

(11) Daniel - Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar's second dream & testimony

SERMON INTRO: Today we come to chapter 4 of Daniel. I hope Psalm 79 helped with the scene setting and helped to draw you into the story and enter into what was going on for those who remained in ransacked Israel and Jerusalem.

What's really interesting about Chapter 4 is that's it's not written by the remnants of Israel/Jerusalem and from their point of view. Neither is it written by Daniel or his friends or the exiles in Babylon and their perspective. Chapter 4 is written from Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's perspective!

It's also worth saying that this part of Daniel (chapter 2:4b–7:28) is written in Aramaic. Akkadian *was* the official language and was written in cuneiform but by Daniel's time, Aramaic was what was commonly spoken in the Middle East.



In chapter 4 we have King Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. His first was described in Daniel chapter 2. We looked at that and dreams in more detail three weeks ago. With dreams (God dreams) we discovered that there is a revelation part, and interpretation part and an application part.

In Nebuchadnezzar's first dream he dreamed of a statue that was made up of four sections. Let's see if you remember...

A head of.... **gold**

Its chest and arms made of...**silver**

Its middle and thighs – **bronze**

and its legs were **Iron** with its feet a mix of **iron and clay**.

In the dream a rock smashed the statue and the rock turned out to be mountainous!

The interpretation was that the different parts of the statue represented different kingdoms/empire with different characteristics. And the rock/mountain represented the everlasting Kingdom of God and in the New Testament the Rock/The Cornerstone is claimed as King Jesus.



That King Nebuchadnezzar was the golden head – went to his head. As Vanda shared last week, the king made a golden statue of himself and ordered that all in the land bow down and worship it/him on pain of death. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused, were thrown into the fire where a 4th person, someone like the son of God, appeared and saved them!

Nebuchadnezzar is recorded saying...3:28 **Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who** [saved his servants who worship him alone].

Sounds good, doesn't it! But Nebuchadnezzar still totally misunderstands the character and nature of Yahweh - the creator God, the God of Moses, the Great I am God who was and is and will always be, the God who delivered his people from cruel Pharaoh and Egypt and made a way from death into life.

Nebuchadnezzar says this in 3:29 anyone speaking ... **against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way."**

Do you see the irony? *Come and worship the rescuing God. The God who saves from proud despots and if you don't damn you and your family and off with your head!*

Why does he misunderstand? Because he still thinks that Yahweh is just like the Babylonian gods or the elemental forces of nature that are all about power, the survival of the fittest and the strong dominating and using the weak for their own gain.

Nebuchadnezzar's heart is full of greed and the need to preen and boast and bask in his own glory and how far up the food chain he is.

That at the heart of a self-seeking emperor or ruler unchecked leads to an imperial, expansionist, coercive, abusive, self-seeking empire.

King Nebuchadnezzar can't imagine grace or mercy being extended to those setting themselves up against him. *No mercy...off with their heads*. Without a different vision, values or heart there is something animalistic and brutish about this. Surely us humans are different!

But something happens to challenge and change Nebuchadnezzar and this way of thinking and being. Nebuchadnezzar goes from *off with their heads* at the end of chapter 2 to *peace be with you* at the start of chapter 4.

In chapter 4 the king has another dream. Once again there is a revelation, interpretation and an application part. I'm going to read the introduction vv1-5 then give a short summary of the revelation and then we will rejoin the passage in verse 20. This is the word of God...

4 [a]King Nebuchadnezzar,

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly! [literally Peace be multiplied to you!]

² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

³ How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid.

Then Nebuchadnezzar gathers all the wise men of Babylon and shares the dream/vision of an enormous fruitful tree that feeds and shelters creatures from far and wide. Then he shares what the holy messenger in the dream says...*Cut down the tree, bind the stump with iron and bronze...let him live with animals and have the mind of an animal for 7 times/years.* Back to the passage. This is the word of God.

²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds – ²² Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

²³ ‘Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, “Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.”

²⁴ ‘This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ you will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice:

renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.'

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

³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, 'This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.'

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified him who lives for ever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'

³⁶ At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honour and splendour were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.



Here's some pictures that might be helpful.
There's Nebuchadnezzar dreaming about the tree.
There's the tree stump cut down and bound

There's William Blake's remarkable painting of Nebuchadnezzar gone wild.
Here are 4 short points...

1. **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)**
2. **We are so much more than animals.**
3. **There are moral laws and there is a law giver and that is a good thing.**
4. **Repentance – come from seeing the ‘woah!’ and ‘wow!’ of God and is the best of things.**

1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)

In verse 5 we read that the dream, the God dream, frightens Nebuchadnezzar in a good way. The Bible differentiates between a fear that is good and a fear that is not good. There is a kind of fear that grips, threatens, intimidates and bullies, that is destructive and divisive and to be resisted and stood against because there is an evil element or source to it.

There is a godly kind of fear which is like a holy reverence and awesome respect which is to be yielded to. There is a godly/good kind of reverence and fear that generates a ‘woah!’ Like driving over the Queensferry bridge and looking down. Much better to yield to the might and strength of the bridge and maintain lane discipline.

Like looking up to the night’s sky and seeing the stars. There is a kind of godly fear and respect that works as a reality check. A reality check that doesn’t diminish us but reminds us of our size and our place in the universe.

Despite what I sometimes think and feel, I am not the centre of the universe! You and my family and the world does not and should not revolve around me. Same goes for you too! In the story, God through the dream, gives **Nebuchadnezzar** a serious reality check.

So, ‘yes’ to the godly reverence/respect/ woah type fear and regard of the Lord and ‘no’ to fear that coerces and intimidates.

2. We are so much more than animals.

Part of the Gospel (the Good news of Jesus and the Bible) is that we/us humans are so much more than animals. We are made in the image of God and that means all of us no matter our race, colour, capacity, orientation, age, status, class, qualification, bank balance has inherited dignity value and worth and are precious and loved in the eyes of God and reflect something of his nature and being.

This means how we are treated and how we treat each other matters. This means it’s not just a case of the strong taking from the weak. This means it’s not just about the dominant passing on their DNA.

3. There are moral laws and there is a law giver and that is a good thing.

Theologian G K Chesterton famously once said, *“If you tell people that they are only animals, they will inevitably behave like them – removing the constraints of morality and reducing their behaviour to mere instinct or survival.”*

Please hear me – Chesterton is not saying, I am not saying and the Bible doesn't say that Christians are more moral than non-Christian or religious people are more moral than atheists. There are many atheists and people from other religions that are more generous and kinder and more moral than I am. Christianity is not at the heart a religion of morals and moralising. The heart of Christianity is Christ – a God who lovingly and sacrificially dies to save us.

What Chesterton and I and the Bible maintain is that God has woven laws and values into the fabric of the universe. There are laws because there is law giver and that is a really good thing. If there isn't something bigger and more authoritative than us humans, or me or you then everything is just a matter of preference and who can enforce their opinion.

Last week marked the 250th anniversary of the creation of the USA and declaration of independence. The declaration of independence is a fascinating document. It starts off like this...*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

There is a real tension here. Is it self-evident, that all humans are equal with rights and to be treated accordingly? Is it self-evident in Scotland or in the USA or around the world? Is that what we see? On paper? In practice?

Nebuchadnezzar has been treating people like animals. In 4:27 Daniel confronts him. **²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.'**

Babylon, its glory, beauty, architecture, agriculture, science, technology, gardens, is incredible. But it's also come at a human cost. People have been used and oppressed. Daniel calls it out as wickedness because God does. Nebuchadnezzar is called to repent, to turn from these wicked ways. He's not just called away from wickedness, he is called to kindness and called to come to God. Repentance is not just turning away from what is wrong, it is turning to what is right and good and true and the one who is the source of what is right and good and true.

4. Repentance – come from seeing the ‘woah!’ and ‘wow!’ of God and is the best of things.

This turning comes from seeing the ‘woah’ of God and the loving kindness of God. It’s the ‘woah!’ of and the ‘wow!’ of God that changes us and allows us and invites us to say...**Our Father/Abba/Dad in Heaven, hallowed by your name.**

In the story, God lets Nebuchadnezzar experience the consequences of his world view. In essence God says to Nebuchadnezzar...*OK. You want to be a brute. You want to cast off moral constraints. You don’t want to recognise that humans are made in the image of God (you included)...you want humans to be treated as animals...let’s see how that works when it is applied to you!*

Then after the warnings Nebuchadnezzar repents. Is that what happens? It is not.
²⁹ **Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,** ³⁰ **he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’**

³³ **Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.**

Do you think 7 years was a long or short time?

At the end of 7 years **Nebuchadnezzar** looked...

- a) To himself and his mighty power and glory to save him
- b) to Babylon and its might and wisdom and how advanced it was to save him
- c) At others and thought of them and treated them as animals
- d) Something else.

It’s D something else – For the first time he looks to heaven/God. Not the Marduk or the Babylonian gods or elemental forces where power is primary but to the God who humbles the proud and lifts up the humble, where love is central. Did this have a lasting effect? Did Nebuchadnezzar go from wicked oppression to kindness overnight? Was Babylon transformed overnight? I’m not sure. But for Nebuchadnezzar to tell this story against himself was and is hugely significant and it remains a lasting testimony. This story and testimony stands as a warning to all the Pharaohs, and Nebuchadnezzars of our day. It stands as reality check and a call to repent to all of us with Nebuchadnezzar tendencies in our heart.

And what does King Jesus do when we make ourselves the centre of universe?
What does he do when we expect/demand that he revolves around us?
The creator of the universe and the creator of all the 'wow' and 'woah' things in the world doesn't take our lives – he gives his.
The cross is Jesus' throne – where he looks down on the ones He made
It is on the cross that God's glory is revealed.
God can imagine grace or mercy being extended to those setting themselves up against him.
That is why he came.
He came and comes in love to save and pay our debt.
In his resurrection his Lordship is confirmed.
That is how he established and establishes his Kingdom.
That is how he wins our hearts and renews our mind.
He is the God who humbles the proud and lifts high the humble.
That is how we and the world is changed.

PRAY