

AM Daniel 4:1-37 "Most high rules"

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[0 : 00] Daniel chapter 4, so I invite you to turn to Daniel chapter 4, you have your page number there I think, page 895 in the Pew Bibles. So Daniel chapter 4, again it's quite a long chapter, but we'll just take it slowly. So Daniel chapter 4 from the beginning.

King Nebuchadnezzar, to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all 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 my 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 magistrates and the enchanters, the Chaldeans and astrologers came in. And I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me the interpretation. At last Daniel came in before me, he who was named Belshazzar after the name of my God, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. And I told them the dream, saying, O Belshazzar, 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, and 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 ends of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it were food for all. The beasts of the field found shelter under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in 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, amid the tender grass of the field. 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. Let a beast's mind be given to him. 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 over it in the lowest of men. This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw.

[3 : 58] And you, O Belshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, Belshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you, Belshazzar, 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 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 shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived. 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. This is the tree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from 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 the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of 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 preaching righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, so that there may be, perhaps, a lengthening of your prosperity.

All this came upon

King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months, he was walking on the roof of his royal palace, Babylon. And the king answered and said, Is not the great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence for the glory of my majesty? While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven. O King Nebuchadnezzar, 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 shall 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 like bird's claws. At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me. I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him, who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures for generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven, 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 splendour returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, and I was enabled in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour 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. God added his blessing to this reading from his own inspired word. Again, verse 27, we'll be looking at the main teachings of the chapter, but I'd like to highlight again verse 27. Therefore, O King, let my counsel be accepted to you. Break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your inequities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that they may be, perhaps, be a lengthening of your prosperity. I've called the title, Most High Rules, although you can have various titles, but one of the authors of a commentary, Robin Sitzler, he takes that as a whole theme of

[9 : 52] Daniel, Most High Rules, and how we are to live according to that. So the Most High Rules. The first part, verses 1 to 3 there, it's a kind of, it's like these films you get. I quite like watching a nice film. And then you get a picture, and suddenly it jumps back in a generation, or it goes back, it flips back. You've seen many films like that, but there's a kind of storyline.

And here the king's telling the people about something that's happened to him, about the Most High God has done for me. And then he goes into what happened to him. So it's a kind of picture of what God has done to him. He's giving his, in other words, he's giving his testimony in the first three verses.

He's telling the people how he has come to faith at the end, as we read, as he looked up to heaven. So he's giving his testimony, and then it goes into, the author goes into how this conversion took place through this dream. So it's using a testimony of how God had brought, as far as we know, he brought Nebuchadnezzar to faith, especially when it says, had he lifted my, he says, I lifted my eyes to heaven. I think at that point, when he lifted his eyes, all changed, as you see, he sings another kind of hymn of praise there. I don't know if in your Bibles, but it's kind of in my Bible here. I'm sure it's the same as the ZE, but it's an American translation. It looks like he has this hymn of praise at the end to God.

And I just wondered if any of you have ever looked back in your own life, and thought about your own testimony, and how you have come to faith. And that's what Nebuchadnezzar does here, as he contemplates the signs and wonders of the Most High God has done for me. Just very briefly, I don't know if I've said this before, but when I was at secondary school, do you know what changed

my life? A notice on a notice board, inviting people to Scripture Union. Just that one simple thing, that probably passed hundreds of times, and it wasn't until six years at school I saw this invitation, I thought, I'm a Christian. So I thought, I'll go to that. I won't give you a long testimony, but that in turn led me to the Scripture Union, which led me to an organisation where all the Scripture Unions met together, called Torch.

They had weekends away, that led me to faith through a guy called Jim Pinton, when he was preaching in Carberry Tower, near where I was brought up in Musselville. That in turn led me to a young girl, who took me to the Free Church, and that was away back in 1971, or back at the end of 70. And because I met Daphne there, later on God called us to the mission field. Later on, God called us to do different things, laterally to work in a Christian bookshop, all because that one notice. And I thought, you know, God's homework wonders how he can work in somebody's life. It made me think, something so simple as a notice brought me all this way, and where would I be? So often I thought, isn't it, where would I be if I hadn't seen that notice?

[14:06] So God in his providence has brought us to faith, and I think it was good for us to meditate, like Nebuchadnezzar, the wonders and signs that the Most High God has done for me, to looking back, once you have looked up to heaven yourselves. At the end of the account here, that's what Nebuchadnezzar does. And just remember what God has done for me. And just challenge you.

It's good, I think, to remember. I did it very briefly, the various footsteps. That takes me down 50 years, these few sentences I just said. And he recognises God's signs and wonders and an everlasting kingdom. But for Nebuchadnezzar, his time of conversion took up quite a bit of time. Way back in chapter 2, when he had that first dream of the big statue. At the end of that dream, when Daniel comes and explains it to him about the stone coming and making that big statue fall and crumble to the ground, that meant a kingdom, an everlasting kingdom would come. And here we find him saying that same thing here. His dominion endures from generation to generation. So in chapter 2, at the end of that account of the dream and Daniel explaining to him, he recognised then, he says, truly your God is God of gods and the Lord of kings.

But at that time, he hadn't really come to a personal faith. It was just an acknowledgement of Daniel's God, not of his own God. Then in chapter 3, the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire. This is what Nebuchadnezzar says then. He came to the door of the burning of the fiery furnace. He declared Shadrach and Meshach, Abednego, servants of the most high God.

That's the first time that Nebuchadnezzar calls them the most high God and he calls them the most high God there. But yet, they were servants of the most high God. He hadn't yet become the servant of the most high God. He was going to, in God's providence, through this dream and through lifting his eyes to heaven, he would become a servant of the most high God just like them. He was going to serve the most high God as he came and looked up to the heavens himself. He recognized these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as servants of the most high. Do people recognize us as servants of the most high God? What identifies us to other people when they look at us? Nebuchadnezzar was able to say and give testimony to these three men, these three men are servants of the most high God. And now he acknowledges the most high God for himself and becomes his servant. And it's a challenge to us, isn't it? How will people recognize us? What are we going to be like salt and light? Folk will say he's a servant to the most high God. So that was another stage in his development. And then as chapter three finishes, and as the three are brought safely out of the fire, he says this, Blessed be their God who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him and set aside the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any God except their own God. He says conversion took time. Some people can pinpoint their time when life was changed. Others, like Nebuchadnezzar, have had a slow path to come to faith. Either way,

God can work in someone's life. And we're never to be judgmental. I think, oh, I was brought to faith so suddenly. But here we learn how sometimes God can slowly work in somebody's life and bring them to acknowledgement, first of his everlasting kingdom, then of the servants.

[18:43] And then finally, he comes himself to recognize the most high God. And he, as I say, was going to become his servant. Jesus, in Paul, rather, in 2 Corinthians 5.15 says this, And Jesus died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. Isn't that a challenge? And that, if we take that verse alone, it's a challenge to us

to remember that we live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us and who was raised again. And so we become servants of the most high. So others, we are now no longer living for ourselves, but we're living to serve the most high God, just like these three characters in Daniel chapter 3. So we see that it was signs and wonders, that the signs and wonders was dream, that this was read, that was given, and then it was read, that again it's merited twice, and then a third interpretation. So these were some of the signs and wonders that helped

Nebuchadnezzar come to faith. The sign of the tree, and all that happened to him, until he lifted his eyes to heaven. These were the signs and wonders that helped him. In John's Gospel, we find that there are seven signs, and that John uses seven miracles. And these, we're told in John's Gospel, are designated to manifest his glory, and recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

If the signs and wonders of this tree was used by God to bring him to faith eventually, nobody has an excuse, because there's these seven signs and wonders recorded in the New Testament from Jesus. And John says that believing, they were given so that by believing, you may have life in his name. In other words, the sign and wonder of these tree and the streams came to help Nebuchadnezzar. How much more can these signs and wonders of Jesus in the New Testament help us recognize him as the most high God? We find in the next section of the verse 4, isn't it interesting?

It says, I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. So it's a picture of happiness and security, of calmness and self-confidence, just like the tree that's pictured.

He's pictured as a flourishing king. He was flourishing in his palace, just like the tree. But then he's given this terrifying vision of the tree, reaching up to heaven. And we read it there, this tree and the beasts and the fruit and this picture that Daniel interprets for him.

[22 : 29] And it's a terrifying vision. He's terrified and afraid of it, especially when the wise man who came, who he thought could help him, they couldn't. So he became even more concerned, more terrified at this dream. And I was wondering that this was something terrifying that the king, that God used to bring him to faith. And I thought it was interesting, as you probably know in the New Testament, how often Jesus uses terrifying images. I think he, amongst even the apostles, seems to highlight the terrifying image more than anything else. For example, he says, it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole to go into hell. In Matthew 3, 12, his winning fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather wheat into the barn.

But he'll burn up the chaff with an unquenchable fire. And then there's a parable of the weeds. Matthew 13, 30. Let both grow together, he says, until the harvest. And at the harvest time, I will tell the reapers, gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned.

But gather the wheat into my burden. So I was thinking about this terrifying image, remembering Jesus' own preaching, how often he painted this terrifying picture of those who didn't trust in him. And I asked myself this question, how much should we, you know, testifying, paint a terrifying picture? I think in the, maybe even earlier in the 20th century, I think it was a sign that a lot of churches was that you were talking about the preaching of hell.

And that was maybe used by God. I had an experience a few years ago from a minister who seemed to highlight it.

I don't know if you can highlight it too much. And people were beginning to sort of get discouraged at that kind of preaching. Because it was too heavy, it was too consistent. I wonder what you think.

[24 : 59] But I think it's there that God uses a terrifying picture to bring Nebuchadnezzar to faith. And Jesus often used these terrifying pictures to challenge people to think about God's judgment.

As I say, it's not something I think we charge in. You notice in verse 19, for example, when Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him.

He was very careful in how he was going to interpret this dream to the king. He had to stop for a moment and think, how am I going to tell the king this?

I wish it was for his enemies, I wish it was for somebody else, and I've got to tell the king what this means. So it's good to stop and think, how are we going to present the gospel in an appropriate way to someone.

Some of you know, I used to work in the bookshop, and there was one student, and there was all those Christians coming into our shop. And I kind of dismayed a bit, but it made me think, this guy would come into the bookshop, and immediately he would turn to the customers that were in.

[26 : 24] Are you saved? Are you saved? I thought, mm-hmm. I suppose that's one way to do it. But it is difficult, isn't it, to think, how are you going to present the gospel?

That might be an appropriate way for somebody. It wouldn't be my way. I think I'd be more like Jesus at the well of the woman, to present the gospel slowly and deliberately.

I suppose like Nicodemus, there are times where you just have to go and say you must be born again. So Jesus was sensitive, and to whom he was preaching to.

His message didn't change, but his method did. And this was a method anyway. It's just a challenging thought to myself about this terrifying picture, both from, that God used for Nebuchadnezzar now, that brought him to faith.

And the terrifying pictures, often that Jesus used in his teaching, challenging people about the judgment to come. So I'll leave that question to you to answer, but isn't it interesting to know how to present the gospel?

[27 : 33] I think one of the solutions is once you get to know someone, it's, you're like Daniel. You're dismayed for a while, but then the moment comes to you, you are confident to speak to that person, and tell him, you are the tree, O King, you're the tree.

And so he has that confidence to share with him the awfulness of God's judgment upon him, that he was the fulfillment of this dream, that he was going to end up with Jew, and all that was going to happen to him for seven times, whatever that means, seven years, a long period anyway.

So all this was so that, we're told, and this gets back to the title, all this was given so that the king would know that the most high rules, God used this terrifying picture, to get home to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, the most high rules.

And interesting that the king was willing to, it wasn't to Daniel. And then there's this verse 27, which there was, I think, three things there that Daniel challenged them to do.

The first thing is, break off your sins. Break off your sins. That's the first thing he had to do, to tear away himself, from his sins, from his life of sinning.

[29 : 11] You see, sinning can become a habit, a habitual thing. Even for Christians, there's things in our lives, that become habitual. And sometimes it's difficult, to break ourselves free, from these sins, because they become so habitual.

And that's what the picture here is. Break off your sins. I've been reading through Kings recently, my daily readings, and something that struck me was that, several times you read through the book of Kings, it says of this, of the king, he did right in God's eyes, but he didn't remove the high places. He did right in God's eyes, but he didn't remove the high places. In other words, they couldn't break away, from that sin, of worshipping.

So that's the first thing. And that's what we read in the New Testament. Quite often, Peter, preaches this, and he, he puts it this way, repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and times of refreshing, shall come, from his presence.

That's exactly what happened, to Nebuchadnezzar. Once he broke off, from his sins, we read at the end of the account, that I was established in my kingdom, and still more, and still more greatness, was added to me.

[30 : 37] So, just as Peter was preaching, there, after the healing of the lame beggar, he preached that, times of refreshing, would come, if only repented.

And then, Peter again, preaching, and Simon the magician, he said to Simon, repent of your wickedness, and pray to the Lord, perhaps he'll forgive you, for the intent of your heart.

Isaiah puts it this way, let the wicked man forsake his own way, and the unrighteous man, his own thoughts, let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion, and our God, for he will freely pardon.

Is there still sins in our lives, that we need to break away from, so these bad habits, that come in, that we're just able to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we're able to resist, God, the devil.

Psalms 66, verse 18 says this, If I cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

Isn't that challenging? If there's any sin in our lives, it affects our relationship with God, it affects our prayer life, he won't listen, if we have that cherishing of a sin.

[31 : 55] We need to break away, and later on in the Psalms, the Psalm 119, verse 11 says, I've stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. There's a good piece of advice, from the psalmist, that he experienced, that the more he, that he, stored up God's word, in his life, the more it helped him, not sin, and to break away, from the life of sin, sinning.

So that was the first thing, that Nebuchadnezzar, had to do, and that's one of the things, that we have to do, is break away, tear away, these habitual things, that are destroying, our relationship with God, examine ourselves, it says at the Lord's Supper, you'll probably hear it next week, examine yourselves, but I don't think that, it's just at the Lord's Supper, I think it's all the time. The second thing he was to do, was practice righteousness, so, from the negative, to the complete turnabout, he was now instead, to practice righteousness, in 1 John, 2.29, if you know that, he is righteous, you may be sure, that everyone, who practices righteousness, has been, has been born, of him.

So, isn't that interesting, from John, if we practice righteousness, like Nebuchadnezzar, was advised to do, in verse 27, not only was he, to break away, from sins, but by practicing, righteousness, and that's what John's, saying, if we know, the one who's righteous, then, we need to practice, righteousness, and that people, will know then, that we are born of God, and again, further on in 1 John, chapter 3 this time, it says this, by this, by this is evident, who are the children of God, and who are the children, of the devil, whoever does not, practice righteousness, is not of God, nor is the one, who does not love, his brother, so loving, your brother, comes into the, aspect of practicing, righteousness, so that was the second thing, that, he was encouraged to do, James, in his epistle, says, a person is justified, by works, and not by faith, as alone, and, he emphasized, the importance, in other words, of works, as well as faith, and then, the third thing, that he was asked to do, was showing mercy, to the oppressed, that was the third thing, he was asked, he was to break away, from his sins, positively, he was to practice, righteousness, by loving, his brothers, and sisters, and the third thing, was he was to show mercy, again, in James, remember, he says, he's picturing a brother, coming to you in need, and the response is, oh, I wish you well, and James says, well, you need to have, works, action, accompanied by your faith, to be merciful, Psalm 41, blessed is the one, who considers the poor, in the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him, so, there's these three things, that, Nebuchadnezzar, had to, was challenged with, and it's a challenge, to each of our lives, as well, to break off, our sins, to practice, righteousness, and, to show mercy, to the oppressed, quite briefly, as we look, at what happens next, in this chapter, the king, of course, became proud, I think that's, from verse 28, it's interesting, that he's given a year, he didn't, sort of, react, to the message, right away, in verse 28, but then, he looks out, to his kingdom, that's before him, flourishing, like the tree, feeding everyone, before them, and, the prosperity, the picture of the trees, the prosperity, of the people, coming to eat, from the tree, like the beasts, for eating, it's a, that kind of picture, and, and, at that moment, of prosperity, he says, is not this great Babylon, which I have built, by my right to power, as a royal residence, and for the glory, of my majesty, and soon as he said, these words, then, the change, came about, on Nebuchadnezzar's life, he was humbled, humbled, he humbles the proud, as many verses, teaches us, he was humbled, by God, and turned, as a prophecy, pointed towards, this humility, of, almost acting, like an animal, and being, wet with the dew, but he gave him, a whole year, [37 : 23] God patiently, was hoping, that, what he had seen, would give him, repentance, at that time, that he delayed, he didn't, repent, he delayed, for a whole year, and therefore, God's judgment, did come upon him, he looked, at his kingdom, and that made him, proud, but, the contrast, to that, is in verse 36, verse 34, rather, and, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes, to heaven, before he was, looking down, at his kingdom, he was, he was, proudly, looking down, in his kingdom, verse 34, he looks up, to, to the, I lifted my eyes, to the heavens, like we sang, in Psalm 121, Psalm 121, is, kind of, one, at first sight, it's, quite, it's, two ways, of interpreting,

Psalm 121, but the way, I look at, Psalm 121, is that, when they were, looking in their eyes, to the hills, they were looking, up to the, high places, that were there, who couldn't help, and, but then, they were looking, in the wrong place, Psalm 121, they were looking, to the high places, who, who, who, who, in the high places, will help, these high places, that were built, no, the Lord is my help, that's one way, I look at, Psalm 121, but, interesting enough, Psalm 123, maybe a bit better, I lift my eyes, to you, the one enthroned, in heaven, as the eyes, of servants, look to, the hand, of their master, as the eyes, of a maid servant, looks to the, hand, of the mistress, so our eyes, are on our God, until he shows us mercy, I think that was, sums up, Nicodemus Luke, his eyes, were on his God, and he found mercy, so, instead of looking down, proudly at his kingdom, he looked up, and was humbled, and he, he, he, he realized,

God was a merciful God, and he has this hymn of praise, that follows, because he acknowledged, God's rule, so, so, we're taught here, to acknowledge, God's, rule over us, while there is yet time,

and like Nebuchadnezzar, don't delay, he delayed a year, thankfully, God had mercy upon him, but that's a dangerous thing, to do, to delay, and, let us humble ourselves, like Nebuchadnezzar, then, and acknowledge, like he did, his works are right, and his ways are just, and go on, to praise, and extol, and honour, like he did, the King of Heaven, may God bless, these few thoughts, to us, we'll never,