentence was just right. in the sight of God.

Huh? Look at verse 33. Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox. His body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagle's feathers and his nails were like bird's claws.

His punishment was swift. Relegated to an animal-like existence from a scientific point of view. It could have been several things. Zoanthropy, a condition where the person thinks of himself as an animal and behaves like one.

[25 : 24] Or it could have been like anthropy, a mental illness in which a person is deluded to behaving like a wolf or some other animal. Or anthropy exhibiting traits like an ox.

Not sure. But here we have a proud earthly ruler that boasted of his majesty and now he's reduced to an animal like, beast like existence until he recognized who it was that really was in charge.

The bottom had fallen out. Again, ever have that happen? Boom! Life goes to the dogs. The bottom falls out professionally or financially or academically or relationally.

And while not always the case here, the bottom fell out because the Lord had a lesson that he wanted to show this most powerful ruler in the then world.

And guess what? Even through him there is a lesson for you and me through this king's downfall. When the bottom falls out, friends, we must ask, why?

[26 : 44] What can this be traced to? Sometimes, not all the times, but sometimes we will find an answer. Could it be to a basic condition of heart, an orientation of mind, where we really feel that we're all that?

Huh? And might the Lord be teaching us? And some of us, many of us, before the bottom falls out, who it is that's really in charge?

Again, we see the Lord's purposes in all this, don't we? Till you know that the most high, the supreme God, the one who is preeminent, the only God, as we would understand him, till he has the king's attention.

attention. Does he have yours? Will the bottom have to fall out? Will your life have to go to the dogs? Before he has your attention.

Think of those. I'm sure that there have been business people who have gone from the top floor with the corner office and all the perks, all the way down to under whacker.

[28 : 08] And an existence there. That pictures it, doesn't it? All the way from the towers of power to what could be termed the very dregs of life.

You don't think that's true? Read streetwise sometimes. It's a magazine for the homeless that chronicles different people's stories. how and why they get there.

Is there warning for us here? The judgment came swiftly. Immediately the word was fulfilled. Here he is, this king that is thrust, and listen to this, probably had a bright mind, but here he is.

He's thrust into mental darkness, into a demented state, one in which he could not help himself.

Powerful king.

Now he's powerless. Why? Why? Why? Because he's under the judgment of God. Humiliation of a haughty king, but then we see the exaltation and the exaltation of a humble king.

[29 : 23] You see that in verse 36. Nebuchadnezzar takes the mic again. At the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar, and notice this, what he does.

He says, I lifted my eyes to heaven, my reason returned to me, I blessed the most high and praised and honored him who lives forever.

He speaks for himself. His eyes are heavenward. There's our word again. The pomp of his rule was gone and then, but he turned his eyes upward forward.

He's thinking has cleared up. His posture contrasts with what we see in verse 29, where his accomplishments had loomed large. He was full of self-accomplishment and self-praise and the hammer fell big time, but the experience showed him how very small he actually was.

Notice the same one who boasted in verse 30, studded with all of those personal pronouns, is singing another tune now. Self-praise has turned to the praise of the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

[30 : 33] The haughty king is now the humble king, and he is joyfully singing a different tune. In psalmist-like fashion, he's blessing God, and his praise has gushed forth to Lord most high.

What does he in fact acknowledge about God? His rule is eternal, verse 34a, and so is his kingdom. It spans all generations.

Furthermore, he rules independently, and sovereignly, and universally, and powerfully, none staying his hand, and he rules without accountability.

You see that? All the inhabitants of the world earth are accounted as nothing. He does according to his will among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand or say to him, what have you done?

Why are you doing that? None. King's restoration comes into view in verse 36, doesn't it? Not only was there a restoration of reason, there was a restoration or return of kingdom, majesty, and splendor.

[31 : 40] The king was back from the brink now. He brought back by the sovereign king of heaven himself, and thus he blesses the God of heaven.

humiliation, exaltation, but in all of this, look at verse 37, we see the triumph of the heavenly king.

The king's praise continues and the earthly king acknowledges the sovereignty of the heavenly king. What's the lesson learned? Huh? The lesson learns the most high rules.

It's not this what Daniel's exiled brothers needed to hear. Huh? The God of heaven is the God who humbles peoples, Israel, but he also humbles those who humble them, kings, and guess what?

He's showing them this, and Nebuchadnezzar is God's exhibit A, if you will, that this is going to happen. The head of gold, the towering tree with far-reaching impact and influence, but there's someone who is more majestic and mighty than the mightiest of the earth.

[33 : 01] That's the idea. It was the sovereign God who had appointed Nebuchadnezzar as king, and was behind his temporary fall, his exaltation, and his humiliation.

That could be traced all the way back. To the God of heaven. Do we likewise need to be reminded of these things as we ponder questions like who is actually in control?

Is it powerful men or cabinets or councils, officials of nations? While certainly and hopefully human responsibility is always in play, they're not ultimately in control.

The most high rules, even when world leaders make bad decisions and exert cruel force against their own or other people, when terrorists of various sorts wreak havoc on foreign and domestic soil, when neighborhoods are overrun by gangs, remember the key statement at the beginning of the book, the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into Nebuchadnezzar's hands.

The picture, again and again, is being replayed. The God of heaven is ultimately in control. While the nation was experiencing captivity in a measure of oppression by foreign powers because of their rebellion against God, God still was in control.

[34 : 27] The who is in charge lesson, it's good for self-reliant leaders of nations and self-assured peoples who feel that they're ultimately in charge of their own lives, afflicted with Invictus Syndrome.

I am the master of my faith, the captain of my soul. What will it take for us to understand that the Most High rules, that He is king and you're not, that you're not the master of your faith, you're not the captain of your soul.

From the New Testament vantage point, the King of heaven shows up in the person and the work of God's Son. Matthew, at the beginning of his book, he notes the royalty of Jesus.

He's the son of David. Then he puts us in touch with the message of the king. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, Matthew chapter 4, verse 17. In Matthew chapter 6, the king himself teaches us how to pray.

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth just like it is in heaven.

[35 : 36] And while on earth, the king himself became the sacrifice for sin for all who believe in him, all who forsake their sin, saying that there's no remedy within themselves and come to him for it.

Huh? He surrendered his royalty, undergoing the humiliation of the cross, so that those who believe could, by faith, enter into his kingdom.

Before he returned to heaven, he declares this, all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me. Huh? Matthew 28, huh?

We see that in there. And then Revelation chapter 1, verse 5, front of the book, huh? The faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

That's Jesus. And then Revelation 19 pictures his return. I saw heaven open and behold on a white horse.

[36 : 39] Here comes heaven's king. The one sitting on it is called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. He's a faithful and true king.

He's a warring king. His eyes are like a flame of fire. Huh? And on his head he's a crown-wearing king. The armies of heaven arrayed in white and pure were following him on white horses.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He's a sword-bearing king.

He will tread the winepress of the wrath of the wrath of God almighty. And listen to this, on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

He's the ruler ruler of all kings. What's the text calling for for you and me today? That all would humbly recognize the rule of God in the world, though it's not always evident, and submit to his son who embodies that rule to live humbly, faithfully, and fearlessly for him in this world.

[37 : 54] I call you this morning to do what Nebuchadnezzar did. Lift your eyes, lift your eyes beyond the plane of this earth, because there's just so much that you can see here.

But as you by faith look beyond this particular plane to him who fills heaven and earth, and then submit to him for his glory and honor, but ultimately for your earthly and eternal good.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for Daniel chapter four. And I pray, oh God, that you, through your word, your power, your spirit, would grip every heart with the reality of who it is that's really in charge.

Our eyes look to you. we lift our eyes, but then we lift our voices in total praise because of who you are, what you have done, and what you will do for the glory and honor of your name.

Amen and amen. God.