

NEBUCHADNEZZAR PRAISES GOD AND HAS A SECOND DREAM

DANIEL 4:1-7

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 4:1-7 in your favorite Bible. As you read, keep in mind that God desires for you not only to hear His Word but also to do it (James 1:22).

Yesterday we watched as God miraculously rescued Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. Today we will listen in as Nebuchadnezzar praises God for His awesomeness, and we will also touch on Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 4:1

To all peoples (4:1): The events we read about in Daniel 4 took place some years after the episode of the three youths in the fiery furnace. Notice that Daniel 4 begins (verses 1-3) and ends (verses 34-37) with Nebuchadnezzar offering praise to God. In between, Nebuchadnezzar narrates how God allowed him to suffer great humiliation to further teach him about God's greatness. This is the structure of the chapter:

1. I praise God for His greatness because

2. God put me through some humbling circumstances that thoroughly taught me about His greatness, and so, again,
3. I praise God for His greatness.

Nebuchadnezzar's praise of God is especially noteworthy in view of his earlier highly exalted view of his own greatness (see Daniel 3:1-7). Now Nebuchadnezzar understood that God is truly the Great One.

Nebuchadnezzar addressed his proclamation of God's greatness "to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth." This form of opening was common in royal inscriptions (on a stela) as well as letters in ancient Persia and Babylon. It was also common in such inscriptions and letters to include a wish for well-being—a salutation. In the present case, Nebuchadnezzar says, "Peace be multiplied to you!" (compare with 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2).

Of course, not all "peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth" even knew who Nebuchadnezzar was at the time. So in its initial context, the text is probably better understood as referring to all peoples, nations, and languages that were under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. The proclamation was regional, not global.

There is another context, however, in which Nebuchadnezzar's words were, in fact, to "all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth." After all, Nebuchadnezzar's words are recorded in the Bible, and the Bible has global distribution.

Daniel 4:2-3

Show the signs and wonders (4:2): Nebuchadnezzar describes what he has witnessed of God as "signs and wonders." The word "sign" often carries the idea of a miracle with a message, whereas "wonder" refers to a miracle that evokes amazement (see Major Themes). As we will see, God's humbling of Nebuchadnezzar would be a miracle with a message (the message being that God is awesomely powerful and great), and the whole episode—including Nebuchadnezzar's restoration—would be amazing (see Deuteronomy 6:22; 7:19; 13:1-2; 26:8; Nehemiah 9:10; Isaiah 8:18).

Most High God (4:2): Notice again that Nebuchadnezzar refers to Yahweh

as the Most High God. The one true God has no real competition, for all other alleged deities are false deities—that is, they are not deities at all.

How great are his signs (4:3): In Daniel 3, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a revelation of His awesome power by delivering the three Hebrew youths from the power of the burning flames in the fiery furnace. But God was not finished giving revelation to Nebuchadnezzar. He would give further revelation to the king by allowing him to go through some humbling circumstances for a period of time, after which he would recover. The new revelation Nebuchadnezzar learned through his experience was that God's signs are great, His wonders are mighty, His kingdom is eternal, and He reigns from generation to generation.

When Nebuchadnezzar said "great are his signs," it was with the recognition that signs always signal something. ("Sign" and "signal" come from the same root.) In this case, God performed miracles (signs) that signaled His identity as the only true God.

How mighty his wonders (4:3): God's miracles are "wonders" because they are amazing, astonishing, and unparalleled. Similar language was used to refer to God's great deliverance of the Jews from the Egyptian pharaoh. Following this deliverance, Moses spoke to the people:

Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him (Deuteronomy 4:34-35).

As was the case in God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, God performed these signs and wonders in Babylon to demonstrate that "there is no other besides him."

An everlasting kingdom (4:3): Nebuchadnezzar realized that human kings can rise and fall. His experience of going mad and dwelling with animals, which he would recount in detail later in Daniel 4, is an example of a human king falling—though God would later restore him. So Nebuchadnezzar speaks

from firsthand experience when he affirms that in contrast to temporal human kingdoms, God's kingdom is everlasting (see Daniel 2:44).

His dominion endures (4:3): Again, Nebuchadnezzar speaks from firsthand experience in affirming that in contrast to human kings, whose dominion lasts only as long as they are alive (and in their right minds, in Nebuchadnezzar's case), God—who Himself is eternal—has everlasting dominion as King of kings. Moreover, no human ruler possesses any authority except by God's permission. Human kings' authority is *derived* from God Himself. As Romans 13:1-2 puts it, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

Daniel 4:4-5

At ease in my house (4:4): Nebuchadnezzar now narrates the circumstances that led to his high praise of Yahweh. It all began with a dream. At the time of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was prospering. All seemed to be going well. His earlier years had involved a lot of military conquest, but his vast domains now rested in security. Wars were over, and he was enjoying the spoils of his conquests. As he was in this peaceful state, the dream seemed to come out of nowhere.

A dream that made me afraid (4:5): Nebuchadnezzar's sense of ease and prosperity was interrupted by a dream that frightened him. He had visions in his head that alarmed him. God was not about to allow him to remain at peace while his kingdom was filled with injustice and oppression (Daniel 4:27) and he remained full of pride (4:30). The serenity of the king's misguided life came to an abrupt halt.

Daniel 4:6-7

The wise men...brought before me (4:6): It was probably with a sense of dread that Nebuchadnezzar decreed that the wise men of Babylon be brought before him to interpret the dream. They failed miserably at their previous attempt. Perhaps the king thought that given another chance, they might be able to redeem themselves. Besides, because the king was afraid, he wanted any input he could get on the dream and its meaning.

They could not make known (4:7): This time Nebuchadnezzar revealed the dream to the wise men. Still, the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers were unable to interpret it (see Daniel 2:27). Daniel to the rescue (in the next lesson).

MAJOR THEMES

1. *God's signs and wonders.* In the Bible, the word "sign" often carries the idea of a miracle with a message. A sign is a miracle that attests to something (see Deuteronomy 6:22; 7:19; 13:1-2; 26:8; Nehemiah 9:10; Isaiah 8:18). We will see that King Nebuchadnezzar was greatly humbled for a period of time and then fully restored. He saw this as a sign that attested to the awesome power of God. This is the unspoken assumption: Where miracles are, deity is present. The miracle is also a wonder in the sense that it evokes astonishment or amazement in the beholder. In the New Testament, Jesus' miracles were signs and wonders that attested to His deity (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:2; 12:18).
2. *God's eternal kingdom.* Nebuchadnezzar affirmed that God's kingdom "is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:3). This is in contrast to human kingdoms, which rise and fall according to God's sovereign will (see Daniel 2; 7; Revelation 17:12-13). The central emphasis in the New Testament is on the Ruler of the eternal kingdom. The New Testament says of Jesus, "Of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). Indeed, "He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). Because the kingdom is eternal, nothing can injure or destroy it. We are therefore urged, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28).

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

God as the Most High—Genesis 14:22; Deuteronomy 32:8; 2 Samuel 22:14; Psalms 7:17; 9:2; 47:2; 57:2; 73:11; 83:18; 91:9; Acts 7:48

Blessing of peace—Genesis 43:23; Judges 6:23; 19:20; 1 Samuel 25:6; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Ezra 5:7; Luke 10:5; 24:36; John 20:21; Romans 1:7

LIFE LESSONS

1. *God sovereignly reigns from heaven.* One lesson we encounter repeatedly in the book of Daniel is that God sovereignly reigns from heaven. In fact, this theological thread runs through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God Himself affirmed, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" (Isaiah 46:10). The psalmist tells us that "his kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). Our God is "a great king over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2). First Chronicles 29:12-13 affirms of God, "You rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name." We, too, should be thankful to God and praise Him for His sovereign oversight of our lives.
2. *Ruling and overruling.* God's desire is that human beings respond to His sovereign rule from heaven. When human beings choose not to respond to His rule, He often *overrules* them. By the time we get to Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar has seen plenty of evidence that Yahweh is the one true God, including the deliverance of the three Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). But Nebuchadnezzar remained a polytheist, acknowledging Yahweh as a powerful god in a pantheon of deities. Nebuchadnezzar should have responded to God's obvious rule from heaven. As we will see in the next two lessons, God will overrule Nebuchadnezzar's reign and severely humble him so that he recognizes God's true greatness. Sometimes, God even has to overrule His own people. After all, God's people sometimes fail to respond to His rule, they go astray, and they fail to repent. In such cases, God overrules by bringing discipline—sometimes severe discipline—so His people will be motivated to return to the right path (Job 5:17; 33:19; Psalms 94:12; 118:18; 119:75; Proverbs 3:11-12). The best policy is to consistently submit to God's rule so He doesn't have to overrule us in our stubbornness.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Nebuchadnezzar was about to learn his lesson the hard way. Can you think of a time when God had to teach you a lesson the hard way?
2. Do you think God still does “signs and wonders” today? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to you personally that God is the Most High God?