

Daniel 4:19

¹⁹ "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.' Belteshazzar replied, 'My lord, *if only* the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!

Let us recall that some 30 years prior, king Nebuchadnezzar was in exactly the same predicament as he is here in chapter 4. He has had a dream, it has scared the compost out of him, and his wise men are unable to provide the interpretation. Daniel has listened to the king's dream and his initial reaction was that of being alarmed. When exactly did Daniel receive the dream's interpretation? I think it is quite likely that Daniel was getting the interpretation as the king was telling him the dream; and the reaction once all the pieces were in place was that of being appalled. The word here literally means 'astonished,' which typically means "causing a feeling of great surprise." Apparently, Daniel was surprised by the dream and its interpretation; and it showed on his face. The text says that "his thoughts alarmed him." It is here that Daniel probably was felt as the wise men felt. He was certainly quite hesitant to relay the dream's interpretation, having understood its meaning completely by now.

The king responded to this hesitation and perhaps what he said to Daniel assured him that he shouldn't "pull any punches" but "tell it like it is." He says "do not let the dream alarm you ..." What could have given Daniel pause here? Several things could have been on his mind ...

First, Daniel could have certainly had genuine concern for Nebuchadnezzar. He certainly understood the king's role in God's plan during the captivity; that God Himself put Nebuchadnezzar over the nation of Israel for a time. Since he knew what the dream meant for the king, I think he showed heartfelt compassion for him. Second, Daniel may have been concerned for the nation of Israel. What would happen to the exiled Jews if something happened to Nebuchadnezzar? Who could say what evil would fall upon the nation should the great tree be chopped down. Walvoord suggests that Daniel's astonishment was, at least in part, due to the evidence that God had heard his prayers on behalf of the king and was drawing him to the truth. It may also have been simply that on other occasions, receiving divine revelation from God proved 'troubling' both mentally and physically.

Here is where Nebuchadnezzar displays a little courage for a powerful king. He tells Daniel not to let the dream or its interpretation alarm him; which is interesting since Nebuchadnezzar himself was already alarmed by the dream. He wanted to know the truth about its interpretation and he probably already figured it was not good news.

Daniel (Belteshazzar) then spills to beans to Nebuchadnezzar ... its bad news. He wishes that the dream pertained to the king's enemies, and in that phrase, he expresses to Nebuchadnezzar that it is indeed bad news. He lets the king know this so he can prepare himself for it.

Daniel 4:20–22

²⁰ 'The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth ²¹ and whose foliage *was* beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged-- ²² it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.

Just as the first part of the image in Daniel 2, the head of gold, so now Daniel tells the king that HE is the tree. He goes on to describe how the size of the tree relates to the king ... "you (your kingdom) have become great and grown strong, and your majesty (his royal power) has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth." The term "reached to the sky" itself sounds ominous and brings to remembrance the tower of Babel declaration of the nations; we know how that ended. Daniel then reiterates the command from the angelic watcher ... to chop the tree down.

Daniel 4:24–26

²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to

eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.²⁶ 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is Heaven that rules.*

It is clear that the decree is not from the watcher (as some have suggested), but the text clearly says that the Most High is the source of this impending judgment upon the king. Notice Daniel says that the decree has already come upon the king, though it would be another year before anything happened to Nebuchadnezzar. This is an example of the so-called **divine present** where something that has not happened yet is described and detailed as if it had ... to highlight the fact that its fulfillment is certain. The king will be driven away from mankind, presumably by the mental illness that will befall him. The insanity would make it impossible for Nebuchadnezzar to remain as the king of Babylon and the ruler of the empire. His new dwelling place will be with the beasts, the wild animals. Notice that all this will befall the king ... for seven years ... until he recognizes that God is ruler ... not Nebuchadnezzar himself.

What does it mean that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men? Daniel's earlier interpretation of the king's dream in chapter 2 revealed a divinely-established sequence of Gentile kingdoms. If He gave the rule of the realm of men to Gentile kingdoms, in what sense does He rule over the realm of mankind? God rules over the realm of men in that it is He that controls that rule by removing and raising up the very kings and rulers of the nations He has given. This should have been evident to Nebuchadnezzar as a result of the events in chapter 2, albeit they were 30 years prior. Thirty years of unrestrained pride on display is why the king did not understand these things. And this inability to recognize the hand of God in the events of their ruling realm is not just a weakness of king Nebuchadnezzar. It would characterize the vast majority of rulers down through the ages since Daniel 4. Consider the prophetic insight in Ezekiel 38 that characterizes the kings that align with the final world ruler, the Beast ...

² "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him ³ and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. ⁴ "I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company *with* buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;

Likewise His influence on the nations during the Tribulation ...

"For **God has put it in their hearts** to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. (Rev 17:17)

But in all this bad news is a small ray of hope ... the promise that after the king recognizes that Heaven rules, not him, his kingdom will be restored ... IF ... he repents.

Daniel 4:27

²⁷ 'Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.'

Now that Daniel fully understands what God is planning for Nebuchadnezzar, he appeals to the king to repent now and he tactfully frames his call to repentance as advice. King, I advise you to repent. Even though it was a fairly bold thing for Daniel to require of the king of Babylon, he does it in a way that clearly shows genuine care and concern for Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't shrink from calling the king out for his sins.

We now highlight what is a fairly large controversy in the text over how the next phrase should be both translated and understood. Garland elaborates concisely ...

Some translations interpret the phrase as if Daniel were urging the king to offset his sins by performing other righteous acts—to compensate for his wickedness and “balance the ledger” of his iniquity through good works. Consider how this passage is rendered by the LXX, “**atone** for thy sins by alms, and *thine* iniquities by compassion on the poor”

Those who use this text as evidence for a doctrine of salvation by works take the word to mean “redeem,” translating the phrase, “redeem your sins by well-doing.” It is true that the meaning “redeem” [for “break off”] is used in the

Septuagint (λύτρωσαι) and (*then*) Vulgate versions, but this meaning seems to have arisen only later, in post-Old Testament time. The meaning in Daniel's day clearly was "break with." . . . Daniel was telling the king to correct his sinful life by conducting himself righteously. The passage cannot be used to defend the teaching that the soul can be redeemed or sins expiated by acts of charity. *Italics mine* ...

Goldingay puts the nail in the coffin of this controversial passage ...

While could conceivably mean "redeem," its object would be the thing redeemed. With "sins" as the object the meaning must be "break off" ("renounce").¹

However, the New Jerusalem Bible retains the faulty rendering as "by upright actions break with your sins, break with your crimes by showing mercy to the poor."

Here Daniel is urging the king to demonstrate his repentance by turning from (breaking off) his sin. This is what Jesus told the Pharisees when He commanded them to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father' (Matt. 3:8–9).

The NASB utilizes the cumbersome phrase to describe the result of Nebuchadnezzar choosing to repent ... "in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity." I prefer the much clearer NIV ... "It may be that then your prosperity will continue" ... or even the ESV ... "that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

Daniel 4:28–30

²⁸ "All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. ²⁹ "Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof of* the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'

Notice immediately the shift to third person narrative.

The result was sure ... "all this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king." Apparently, he did not repent. So very interesting that God gave Nebuchadnezzar a year to repent of his sins; but he did not. Why do you suppose he gave the king so long? God historically provides a warning before He executes judgment and this case is no different. But history shows time and time again that the temporary withholding of God's judgment rarely produces repentance. He is certainly long suffering with us sinful humans, is He not? How long has He been patient with the world today; with the United States; with us as individuals? But for king Nebuchadnezzar, a year was just too much time for his ego to be inflated again to the point where he might as well shake his fist up to heaven when he said "is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built ..." Let's dissect his arrogance for a few minutes.

The king is walking on his palace; most likely a reference to walking on the palace wall or the palace roof. From this vantage point he would have been able to look out upon the city of Babylon and see all the notable features. He may have been walking among the famous hanging gardens that he constructed for his wife. In any event, the context is his pondering all the architectural highlights of Babylon ... and he finally makes the confession that sends him into exile ... "Is this not Babylon ..."

- which I myself have built
 - as a royal residence
 - by the might of my hand
 - and
 - for the glory of my majesty ...

Wow ... but really ... was Nebuchadnezzar any different that our own set of loud-mouthed, arrogant, narcissistic, ego-maniacal presidents, congressmen, senators, mayors, media members, schoolboard members today?

Let's break it down ... first he boasts that he himself built his residence. Do you really think he himself build his own palace? He may have laid the first brick but surely, he had construction workers (i.e., slaves) to do the hard labor and he sat around

¹ Goldingay, John E., *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, Word, Inc., 1989.

pondering his dreams. His first mistake is mischaracterizing his own contribution. Recall Paul's admonition in Romans 12:3 ... "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." We as prideful human beings more often than not over-estimate our contribution to everything. Every week I sit in multiple meetings that status different programs and aspects of programs and each time at least one individual makes a mountain out of a mole hill contribution. Its our nature ... but we are commanded to be sober in this regard. The king was not!

Second, he built a house, gardens, temples, statues, all kinds of things that are not there now. The enjoyment of nice things in life is temporary. Everything we have is temporary. It's all going to "burn up," either literally in the tribulation, or figuratively when we stand before the Lord to give an account. Nebuchadnezzar never had sight of that, up to this point. Third, he ascribes the great accomplishments as protruding by his hand. Recall his proclamation in the last chapter ... "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" He had an over-inflated view of his own power, his own influence; he never tempered it with a somber understanding of who gave him life, and rulership, and dominion over his domain.

Lastly, it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar sought his own glory and the beauty of royal privilege that comes with being the king of Babylon. Most people struggle with seeking our own glory. Do you know how hard it is to teach the Bible and not struggle with self-seeking glory. We as teachers, and some of you will certainly progress to that place in your ministry activity, must be very careful to avoid wanting to please our "students" or seeking praise for ourselves. Why? Because our job as teachers is to clearly communicate the text of scripture, to present the knowledge of the Bible on a platter for you to feed on. But it is a fact that "knowledge puffeth up" (Rom 8:1). The king displayed and wielded royal majesty, he had the power over his realm that came with being the king. But he forgot or ignored that fact that the Most High revealed to him that it was He that gave this majesty to him. He did not achieve it on his own. Yes, he was a powerful personage, but the Lord God is the one who makes kings rise and fall ... and his fall was now at hand.

Nebuchadnezzar is no different than any other ruler of a country these days. The tendency of rulers to abuse their power is aptly-demonstrated by both Jewish and Gentile history. God vested authority in the line of Davidic kings who were to rule in a manner reflecting His righteous rule. Within only one generation, the awful (mostly) leadership led to the division of Israel into northern and southern kingdoms (1 Kings 11). Both failed to produced righteous kings with any consistency. This ultimately led to the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria (1 Kings 14; 2 Kings 15–18), followed by the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon (Daniel 1–5). The removal of Israeli rule was God's judgment upon their leaders who failed to rule righteously. They abused their power and their people. Can we expect God to overlook the unrighteous rule of our present world leaders and those in our own country?

Daniel 4:31–33

³¹ "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' ³³ "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*."

Aha, there is a subtle nuance in text that might have slipped by us (yeah, it slipped by me until just now). The king was making this proclamation of his own worth audibly. While the word was in the king's mouth is a fancy way of saying the king SPOKE this arrogant diatribe to himself! Imagine the cold water on the pot after Nebuchadnezzar received the interpretation of the dream. Month after month he had a chance to ponder the ramifications of the dream, month after month he considered it. Eleven months he began to wonder if the dreams interpretation was correct, the water of his ego started bubbling, steam started coming from the surface. And then boom, he could not contain his arrogance any more, the pot boiled over

"IS THIS NOT BABYLON ... WHICH I MYSELF HAVE BUILT ..."

At that moment, in the speaking of those words ... the promised judgment had come ...

We will conclude the text of Daniel 4 next week.