

Daniel: A Sovereign God and a Mad King

Daniel 4

MPS God is sovereign and worthy of all praise and honor and is able to humble those who walk in pride before Him.

OBJ Every person should trust God and repent to honor Jesus by faith in obedience because of four lessons.

READ Daniel 4:1-37

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! ²It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. ³How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me. ⁶So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹“O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. ¹⁰The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹²Its leaves were 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 heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³“I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from a man’s, and let a beast’s mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. ¹⁷The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.’ ¹⁸This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

¹⁹Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies! ²⁰The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, ²¹whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— ²²it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. ²³And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,’ ²⁴this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. ²⁶And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. ²⁷Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”



²⁸All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³²and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." ³³Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

³⁴At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

³⁶At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Daniel 4 opens with King Nebuchadnezzar extolling the Most High God to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell on earth. This chapter opens with a stark contrast from the previous chapter, where the King summoned this same group to gather and worship his golden image. But before we celebrate the King's conversion to worship the Most High God, we should be careful to consider the whole chapter.

Chapter Four records King Nebuchadnezzar's last words, as he is the one who narrates all but a small portion of this story and this will be the last chapter that involves him. What we will learn will provide little answers to the eternal state of King Nebuchadnezzar, but great spiritual insight for our own life and relationship with God. While we will find great comfort today, we will also find what I call a "divide", where obedience by faith is absent because it is disconnected from knowledge and stated belief. Where one claims to believe, and even extols, certain truths about God, but does nothing to live according to or in light of those truths in their life. Where one claims to believe these truths about God and worship Him as God, but never sees any change of their life into His likeness. What we mean when we say we "worship", and how we worship, must be true to the One who is God, or we may find that we have not actually worshiped, but offered far less than He is worthy of. Ask yourself, "Do my words in what I claim to believe about God match my heart in what I trust to obey from God?"

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[.4-18] King Nebuchadnezzar records that he was at ease in his home and prospering in his palace. He felt both satisfied and secure in life because his kingdom was doing so well in his rule. In this midst of his peace and prosperity, he was suddenly disturbed and alarmed by a dream. He called in all his wise men and told them the dream, but none could interpret. (.7) Then, he called in Daniel, the one he knew could help him because he had "the spirit of the holy gods". He recounts the dream and vision to Daniel of the great tree and all it entailed. Then, he tells how a "watcher" from heaven came down and made the proclamation to chop down the tree but to leave its stump in the earth, and what would happen to this one who was represented by the stump. He concludes by sharing the purpose of this one's sentence (.17): "The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men." Then he asks Daniel to interpret because he knows he can.

[.19-27] Daniel was dismayed. It doesn't take much imagination to see how flush was Daniel's face. His thoughts alarmed him. The king comforts him to not be alarmed to tell the king. Daniel states that he hopes the meaning is intended for the King's enemies. He then begins to interpret the dream by telling King Nebuchadnezzar that he is the tree. The greatness of



your kingdom has extended to reach the heavens, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. But the watcher who came from heaven has a decree from the Most High. You will be driven from among men, dwell like a beast of the field, eat grass like an ox, and be wet with dew for seven periods of time, so that you know the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives to whom He will. Then Daniel offers one final word. He tells the king that if he accepts his counsel to stop his sins and begin to practice righteousness, and show mercy to the oppressed. And that if he does this, perhaps there will be a lengthening of his prosperity.

[.28-33] Twelve months later, the King is walking on the roof of his palace surveying Babylon, and he answers Daniel interpretation by proclamation of his own mighty glory. *“While the words were still in his mouth”, the text states, a voice fell from heaven that the kingdom had departed from him. And all that was stated became true of him until he knew that the Most High rules. Verse 33 records, “Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.”* And so Nebuchadnezzar lives this way for seven years.

[.34-37] When the time had passed, Nebuchadnezzar lifted his eyes, his reason returned to him, and he blessed the Most High, by declaring, *“for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”* Also at this time his whole kingdom returned to him, and he was reestablished in his kingdom with even more greatness than before. And with this King Nebuchadnezzar praised and honored the King of heaven, recognizing, *“for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”*

TRANS We’ve come a long way from the King extoling God in praise and “at ease in his house and prospering in his palace” to a year of warning, seven years of living as a beast, and now back to his kingdom. If we can summarize this chapter in any way, it is best to say that just because you are at ease in your own world with everything going great does not mean you are at ease with God.

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Q? Do you find it as mystifying as I do to know how terribly difficult it is to see reality clearly when we stand on the “mountaintop” of peace and prosperity, or success in accomplishment and achievement in this world? Does it cause any measure of fear or concern to know that just because you feel at ease in life does not mean that you are okay with God?

As a strategy, gaining the highpoint to survey the landscape is always the advantage in battle. I wish I could genuinely say that every time I’ve been on one of life’s mountaintops I surveyed all of life with great accuracy. But the truth is, it’s far too easy to look out and see all that is according to how I am over how it really is. Who wins three Super Bowls as the star quarterback and thinks, “There’s got to be something more than this.” Tom Brady, that’s who.¹ I remember reading a book with quotes at the beginning of each chapter, and one chapter started with a quote from Anias Nin that stated, “We see the world not as it is, but as we are.”

What Nebuchadnezzar did is not just familiar to us, but indicative of each one of us. We hear the gospel, that a loving God created us in His image for His glory. And we’ve been told that our sin has separated us from God, and an eternity of separation from Him in torment and suffering of unimaginable degree, awaits us because we worship the creation above the Creator. But in the comfort of a calm moment as we survey our own life, we are at great risk to believe something about our whole life because of that moment above what God’s Word says about us and our true nature. At times, each of us has considered our good deeds and questioned, albeit secretly, why God did not extol us. And so often, in the quiet nights of disturbing dreams when our heart threatens or haunts us, we salve ourselves by remembering all we’ve surveyed.

¹Tom Brady Interview with 60 Minutes, January 30, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TA4_fVkv3c Last Accessed Friday, March 8, 2024.



TRANS Listen to King Nebuchadnezzar's words today, friend, not only to hear but to understand what he is saying! He teaches powerful lessons that each one of us need to hear and heed today.

OBJ [Four Lessons that teach us why every person should trust God and repent to honor Jesus by faith in obedience.](#)

Lesson #1: Our greatest comfort is our highest confidence: God is sovereign over all.

What God was doing with Nebuchadnezzar was not so much for him, but FOR God's people. Daniel was writing to a people conquered by a kingdom God raised up to discipline them for their rebellion against Him, scattered across the whole world, and now exiled with life completely altered. It could have been really easy to think, "Either God has forgotten us, or He is not able to deliver us." But in their feeling of God's absence, from the mouth of their conquering King, comes praise that extols Daniel's God as the Most High. God worked His mighty power over Nebuchadnezzar to tell His people, "I am the sovereign One, who is worthy of all worship, of honor, praise, and glory." God sets up ungodly, wicked rulers, and tears them down, to show that He is sovereign over all. He is worthy that all people, languages, and nations worship Him. And He is worthy of the worship of one's whole life. [The Most High God, the Lord Almighty who rules sovereign over all creation, and alone is worthy of all honor, praise, and glory from all people, languages, and nations, is the comfort and confidence of His people.](#)

APPL Friend, your peace and prosperity is not found in a better king, or president, of human government. Earthly Kingdoms rise and fall because God sets them up and tears them down. Your comfort and confidence is not found in your life circumstance but in the One who is Christ over your life, the One in whom God's promise is fulfilled for you, Jesus the Lord.

Q? [When it is so easy to forget, how do we remember God's love and sovereign care for us?](#)

ILLUS Two simple songs sung by the youngest child declare the grandest truths and life's greatest lessons. "Jesus Loves Me this I know, for the Bible tells me so, Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." And, "He's Got the Whole World in His hands,...the wind and the rain, the little-bitty baby, you and me brother, you and me sister, he's got the whole world in His hands, He's got the whole world in His hands, He's got the whole wide world in His hands."

Daniel 4 bookends with praise for God, our comfort and confidence! Our peace and prosperity as followers of the Most High God rests solely in this: God is sovereign over all. His dominion and kingdom are everlasting. He is worthy of all praise and honor and glory from all people. [Are you giving God what is His? When you rest in God and His sovereignty, He is your great comfort and high confidence!](#)

TRANS Far too often we confess with our lips that God is sovereign, all the while in 'secret rebellion' within our own heart. It's not the evil world empires that primarily steal of God's glory, but the evil of every individual heart who walks in pride.

Lesson #2: Our biggest problem creates our divide: pride.

Nebuchadnezzar tells what caused his divide with God. He also tells of God's ability to humble those who walk in pride. Pride that divides us from God is not new to our day but has been true of every generation. We can best understand the "pride divide" by considering the whole chapter in light of the last phrase, "those who walk in pride."

Daniel 4 begins with the King extolling God. Shallow words from a man who thought he was god. It's not that he didn't mean the words he said, it's just that the words he said didn't mean much to him. He honored God with his lips, but his heart remained far from God. The Bible calls this "lip service" in Isaiah 29:13 when one "draws near with their mouth and honors with their lips, while their hearts are far from" God. This divide by pride is not unfamiliar to us today. It is possible for you to worship the true and living God and remain far from Him.

Pride justifies a breach of life, where the way one thinks and believes about God and life with God is separated from how they live, or not, by faith in obedience to God's Word. The "pride divide" is an utter deception of self-centeredness. There are indicators that signify that your worship is not true and nothing more than lip service. These indicators begin with speaking or singing to or about God in a way that you do not hold as true in your heart, basing what you think about God and your worship of Him on how you feel about it above what His Word says and what you have done to trust and obey



Him, or, as is likely most common, just doing it without thinking anything of Him. Pride divides because it deceives, to the core, allowing us to extol one thing with our mouth, all the while holding a completely contrary position in our heart. Pride that divides always destroys. Pride is the ultimate heart disease, making it possible to be at ease in your own world, with genuine intentions for God, and not be at peace with God. Be careful to listen and ask yourself, **“Is my heart and mind aligned; do my words about God agree with His Word, and align with how I think about my life and live for God?”** You can know pride is increasing when heart overflows with little praise and gratitude to God, and when your thoughts give little and lesser attention to God. C.S. Lewis once said, “Pride is the mother of all sin.” **Our biggest problem creates our divide with God, pride.**

TRANS **Is it of any concern to you that you can be at ease in life and still be far from God?** The biggest problem in this passage is not the King’s pride, but whether or not we recognize our own.

Lesson #3: Our one hope rests in God’s invitation: repent.

Daniel’s counsel for Nebuchadnezzar was to repent. *“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed”*. God is not worthy to be worshiped as all other gods. And God is not worthy to be worshiped as one determines in their own heart or mind to worship Him. **God is Most High, and there is none other like Him. He is worthy of all honor and praise because His glory is like no other.**

You may be at ease with, but you will never be okay with God until He is the One whom you worship above all with your all, until you put your faith in Him and trust His Word. And just as the watcher warned the King, then sent Daniel to interpret, ie. testify, to Him, so God warns people today too by conviction from Holy Spirit. Maybe your peace or prosperity has been disturbed lately, like the Kings was by his dream. When we are not right with God, our heart and mind are the first to be disturbed because God’s Holy Spirit convicts us. Repentance is the way we respond to Holy Spirit’s conviction.

Repent simply means “to have a change of mind”, which includes not only our mind but our heart too. When we repent, we turn from honoring and trusting self, or anything else, as first, and put our trust in God and His Word. Obedience by faith to His Word is the first way one honors God with all of life. In Acts 2(.37-38), on the Day of Pentecost when Peter finished preaching the gospel, it states, *“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said, . . . ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”* Repentance often begins by a single recognition or even in a single circumstance, but extends to the whole of our being and our nature of sin when we put off self to receive the finished work of Jesus Christ for us in our place. And when we receive God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ, He comes to live within us by His Holy Spirit who empowers us to walk with Him, and no longer walking in our pride. **Your one hope rests in God’s invitation to repent, and put your trust in Jesus Christ.**

Lesson #4: Your only way forward is to lift your eyes to Him in praise.

What I mean by “forward” is captured in Daniel’s word of “a lengthening prosperity”. Until you confess that God is the One who establishes your security, that in Him all your satisfaction is found, and that only He is the One in whom all your prosperity has been given, then your praise of Him is less than He is worthy of; you walk in pride. But when you repent to put your trust in Jesus, and walk by faith, you live every day with eyes set on Him. And God promises that the life He gives is eternal and abundant.(John 10:10) The sentence of the watcher from heaven was so that the living may know that the Most High rules. But the sentence was also that until Nebuchadnezzar knows(.32). This lesson holds a universal application for God’s truth that is as equally personal in its necessity to recognize. God sends forth his message for the whole world to hear. But each and every one of us must decide whether we will hear and trust, or walk in our own pride. **Have your eyes been lifted to the One who give life abundant? Your only way forward, a long prosperity, is to lift your eyes and look to Jesus, and walk by faith in Him with your whole life.**

CLOSE The glory is God’s, who is the Most High, sovereign over all. The problem is pride. The solution is repentance. The option is bleak. The result eternally glorious.

Once he was restored to the kingdom, do you think Nebuchadnezzar worshiped God as He is truly worthy? Well, the fact is,



we don't know and cannot say with any finality. From historical record there is no reason to believe that he did. But that's no longer the important point for us today. **Our priority is this: will you repent, and trust to honor and praise God as He alone is worthy, as first in all of life with your whole life?**

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