

Review of Daniel 4 so far ...

Daniel 4 begins with a proclamation by Nebuchadnezzar to the whole world about the “signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for” the king. He acknowledges the eternal nature of the kingdom of God and its dominion over the course of human history. The king then relates another dream that has troubled him. This time he calls for the Babylonian wise men and tells them the dream, however, they are unable (or unwilling) to provide an interpretation. Daniel eventually comes to resolve this situation and the king begins to tell Daniel the dream. He was laying on his bed and he saw a huge tree with beautiful leaves and fruit on it. It provided food for the whole earth, shade for the animals, and homes for all the birds.

We mentioned that the tree was a symbol for Nebuchadnezzar himself, as well as the kingdom of Babylon. This association (a tree) is used before in the OT to represent kingdoms so there is precedence for an interpretation before Daniel gives us the details.

Last week (shortened class due to Easter Sunday) we covered Dan. 4:13–15. Let’s continue ...

Daniel 4:16

¹⁶ "Let his mind be changed from *that of* a man and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him.

While the NASB has chosen “mind” (the faculty of reasoning, thought, and understanding), the literal meaning of the word here is “heart.” Let his heart be changed ... this would imply a little more than just his mind. Archer explains

The word for “mind” is לִבָּהּ [lebab] (lit., “heart,” a term that in Scripture refers to the inner self as the seat of moral reflection, choice of the will, and pattern of behavior). It includes not only the mental processes but also the feelings, affections, and emotions, along with all the motivational factors leading to decisions and responses to life situations.

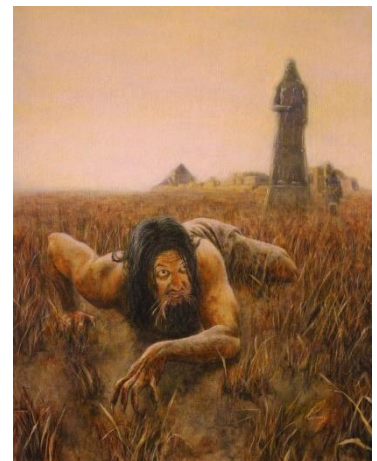
Let him be given the heart of a beast. Notice the irony in the pronouncement; Nebuchadnezzar was given dominion over the beasts (Dan. 2:38) and now he will become like one of them instead. God’s word from Jeremiah 27:5–6 ...

⁵ "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight. ⁶ Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him.

What is it that separates men from beasts? Is it not our ability to respond to God through being created in His image? Not only would Nebuchadnezzar behave like the beasts of the field, he would now lose the very ability that separates us from the animals. Some would see this condition which will come upon Nebuchadnezzar as symbolic of the Gentile nations who will rule the world without God’s participation, resembling the very beasts they were given dominion over. Skipping ahead in text we see that the watcher decrees that this ailment would last for a period of time (seven periods of time, perhaps years).

Now, what about this condition that God would judge Nebuchadnezzar with? Is it believable that something like this could happen to a person? I love Shower’s explanation ...

Skeptics have scoffed at the account of Nebuchadnezzar’s mental illness in Daniel. They have claimed that it is preposterous to believe that such a thing happened to such a mighty king. However, a Greek writer named Megasthenes, who lived from 312–280 B.C., related an interesting story that had been told to him by the Chaldeans. According to this story, after he had completed military conquests,



Nebuchadnezzar “was possessed by some kind of god or other” while on the roof of his palace.¹ The story also talked about a man driven through the desert where wild beasts sought their food – “a lonely wanderer among the rocks and ravines.”² Although this story differed in several respects from the account in Daniel, the similarities were strong enough to have prompted the conclusion that the Chaldean account to Megasthenes was a perversion of what actually happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

In addition, it is interesting to note that for four years Nebuchadnezzar’s name disappeared from the historical and governmental records of Babylon. It reappeared for a brief time before the king died.

Are there actual medical conditions that resemble what happened to the king? Yes. The illness described in Daniel is a rare form of a general condition called monomania. Monomania (from Greek *monos*, one, and *mania*, meaning "madness" or "frenzy") is a form of partial insanity in which a single psychological obsession is conceived in an otherwise sound mind. Some cases of this general condition are where the person imagines themselves as a particular animal and adheres to the characteristics of that animal. This has historically been called zoanthropy, from *zoon*, meaning animal, and *anthropos*, meaning man.

In modern day usage, where every possible condition under the sun is a disorder; this condition is called Species Identity Disorder. There are particular variations of the disorder. There is ...

1. Zoanthropy, mentioned above.
2. Lycanthropy, which comes from two words, *lycos*, meaning wolf, and *anthropos*, meaning man. This is a condition in which men regard themselves as wolves and imitate their manner of life.
3. Boanthropy, which comes from *bous*, meaning cattle, ox, or bull, and *anthropos*, meaning man. This would be a condition in which men regard themselves as some kind of cattle. The best-known case of this insanity was that of King George III of Great Britain.

What about the “seven periods of time shall pass over him;” what are we to make of this? There is no specific length mentioned by Daniel that these seven periods span. The Septuagint renders it as seven seasons, while older texts print it as seven years. Various suggestions have been made by expositors. Some have tried to use historical records of Nebuchadnezzar’s time to estimate the time period, assumed to be seven years. But it is typical for royal families to purge potentially embarrassing episodes from records, so there is no way to perfectly line up the time period.

There are those who view the seven time periods as less than seven years, mostly based on faulty assumptions. For example, Keil supports the seven periods as less than seven literal years based on his preconceived belief that Nebuchadnezzar could not have recovered from seven years of insanity. Calvin suggests that the seven periods be understood symbolically (shocking!) as denoting a long enough time to punish the king. Steinmann makes the ultimate assumption that the absence of the term *year* in Daniel 4 indicates the time period cannot be a literal seven years.

Several factors indicate the term seven periods should be taken as seven years:

1. Elsewhere, esp. Daniel 7, the term indicates years as the usual interpretation
2. The seven times are said to *pass over* Nebuchadnezzar, which appears to be an indirect reference to annual cycles
3. Seven years would be ample time for the changes to the king's hair and nails in Dan. 4:33.
4. The Old Greek text indicates that the time period is years
5. A large array of expositors support the “seven years” interpretation; Calvin, Clarke, Darby, Gaebelien, Gill, Ironside, Jerome, Josephus, Larkin, Showers and Walvoord.

If we accept the premise that the seven time periods are seven years, there appears to be several parallels between Nebuchadnezzar’s situation and that of the Antichrist during the Tribulation period³ (I know, I know ... we haven’t gotten there yet but I am unlikely to remember to come back to Daniel 4 to cover these points after going through Revelation lol).

¹ For a complete analysis of the Megasthenes legend, see Boutflower, Charles, *In and Around the Book of Daniel*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1923.

² Ibid.

³ This list is entirely a direct copy from spiritandtruth.com, the commentary on Daniel by Tony Garland.

- **Man and Beast** – Both leaders combine attributes of man and beast. “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate **the number of the beast**, for it is **the number of a man**: His number is six hundred and sixty-six” [emphasis added] (Rev. 13:18).
- **Delusion** – Like those who will worship the Antichrist at the time of the end (2Th. 2:12), God afflicts Nebuchadnezzar with a strong delusion. “Nebuchadnezzar’s madness symbolizes the peoples who will be under the power of Antichrist during the Tribulation . . . God shall send them strong delusion . . . (2Th. 2:12).” “The nations have been mad—as utterly bereft of all true reason as was the demented king of Babylon. But the day is nearing when God, in His grace, is going to end all this, and deliver a groaning world from the evils of selfish despotism and national jealousies. Christ’s personal return from heaven will conclude the long period of Gentile misrule.”
- **Afflicted Seven Years** – The duration of Nebuchadnezzar’s affliction matches the last week of Daniel’s *Seventy Weeks*, the period of the Tribulation. “Nebuchadnezzar’s great humiliation in becoming a beast for seven times (seven years), points us to the end of this Gentile age once more. Apostasy from God will be the great characteristic of that end. There will be no more looking up to God, but the attitude of the beast will be the attitude of the nations. We see much of this already. They mind earthly things and become the ‘earth-dwellers’ so frequently mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Madness and bestiality will seize upon the Gentiles, after the One who hinders, the Holy Spirit is removed.”
- **Pride Overthrown** – God judges the prideful boasting of both (Dan. 4:30; 7:8, 11, 20, 25; Rev. 13:5). “The major purpose of this chapter must definitely be kept in mind, the purpose indicated by our caption ‘The Overthrow of the Pride of Worldly Empires.’ It is not so much the individual who is under consideration, Nebuchadnezzar, the king, but this monarch in so far as he exemplifies the spirit of worldly empires. Such pride is characteristic of empires and particularly of empire builders. But it is equally reprehensible in all and doomed to an ultimate overthrow.” “The contest between God and Nebuchadnezzar is a broad illustration of God’s dealings with the entire human race and especially the Gentile world in its creaturely pride and failure to recognize the sovereignty of God.” “In Nebuchadnezzar we see a picture of all Gentile power—its departure from God, its degradation and bestial character, and its final subjugation to God in the Time of the End, when Christ shall return in glory, and all nations shall prostrate themselves before Him, owning His righteous and benevolent sway.” “One purpose of the Tribulation, which will immediately precede Christ’s second coming, will be to humble the nations and bring them to the point of subjection to Christ’s authority.” “what was then literally true of him individually, became morally true of the Gentile powers as a whole. The character of the Gentiles all through would be without intelligence of God and without subjection to Him.
- **Divine Deliverance** – “The beginning of Gentile empire is only the foreshadowing of what will be the closing scene. For as there was then deliverance by divine power at the beginning, so there will be by and by; and this specially found in connection with the faithful of Israel, the Jews. I do not mean, of course, with the Jews in their present state; because now a Jew remaining such is an enemy of God. But this will not always be the case. The time is coming when the seed of Abraham, without ceasing to be Jews, will be converted to God and receive the Messiah, according to the prophetic word.

Daniel 4:17

¹⁷ "This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men."

Perhaps the most important verse in the book of Daniel. The first phrase is interesting in that it suggests that the angelic watchers are the ones issuing this decree or command that Nebuchadnezzar be afflicted with this ailment. Here is what Calvin has said about this ...

... the angels urge God by their prayers to humble all mortals and to exalt Himself alone. . . . hence angels continually seek from God the casting down of all the proud, and that he will not permit Himself to be defrauded of his proper rights. . . . Angels seek from God by continual prayers to declare his own power to mortals, and thus to lay prostrate the proud who think to excel by their own power and industry, or else by chance, or by the help of men. To induce God to punish men for their sacrilegious deeds, the angels desire him to prostrate them, and thus to shew himself to be not only the king and ruler of heaven, but also of earth.⁴

⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on The Prophet Daniel*, Dan. 4:17.

Since the angels ultimately serve God, the watchers declare and enforce the decree but they are not the source of the decree. Now comes the multi-purpose statement and the theme of the book of Daniel ...

That the living may know:

- that the Most High is ruler over the realm of men
- that He bestows it (gives it) on whomever He wishes
- that He sets over it the lowliest of men

We will be careful to remember that it is the watcher that is speaking this phrase, not Nebuchadnezzar. The first bullet sets the ultimate control of human history at the throne of Almighty God. Even though God Himself has given the rule of the earth (temporarily) to the Gentile kingdoms of history, He is ultimately still in control of the affairs of men. Where would we find Biblical evidence for this? Here is a partial list ... 2 Kings 19:28; Ezra 6:22, 7:27; Job 12:23; Isa. 37:29; Ezek. 38:4, 10; Rev. 17:17.

We see evidence in the book of Daniel of God controlling things behind the scenes. For example, God influences Cyrus to begin laying the foundation for the rebuilding of the Jewish temple (Isa. 44:28). It is often the case that particular rulers in history do not know that they are under divine influence. Pontius Pilate was not aware that God was in control of Jesus' fate, not himself. "You could have no power against me unless it had been given you from above."

The second bullet declares that God gives this rule to whomever He wishes. The pity saying "God is in control of who is in control" is an apt depiction of the reality of God's rule. No human (or angelic, for that matter) being can thwart the rule of God and his influence, control, and sovereignty over the universe. His plan can never be thwarted by sin, by humans, by the most powerful of angelic beings ... He will always execute His plan for human history ... eventually.

Here is where our political leaders are completely ignorant. A good ruler will recognize that the power and authority that they carry does not derive from them, from leaders above them, or from the people in an election. A good ruler will recognize that he/she has been given this power from God and they are mere managers or stewards of it. They are to wield this authority as representatives of God and to ultimately give Him honor and glory. We have almost no rulers that fit this model of ruling wisdom today. Even evil rulers are subject to God's power.

Finally, God often chooses the meek and mild to be elevated to a position of authority and influence. Think of David, Mordecai, and Joseph. Scripture attests to this ...

⁷ "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts. ⁸ "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, And He set the world on them. (1Sa 2:7-8)

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God, Who is enthroned on high, ⁶ Who humbles Himself to behold *The things that are* in heaven and in the earth? ⁷ He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the needy from the ash heap, ⁸ To make *them* sit with princes, With the princes of His people. (Psalm 113:5-8)

There is also a veiled witness to the sixth century authorship here. The argument goes like this ... it is fairly unlikely that an author would refer to the most powerful king in the ancient world as "lowly." Over time, the episodes of great leaders tend to romanticize their contributions to the point that very little harsh words will be printed contrary to this assumption. Let us not forget that Nebuchadnezzar was a brutal dictator for most of his reign. He slaughtered enemy nations, subjected them to harsh captivity, and was willing to slay any who would disobey him. For an author to say he was "lowly" does not seem to align with centuries of time passing to smooth over Nebuchadnezzar's image.

Daniel 4:18

¹⁸ 'This is the dream *which* I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell *me* its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.'