

THE BOOK OF DANIEL
LESSON 11—NOTES
DANIEL 4:4-18
THE MOST HIGH IS RULER OVER MANKIND

INTRODUCTION

In Daniel, we have discovered two major events in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. By the end of each of these miraculous events, we see the king confess multiple truths about Daniel's God. In chapter two, when concluding Daniel's interpretation of the troubling dream that overwhelmed Nebuchadnezzar with anxiety, we see Nebuchadnezzar confess to Daniel saying, "***Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery***" (v.47). Then at the end of chapter three, after God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar responds, "***Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him***" (v.28). So, at this point Nebuchadnezzar has acknowledged the power of God, the sovereignty of God, the wisdom of God and the faithfulness of God. But despite all that he had experienced in these miraculous events, the heart of the King has remained willful and prideful, and he continues to pursue his own purposes and ultimate devastation. Now, God speaks for the third time in a most humiliating manner to this prominent world ruler.

This riveting fourth chapter of Daniel was told by King Nebuchadnezzar himself and preserved in this chapter. In it we have the amazing account of the means God used to bring this haughty and prideful king to the end of himself.

Davis points out important details asking us to note, "The three major 'report' sections (4–18, 19–27, 28–33) and how the reigning idea of the chapter occurs three times (toward the end of each section): ***the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he wishes*** (17, 25, 32; see also 26). The associated ideas of kingdom,

dominion, and King of heaven (3, 34, 37) reinforce this theme. The stress then in Daniel 2 is that God reveals, in chapter 3 that he rescues, and in chapter 4 that he rules. Daniel 4 hammers home the point that God rules the kingdom of men and human rulers serve only at his pleasure.”

FROM REST TO FEAR

VERSES 4-7 “**I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.**

The king begins verse 4 with “**I, Nebuchadnezzar.**” Giving his own name again (v. 1) provides an appropriate formality to his proclamation and also makes it clear that he is the one giving this account. He begins his story by recounting the second of his troubling dreams. The first being in chapter 2 where he becomes *anxious (troubled)* as opposed to this second dream, causing him to be **fearful (afraid), alarmed (terrified)**.

He notes that he was **at ease in his house and flourishing in his palace** while **lying on his bed** where he had **visions in his mind**. “*At ease*” (*at rest*) conveys the meaning of contentment, security and being free from apprehension or fear. Together the words signify that he was experiencing no serious problems at home and in his kingdom when the dream occurred. There was no serious threat to his authority, his opponents had been subdued and he was living in peace and prosperity. The word the king used for **flourishing** (*prospering*) literally means “growing green” such as the growth of green leaves on a tree that can be described as a luxuriant or flourishing tree. This description anticipates the tree figure in the dream that follows. Walvoord writes, “The context of Nebuchadnezzar’s security and prosperity, surrounded by the monuments of his wealth and power, made his dream all the more troubling. The expression **made me afraid** is actually much stronger in the original and indicates extreme terror or fright.”

Nebuchadnezzar contemplating the meaning of his dream once again called all the wise

men of Babylon to interpret the dream for him. But when being told the dream, the wise men had no interpretation to offer the king. It appears that they not only did **not make known the interpretation** but were unable to do so. Miller writes, “Babylon's wise men were commanded to interpret the dream, but as in previous cases they could not. Although the wise men—the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners—probably had an idea that the dream foretold something unpleasant for the king, they did not understand its full import.”

VERSES 8-9 But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, ‘O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

At last **Daniel came in before** Nebuchadnezzar. Although many commentators have suggested reasons for Daniel’s late arrival, none is recorded. But for whatever reason, it was ordered by God's providence that he should be kept to the last. Questions have arisen as to why Nebuchadnezzar used both names for Daniel (Hebrew and Babylonian in verses 8 & 19). This may be due to the proclamation going out among the Babylonian provinces. The use of both Hebrew and Babylonian names could identify Daniel to a broader range of people.

The king explained that the name Belteshazzar was given **according to the name of my god**. Miller writes, “Nebuchadnezzar's words **after the name of my god** have been understood to mean that the king never truly came to accept Yahweh as his god, even after this encounter. Yet the phrase could mean no more than that Daniel was named after the gods of Nebuchadnezzar's country, Babylon, or may be taken to describe the king's condition as a Marduk worshiper at the time of the dream.” However, Wood believes that Nebuchadnezzar added this phrase of explanation because he, “Probably had more in mind than merely to tell the significance of the name, which any Babylonian would have known. He probably was seeking to give at least some credit to the Babylonian god Bel for the interpretation given. (Note: Bel and Marduk are the same god.) He was saying that Daniel,

who had given the interpretation, was at least named after Bel, whom he identifies as his own god by the possessive pronoun “my.” That Nebuchadnezzar did still speak of Bel as his god shows that, along with whatever degree of allegiance he had now given to the God of heaven, he was continuing to hold also, though possibly for public show, to the Babylonian deities.”

King Nebuchadnezzar states 3 times in this chapter that the qualification for Daniel’s interpretation of the dream is that in him, was **a spirit of the holy gods**. It is debatable whether “**gods**” is singular or plural as it can be translated either way. Wood explains, “Some expositors argue that Nebuchadnezzar used this phrase here in respect to **gods** generally. Keil, for instance, states that Nebuchadnezzar could be expected to have been speaking out of the usual pagan concepts of the day, and Keil finds evidence also in the use of the plural **gods** (*lahin*) here. A similar mention by Pharaoh in connection with Joseph, years earlier, is taken as parallel in significance (Gen. 41:38). There are several reasons, however, for taking the phrase as a direct reference to Daniel’s God in particular. (1) The plural **gods** can be used in reference to a single deity in the Aramaic language as well as in Hebrew. (2) Nebuchadnezzar had already experienced, on two different occasions, the supremacy of Daniel’s God (in contrast to Pharaoh with Joseph). He could not have forgotten these occasions, especially since this was another dream situation like the first; hence, he had ample reason to refer to the God of heaven. (3) In verses nine and eighteen Nebuchadnezzar’s continued use of this same phrase in a context telling why Daniel would be able to reveal the interpretation is more meaningful if Daniel’s God is particularly in mind. (4) Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude on seeing Daniel was clearly one of gladness, relief, and expectancy, indicating that he was seeing him as the one who had met his need a prior time—the time when Daniel had revealed the first dream and had explicitly identified the God of heaven as the one to receive all the credit.”

Macarthur also accepts the translation for “**gods**” as being singular, commenting that, “The intended meaning here is correctly reflected in the translation, *“the Spirit of the Holy God.”* Some believe Nebuchadnezzar meant *“a spirit of the holy gods,”* but this is unlikely because no pagan worshipers claimed purity or holiness for their deities. In fact, they

believed just the opposite. Furthermore, because Nebuchadnezzar was rehearsing his conversion, he could genuinely identify the true Spirit of God.”

A noteworthy fact is that after approximately thirty years Daniel was still recognized by Nebuchadnezzar as the **chief of the magicians**. He must have must have fulfilled his duties well to still be in this position.

THE DREAM

VERSES 10-12 ‘Now *these were* the visions in my mind as *I lay* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, *there was* a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. ‘The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it *was visible* to the end of the whole earth. ‘Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it *was food* for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, And the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it.

The king, describing his dream as he **lay on his bed**, sees a tree **in the midst of the earth**. He recounts the tree as growing very **large** and becoming very **strong** and very high until its **height reached to the sky**, obviously exceeding the possibilities of any average tree. The tree appears to be centrally located in order to symbolize its position of supreme importance in relation to the rest of the world, as it **was visible to the end of the whole earth**. In ancient times, trees were commonly used to symbolize prominent rulers. Pharaoh is referred to as a tree in Ezekiel and Amos 2 refers to an Amorite ruler describing him by two types of trees.

Nebuchadnezzar describes a beautiful, growing, productive tree, where **its foliage was beautiful**, and its abundant fruit production was **food for all**. It was bountiful enough to provide protection for **the beasts of the field** and **birds of the sky** and **all living creatures fed themselves from it**, (symbolically, this included mankind as under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar).

VERSES 13-15a ‘I was looking in the visions in my mind as *I lay* on my bed, and behold, an **angelic watcher**, a holy one, descended from heaven. ‘He shouted out and spoke as follows: Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the

beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. “Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field.

Nebuchadnezzar was looking as an **angelic watcher, a holy one** was observed **descending from heaven**. The Aramaic translation for **looking**, is “An interjection that expresses great surprise and might be rendered more emphatically **“look!”** (Miller.) **Watcher** only occurs in this chapter of the Bible and translates “one who is awake,” and “watchful one.” The concept is that this heavenly one is awake and keeping watch over the activities of humans. Wood, in describing this heavenly being writes, “He was clearly one person only, because all verbs employed regarding him are singular, but he is described with two qualifiers **watcher** and **holy**. The first one (*ir*) is from the root verb *ur*, meaning “to watch” with vigilance implied. The second one (*qadish*) is the well-known adjective “holy,” here used with the *waw*, signifying “even.” The participant to which reference is made must be an angel, but it should be noted that only in this chapter is this way of referring to an angel used.”

Nebuchadnezzar heard the angel **shout out**, lending importance to what he had to say. He commanded that the tree be **chopped down** and its branches **cut off**, its **foliage stripped**, and **fruit scattered**. When this is done, the animals and birds are forced to flee its protection and are no longer able to be satisfied by its abundant produce. However, the tree is not to be totally destroyed, as **the stump** is left **with its roots in the ground**. The word translation for **stump** carries the implication of something that is alive, not dead. Miller comments, “Its stump and roots are left standing in the middle of the grassy field, suggesting the possibility that the tree may grow again. The stump is to be **bound with iron and bronze**, which means that a strong band or fence was to be placed around the stump of the tree in order to protect it from destruction.”

VERSES 15b-18 And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. “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.

Now the description changes from the tree to a man symbolized by the tree. This man was to live outdoors and share **in the grass of the earth** with the animals where he would be

exposed to the elements, being ***drenched with the dew of heaven. His mind*** (corresponding to heart; used here as the seat of reason) will ***be changed from that of a man*** to that of an animal. This man would actually believe himself to be an animal. Commentators differ on the meaning of this manifestation, but some believe it to be a psychological phenomenon known as Lycanthropy. MacArthur explains, "This is an unusual psychological delusion known as lycanthropy (Gk. *lukos* = "wolf", *anthrōpos* = "man"). A person deluded in this manner thinks he's an animal and lives accordingly. Biblical scholar Raymond Harrison recites a personal experience with a modern case similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar which he observed in a mental hospital in 1946. He writes: 'A great many doctors spend an entire busy, professional career without once encountering an instance of the kind of monomania described in the book of Daniel. The present writer, therefore, considers himself particularly fortunate to have actually observed a clinical case of lycanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946. The patient was in his early 20's who reportedly had been hospitalized for about five years. His symptoms were well developed on admission and diagnosis was immediate and conclusive. He was of average height and weight, with a good physique, in excellent bodily health. His mental symptoms included pronounced antisocial tendencies, and because of this, he spent the entire day, from dawn to dusk, outdoors, on the grounds of the institution... His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns, with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. On observation, he was seen to discriminate between grass and weeds, and on inquiry from the attendant, the writer was told the diet of this patient consisted exclusively of grass from hospital lawns. He never ate institutional food with other inmates, and his only drink was water... The writer was able to examine him cursorily, and the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the fingernails. Without institutional care, the patient would have manifested precisely the identical physical conditions as those mentioned in Daniel chapter 4:33.' So, this is not an unknown psychological phenomenon. However, in this case, it was induced by God." (Note: a different form of lycanthropy is known as boanthropy where the person thinks he is a cow, bull or ox.)

Nebuchadnezzar's illness would continue until **seven periods of time pass over him**. Most scholars have interpreted the seven periods as seven years. As Wood explains, "It is reasonable to use the word "times" on this basis: the full cycle of seasons, with all the changes in types of weather involved, would pass over the king seven times."

THE DECREE AND APPEAL

VERSE 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."

The sentence of judgment on the tree is **by the decree of the angelic watchers and command of the holy ones**. Wood comments that, "The words for *watchers* and *holy ones* are plurals of the singulars used in verse thirteen. This means that reference is to a group of angels, one of whom came down to give the announcement of these verses...The force of the verse is to say that the thoughts conveyed in the announcement were by the "decree" or "word" of this group. One may not conclude from this, however, that angels are themselves formulators of decisions; because, among other reasons, Daniel makes clear later (v.24) that this decree was by the Most High. The thought intended must be only that angels concur with, and then convey, such decrees as are here in view."

God's decision to judge Nebuchadnezzar was made in order **that all the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind**. He **bestows it on whom He wishes, and He sets over it the lowliest of men.**" This reference is to all **living** humans (and specifically to Nebuchadnezzar) that God had a message in this decree for all to learn. Wood writes, "The lesson consisted in learning that there is one higher than humans, who rules supremely in the world. He is the Most High God of heaven. He rules **over the kingdom of men** which means over the **realm of mankind**. He carries final authority and is judge in the affairs of men...One aspect of God's sovereignty in the world, particularly pertinent in reference to Nebuchadnezzar, is His superintendence over the election and appointments of national rulers. God permits only those to be placed in office whom, for some reason He desires (cf. Rom. 13:1). This does not mean that He approves of all they

do or of the kind of people they are...But He reserves control so that no person is allowed into office whom He rejects, in view of the circumstances then existing. From the words here given, Nebuchadnezzar should know that he held his particular office only because God had permitted it. In superintending royal appointments, God gives precedence to those who are **lowly** and humble...This is but a particularization of the general biblical truth that **“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble”** (James 4:6). The point for Nebuchadnezzar to notice was that, because he was not thus characterized, he was in line for the punishment symbolized in the dream.”

VERSE 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.*

Nebuchadnezzar finished recounting his dream by stating, ***this is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen.*** Expressing it in this manner was apparently to assure Daniel of the authenticity of the dream and the accuracy in which he relayed it.

Nebuchadnezzar then appealed to Daniel to interpret the dream. The Babylonian wise men were unable to ***make known the interpretation,*** but the king again expresses his confidence in Daniel's ability and affirms for the third time what he knows to be true, that ***a spirit of the holy gods is in you.***

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