**DANIEL CHAPTER 4**

Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful man in the world. As you might expect he is a man who is quite arrogant. Back in Chapter 2 the king had a disturbing dream. After the wise men of his empire were unable to tell the king his dream and interpret it, Daniel did. If you’ll recall in that dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image. It had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. The image, which represented all the great kingdoms of the world from Daniel’s day up until the last days, was toppled by a hewn stone not cut by human hands. We said that this stone represents Jesus and His 1,000-year reign described in detail in the book of Revelation.

Well, here in Chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. Once again Daniel ends up interpreting it. Nebuchadnezzar’s own words give us the account of this. They were recorded in official Babylonian documents. But this second dream is much different from the first one. In this dream the king sees a tall tree. As you will see in our lesson today the meaning of this dream is personal for King Nebuchadnezzar.

READ Daniel 4:1-3. When you first read these verses it is hard to believe that they are King Nebuchadnezzar’s words. Could this really be that same arrogant king we just mentioned in the opening. Is this the same man who had Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego thrown bound into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow before his golden image? Yes it is! Now, if someone just quoted you these verses and asked you to identify where they are found in the Bible and who the author is, you might guess maybe it was in one of the Psalms and was written by, say, King David. Perhaps you might guess it was from the Book of Isaiah or maybe one of the songs of Moses. Admit it. Very few of us – even those of us acquainted with the Bible – would guess that these are the words of a proud Gentile tyrant like King Nebuchadnezzar!

[Q1] The signs and wonders referred to are those miraculous things that the king personally witnessed being done by the Most High God. Fresh on his mind is the deliverance of Shaddrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace (Ch 3). Daniel’s revelation and interpretation of his first dream not long before that (Ch 2) was also quite miraculous. So Nebuchadnezzar praises God for what he has seen Him do. His own experience with the Most High God compels King Nebuchadnezzar to offer these lofty words of praise. The king’s words are sent out for his entire kingdom to hear. Daniel later records them in this book. So this Gentile king’s words of praise for the one true living God have been preserved for centuries, circulated throughout the entire world and passed down to us!

In the next verses, Nebuchadnezzar tells in his own words about a series of events in his life. These events will lead him to a deeply personal encounter with the living God.

READ Daniel 4:4. Everything is going well in the kingdom. Things are good. Suddenly something happens that gets the king’s attention…

READ Daniel 4:5. The king has a dream that disturbs him. It says here that, “the visions of my head alarmed me.” This is similar to what happened to him back in Chapter 2.

READ Daniel 4:6-7. Same song, second verse. The king summons all the wise men of Babylon to tell him what his dream means (all except Daniel). Like before none of them can tell him. Do you notice anything different about Nebuchadnezzar this time and the way he reacted back in Chapter 2? He doesn’t get angry. He doesn’t resort to threats. His hard cruel heart appears to have softened a bit. Maybe he’s mellowed with age. While that may be true, I believe the difference this time is that the king finally remembers Daniel. Look at the next verse *[pause after 1st sentence]*.

READ Daniel 4:8-9. The expression, “in whom is the spirit of the holy gods” is the pagan king’s way of saying that God is evident in Daniel’s life. The king knows that Daniel can tell him the interpretation of his dream. He knows this because he did it before. This begs the obvious question, “why didn’t the king summon Daniel first?”

[Q2] Although scripture gives us no clear explanation, all three of these could reasonably explain why Daniel is not called first. Once Daniel does arrive on the scene the king begins to reveal his dream to him.

READ Daniel 4:10-12. In his dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a very tall tree. It grew, it was strong, its leaves were fair and it bore much fruit. It provided food for all and even provided good shade.

READ Daniel 4:13. The king saw a holy being, one of God’s angels, coming down from heaven. This angel made a disturbing pronouncement.

READ Daniel 4:14.

[Q3] “Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.” Nebuchadnezzar probably knows this can’t be good news.

READ Daniel 4:15-17. The great tree is to be cut down, but its stump is to be preserved. Though the tree will appear to be dead, there is still some life in it. After a period of time, there will come restoration. Notice in v 15 that the pronoun describing the tree switches from the impersonal “it” to the personal “him.” That’s because (as we will see) the tree represents a person – King Nebuchadnezzar himself.

READ Daniel 4:18. The king again asks Daniel to interpret the dream for him. Based on his previous experience he knows that God has a message for him. Though he has no idea what it is yet, he probably has a feeling it is not going to be a good thing.

Beginning in verse 19 and going all the way through verse 33, the narrative in this chapter shifts from the first person (King Nebuchadnezzar telling his own story) to the third person (Daniel relating God’s judgment upon the king). After God’s punishment of King Nebuchadnezzar ends in verse 34, the narrative will again revert back to the first person.

READ Daniel 4:19a. Daniel doesn’t just jump right in and start telling Nebuchadnezzar what his dream means. Daniel pauses for a moment. Then he gives the king the bad news.

[Q4] Daniel is hesitant to announce God’s judgment on King Nebuchadnezzar. But the king insists. So Daniel proceeds to tell the king what his dream means.

READ Daniel 4:19b-22.

[Q5] Nebuchadnezzar’s worst fear is realized. This is definitely NOT good news! The tree in his dream represents him. Daniel goes on to tell the king that this judgment of God is about to fall on him.

READ Daniel 4:23-25. Daniel is a prophet. He’s God’s human instrument through which God’s message is given to the king. This is not a task that Daniel particular enjoys, but he has an obligation to speak God’s truth, even when that truth is not pleasant to hear. What is Daniel’s message to the king? Basically it’s this: “Because you have not recognized that it is I the Most High that really rules over human affairs, I am going to turn you into an animal. For seven years I am going to put you out in the fields with the animals. You will have the heart and the lifestyle of an animal.”

But there is a ray of hope. There’s some good news…

READ Daniel 4:26. God promises that Nebuchadnezzar will eventually be restored.

[Q6] God’s judgment is only temporary. It will end when Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledges the rule of God in his life.

READ Daniel 4:27.

[Q7] Daniel’s admonition to the king for right now is to stop sinning and live righteously – “repent and do what is right!” Show mercy to the poor and maybe God will let you hang on a little while longer.

Does the king repent? Apparently he does NOT. Daniel’s call for the king to “break away” from his sins is followed by a description of God’s judgment upon him.

READ Daniel 4:28. The vision that Daniel interpreted for the king comes true. You can mark it down – everything God says will happen eventually comes to pass. God’s judgment is sometimes immediate. However sometimes, in His mercy, He delays meting out what is deserved. His delay gives people the opportunity to repent and turn from their sins. This was the case with the nation of Israel time and time again. And this is also the case with Nebuchadnezzar here in this chapter.

READ Daniel 4:29-30.

A year passes. Nothing happens. By now Nebuchadnezzar’s fear has subsided. Whatever conviction he had in his heart the year before has faded by now. This is normal. It is why the Scriptures tell us, “Behold NOW is the favorable (acceptable) time, behold now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2) The king is consumed with his own power and greatness. Pride has welled up inside of him. He looks around at his kingdom, “Babylon the great.” He boasts to himself of what HE has accomplished. What’s wrong with that? Here’s what’s wrong… Nebuchadnezzar has failed to acknowledge that it is the God of heaven who has given him everything he has.

READ Daniel 4:31-33. God is slow to anger. However, when His judgment finally comes, it is swift. One minute Nebuchadnezzar is as sane as you and me. The next minute he’s tearing his clothes and rushing out of the palace like a wild animal. The most powerful and respected man in the world transforms into a madman. The next thing you know he’s out in the field eating grass like the cattle. Over time his hair and fingernails grow out. He must have been a sight to behold, a spectacle.

After seven years of madness God’s judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar comes to an end as Daniel had prophesied.

[Q8] [Q9]

Nebuchadnezzar once again begins to tell his own story…

READ Daniel 4:34-36.

[Q10] The king’s sanity is restored only after he lifts up his eyes to heaven. God in His mercy restores the king’s throne and even his greatness. Just as quickly as he lost his mind, he gains everything back again. God finally gets through to King Nebuchadnezzar and humbles him.

READ Daniel 4:37.

[Q11] The answer is NO. Mere words of praise, no matter how beautiful they might be, are not a true indication of a redeemed life. It may well be that through this seven-year ordeal Nebuchadnezzar DID come to know the living God personally and was saved. Daniel doesn’t tell us. What we do know is that God in His grace reached out to this pagan king. He made Himself known to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Application: Think back on your own life to your own salvation experience. At some point in time God spoke to you by His Spirit through a song, a sermon, a scripture passage, or the witness of a friend. But then it took an act of your will to repent, confess your sin and turn to God. Likewise it takes an act of your will every day to grow in your faith. God doesn’t force us to make the right decisions. We are agents of free will. With that being said, God will allow us to go through whatever circumstances it takes in order to get our focus back on Him whenever we ignore Him and go our own way.

How sad it is that so many people, including a lot of Christians, have to wallow around in the pig pen or stand out in the field eating grass before they finally lift up their heads toward heaven. Our daily prayer ought to be, “Lord, guide my thoughts, words and actions today. Grant me the strength, courage and willingness to know and do your will. Do whatever it takes to conform me to the image of Jesus!”