

DANIEL INTERPRETS THE SECOND DREAM

DANIEL 4:19-27

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 4:19-27 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that God's Word is the true source of hope (Psalm 119:81).

In the previous lesson, Nebuchadnezzar revealed his second dream to Daniel. In today's lesson, Daniel interprets this second dream. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 4:19

Daniel...was dismayed (4:19): Daniel did not get upset while interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's first dream (2:27-45). After all, in that dream, Nebuchadnezzar was portrayed as a head of gold. But this second dream was far different. It indicated that Nebuchadnezzar was to be greatly humiliated for an extended time as a form of divine discipline. Daniel became dismayed, perhaps because he had grown somewhat fond of the king—a surprising development because Nebuchadnezzar was the one who brought Daniel into captivity. Or perhaps Daniel was dismayed because bringing bad news to the king could result in his fall from the king's favor. At any rate, breaking this bad news to the king was difficult for Daniel.

Let not the dream...alarm you (4:19): The king could tell from Daniel's countenance that the news was not good. He nevertheless instructed Daniel

not to be alarmed but to go ahead and share the meaning of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar's words might be paraphrased this way: "Speak out, and let the event be what it will."

May the dream be for those who hate you (4:19): Daniel prepared the king by confirming that the meaning of the dream was not good.

Daniel 4:20-22

The tree you saw...it is you, O king (4:20-22): Daniel got straight to the point. After repeating the description of the great tree, Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that the tree represented him. Daniel began tactfully, indicating that just as the tree had become great and strong, so Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom had also become great and strong. "Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth" (verse 22).

Some Bible expositors have suggested that ancient Near Eastern kings were sometimes identified with the tree of life because they protected and sustained their people. If the king acted wickedly, however, the tree of life could become a tree of death, for protection and sustenance would vanish.

Daniel 4:23-25

It is a decree of the Most High (4:24): The judgment that was to fall on Nebuchadnezzar was a decree from the Most High God, who had rescued the three Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace. This decree was communicated through watcher angels.

You shall be driven from among men (4:25): Nebuchadnezzar was now to be removed from his position of authority in his own kingdom. He would no longer live in the palace, but would dwell among the wild animals and even act like one. As we saw in the previous chapter, some scholars have suggested that Nebuchadnezzar suffered from boanthropy, which causes a person to think he or she is a bovine and act accordingly.

Seven periods of time shall pass over you (4:25): This judgment—a decree from the Most High God—was to last for seven years, a significant portion of Nebuchadnezzar's life. For seven years, Nebuchadnezzar would live in a demented state like a wild animal. (Note that the word "times" is used again in Daniel 7:25, where it also refers to years.)

Till you know (4:25): The purpose of the judgment is now revealed. For years Nebuchadnezzar had been full of pride, acting like a god before the subjects of his kingdom. He apparently thought of himself as divine. Now Nebuchadnezzar must be shown the truth. The cutting down of the tree represents the breaking down of Nebuchadnezzar's pride. Nebuchadnezzar was to experience severe humiliation for an extended time in order to teach him "that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." Indeed, it is God, not Nebuchadnezzar, who is the Lord of all the nations. No matter how powerful human beings may become, they are puny when measured against the infinite power and greatness of the Most High God.

Psalms 107:40 speaks of God's judgment on self-exalted rulers: "He pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes." The psalmist also tells us, "It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another" (Psalm 75:7). God affirms, "It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me" (Jeremiah 27:5).

Daniel 4:26-27

Leave the stump of the roots of the tree (4:26): Despite the horror of such news, there was still hope for Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that the stump was left in the ground indicates that after his time of chastisement, Nebuchadnezzar would one day be restored to the throne. But that restoration to the throne would not take place until Nebuchadnezzar humbly acknowledged that God alone is the true Sovereign over humanity.

From the time that you know that Heaven rules (4:26): Daniel indicated that before Nebuchadnezzar came out of chastisement, he must come to understand that "Heaven rules." This phrase is a Jewish way of saying, "God rules," just as "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are equated in the New Testament (see Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20).

Break off your sins by practicing righteousness (4:27): With the hope of perhaps warding off such an extended punishment, Daniel urged the king to break off sin and pursue righteousness. God typically withholds promised judgment when He sees repentance. The repentance of the Ninevites in the book of Jonah is a powerful example of this truth. When Daniel said, "Break

off your sins by practicing righteousness," he was probably speaking of Nebuchadnezzar's prideful and self-exalted behavior. A key means of practicing righteousness is to live humbly before God. If Nebuchadnezzar did this one thing, it would affect everything else he did during his reign. Had Nebuchadnezzar been able to do this, he may have averted seven years of chastisement, and his kingdom would have been much better off. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

Mercy to the oppressed (4:27): This is another aspect of practicing righteousness. Nebuchadnezzar's reign had been spent building a grand city that would be a monument to his greatness, and in the process, the poor were oppressed and uncared for. This must stop, Daniel said. God's Word speaks a great deal about the proper attitude toward the poor. Referring to the poor, God commanded His people, "You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land'" (Deuteronomy 15:10-11). Proverbs 29:14 exhorts, "If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever." Likewise, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:9).

A lengthening of your prosperity (4:27): By following Daniel's good advice, Nebuchadnezzar could have continued his prosperity. But being a prideful and thick-headed ruler, he refused and paid the consequences for it. In a test of wills, God will always win.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *Trees are representative of evil people.* It is interesting to observe that evil people are sometimes metaphorically represented as trees. The psalmist affirmed, "I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree" (Psalm 37:35). God raises some kings and brings down others: "All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it" (Ezekiel 17:24). In the New Testament, Jesus urged, "Even now the

axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10; see also Luke 3:9).

2. *Seeking God to relent.* Daniel urged Nebuchadnezzar to repent of evil and turn to righteousness “that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Daniel 4:27). Perhaps Daniel thought God might relent if Nebuchadnezzar repented. There is scriptural precedent for such an idea. The Ninevites repented at Jonah’s preaching. “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” (Jonah 3:10). This is in keeping with God’s promise in Jeremiah 18:7-8: “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it” (compare with Acts 8:22).

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

God the sovereign King—Exodus 15:18; 1 Chronicles 16:31; 2 Chronicles 20:6; Psalms 22:28; 47:7; 93:1; 95:3; Isaiah 6:5; 44:6, 10; Romans 14:11; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 19:6

Examples of wise counsel—Genesis 41:35; Exodus 10:7; Numbers 13:30; Job 29:21; Proverbs 1:5; Ecclesiastes 9:17; Daniel 2:14; 4:27; Acts 5:35; Revelation 3:18

LIFE LESSONS

1. *God brings down the proud.* God sovereignly decrees to bring low the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:25). Corrie ten Boom offered a good word about pride. She said she was once asked if it was difficult for her to remain humble amid all the attention she was getting. She simply replied, “When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him?” Her point

was, "If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in His glory, I give Him all the praise and all the honor." ¹ As we've affirmed previously in this book, Scripture says God not only exalts the humble (Luke 1:52; James 4:10) but also humbles the proud (Isaiah 13:11; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

2. *Stop sinning and do what is right.* Daniel urged the king, "Break off your sins by practicing righteousness" (Daniel 4:27). Daniel's comment was motivated by two spiritual realities: First, sin leads to destruction and death (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 11:29-32; 1 John 5:16). Second, righteousness leads to blessing and long life (Deuteronomy 4:40; 2 Kings 20:1-6; Proverbs 10:27; Ephesians 6:2-3). Daniel knew it was in the king's best interest to turn from sin and pursue righteousness. The same thing is true of you and me. God fervently desires to bless us. But before that can happen, we must become "blessable" by turning from evil and pursuing righteousness (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:40; Joshua 1:8; 1 Kings 2:3; Matthew 5:2-12).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you think you are presently a blessable person? If not, what changes do you need to make in your life?
2. Are you content to be a donkey on which Jesus rides in glory?
3. What impressed you most about today's Scripture reading?