

Series: The Book of Daniel

Title: Experiencing God's Power

Text: Chapter 4

Introduction

Chapter 4 is about The Fall and Rise of Nebuchadnezzar and his remarkable testimony. Some give it the title "The Tragedy of a Tree." I've titled it "Experiencing God's Power." This event occurred approximately ten years after Nebuchadnezzar constructed the golden image in the plains of Dura and just before the end of his life.

God continued to deal with the king even though he still had a tremendous problem with pride. After experiencing God's sovereign power, Nebuchadnezzar tells the story of his own humiliation revealing that God can change the proud heart of even a stubborn king. Nebuchadnezzar humbly acknowledges that his temporary insanity and ultimate restoration are the work of Almighty God.

He even publishes his testimony to all the people that "dwell on earth." The whole realm of the Babylonian Empire would include Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Assyria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran at that time.

Nebuchadnezzar's conversion didn't occur instantaneously. He hears about the one true God in Chapter 1. Eighteen years later, in chapter three, he encounters the witness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Little by little, he becomes aware of Israel's great God.

Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar must decide who is the most powerful God. The task would not be easy since he ruled the whole known civilized world of his day. He considered himself the supreme ruler of the world, which made it difficult for him to accept that he was not above God's laws. He believed in supernatural powers, but only to the extent that they were at his disposal to do with as he willed. The thought of serving a higher power never crossed the king's mind.

In Chapter 4, verse 1, Nebuchadnezzar writes this decree, "Nebuchadnezzar, the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great *are* His signs, And how mighty His wonders! His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion *is* from generation to generation." (Daniel 4:1-3 NKJV)

Chapter 4 is the testimony of this Gentile king and about how God changed his heart. The best witness you have is what God has done for you. Satan is most interested in keeping us as silent as possible about the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for us.

Nebuchadnezzar was a great and powerful king, but he would come face to face with God's kingdom and finally realize that God's kingdom was a far greater and everlasting kingdom.

In verse 4, God challenges Nebuchadnezzar's pride, and once again, the king summons Daniel to explain the king's dream. "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise *men* of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation. But at last Daniel came before me (his name *is* Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him *is* the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, *saying*: "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God *is* in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation." (Daniel 4:4-9 NKJV)

Here we see Nebuchadnezzar resting on the false peace of self-attainment. But God would soon shake him to the very core of his false security. This dream in chapter 4 is not the same dream as in Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar told his counselors about the dream this time, but they could not tell him what it meant. The dream was pretty easy to interpret, but the wise men probably lacked in courage more than insight. Nebuchadnezzar says they did not make it known, not that they couldn't make it known.

At last, Daniel comes before the king. I wonder what took him so long to call for Daniel? The king says Daniel's name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god. Nebuchadnezzar now considered the Babylonian deity *Bel* his god. It seems Daniel and the three Hebrew young men had impressed the king, but not enough to convert him. Being impressed with God is not the same as being converted.

In verse 10, Nebuchadnezzar reveals the content of his dream. He says, "These *were* the visions of my head *while* on my bed: I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves *were* lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it *was* food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it. "I saw in the visions of my head *while* on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, And the birds from its branches.'" (Daniel 4:10-14 NKJV)

The tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was noted for its size, strength, prominence, beauty, fruit, and shelter. The watcher (probably an angel) explains what will happen to the tree. Daniel says the tree will be chopped down and lose its size, strength, prominence, beauty, fruit, and shelter.

Verse 15, "Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, *Bound* with a band of iron and bronze, In the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, And *let* him graze with the beasts On the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from *that of* a man, Let him be given the heart of a beast, And let seven times pass over him. 'This decision *is* by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.' (Daniel 4:15-17 NKJV)

The tree represents Nebuchadnezzar, who will be changed and given the heart of a beast and will no longer be free and great so that the living may know that God rules in the kingdom of men. The dream isn't hard to interpret - it deals with the humbling of a great king. No wonder none of Nebuchadnezzar's counselors wanted to interpret the dream for him! Nebuchadnezzar wanted to believe that *he* ruled - not God or anyone else.

In verse 18, Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to interpret the dream. "This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation since 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 God *is* in you." (Daniel 4:18 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar knew he could get an honest answer from Daniel, even when the truth was hard to bear. Nebuchadnezzar recognized the Spirit of the Holy God was in Daniel even though he had not yet yielded himself to God.

In verse 19, Daniel explains the rise and coming fall of Nebuchadnezzar. "Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. *So* the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, *may* the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies! "The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be seen* by all the earth, whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— it *is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth." (Daniel 4:19-22 NKJV)

Daniel genuinely cared about Nebuchadnezzar and was affected by the meaning of the dream. He didn't *want* it to be true of Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel applied the point without ambiguity. Instead of reaching for something generic, Daniel got right to the point.

Verse 23 says, "And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, *bound* with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of

the field, till seven times pass over him'; this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. "And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump *and* roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules." (Daniel 4:23-26 NKJV)

When Daniel explained this to Nebuchadnezzar, the king probably couldn't have guessed just how literal it was. God's intended purpose for Nebuchadnezzar was for the king to know that Heaven rules. If the king could have humbled himself, he could have avoided this humiliating fate. In verse 27, Daniel presses the point: repent; maybe it is not too late.

Verse 27, "Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

Break off your sins! That's a good word for all of us! The best reaction to the judgment is humble repentance. Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar didn't do this. Nebuchadnezzar is counseled to stop sinning and practice righteousness and generosity.

Verse 28 shows the dream's fulfillment, "All *this* came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months, he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" While the word *was still* in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*." (Daniel 4:28-33 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar is stricken with madness (or, as we would say today, mental illness), and he is totally humiliated and humbled. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a whole year to repent, and he probably forgot about the dream during that time - but God didn't forget. Babylon was truly one spectacular city of the ancient world, which included the famous "hanging gardens" built by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel knew that the new Babylon was the creation of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:30).

There are six columns of writing in the British Museum recovered from Babylon, which describe the colossal building projects of Nebuchadnezzar and his zeal to beautify the city. Most of the bricks found in the excavations of Babylon are stamped "Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, exalted first-born son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon."

The announcement came to Nebuchadnezzar in the exact words of his dream. It revealed to him that the dream was about to be fulfilled, and he would be reduced to the existence of an animal - specifically, an ox. The type of insanity when a person thinks of themselves as an animal and imitates an animal's behavior is generally called *insania zoanthropica*. But in Nebuchadnezzar's case, it is called *boanthropy*, the delusion that one is an ox.

There is no record of these seven years of insanity in the secular historical records of Babylon - just as we would expect, considering the custom of the times. But, Abydenus, a Greek historian, wrote in 268 B.C. that Nebuchadnezzar was "possessed by some god" and that he had "immediately disappeared." (Wood) Some dismiss this account of Nebuchadnezzar's madness as unhistorical, but there is no historical record of his governmental activity between 582 B.C. and 575 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar had an opportunity to humble himself, and he did not. Now God humbled him, and the experience was severe. In verse 34, we find a repentant Nebuchadnezzar ready to be restored and praising God. He says, "And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 *is* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down." (Daniel 4:34-37 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar could not break free from his insanity until the time appointed by God. Then, he was given the opportunity to humble himself and lift his eyes to heaven. Nebuchadnezzar finally learned that the One True God we serve not only exists but also reigns. Nebuchadnezzar said, "I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him." Nebuchadnezzar saw the truth about *himself* when he saw the truth about *God*. The King's eyes were opened, and he did see who God was and eloquently praised His sovereignty. It was then he was restored.

What can we learn from Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter?

By the end of Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar knew which God was the true God. And when Nebuchadnezzar embraced it, he wasn't shy about telling people what he had learned. Nebuchadnezzar became a true witness, giving testimony to God's great works.

I. Salvation is always God's will

Salvation is deliverance from Sin. The Bible says that there is only one plan of salvation that really works. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that God's plan is the only plan that works for all humanity. Humanity's plan of salvation includes observing religious rituals, obeying the leader's commands, and achieving certain levels of spiritual enlightenment. But none of these things are part of God's plan of salvation.

God's plan of salvation begins with understanding why we need to be saved. We need to be saved because we have sinned. The New Testament truth is that everyone has sinned. "For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin." ([Ecclesiastes 7:20 NKJV](#))

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
([Romans 3:23 NKJV](#))

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." ([1 John 1:8 NKJV](#))

Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is when we reject God, disobey God's plan of salvation, and choose our own way. We all choose to do things that are wrong. Wrong things are sinful things that harm others, damage us, and, most importantly, dishonor God. God does not allow Sin to go unpunished. The ultimate punishment for Sin is death. "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." ([Romans 6:23 NKJV](#))

In God's plan of salvation, God Himself is the only one who can provide for our salvation. We cannot save ourselves because of our Sin and its consequences. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross fully paid for the sins of the entire world. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not only for ours but also for the sins of the world.

The Apostle Paul's response to this was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." The way to follow God's plan of salvation is to believe in Jesus alone as Savior. Jesus is God's plan of salvation. Nebuchadnezzar was introduced to Him as the fourth man in the fiery furnace.

Little by little, we embrace a greater part of God's plan for our salvation!

II. God is sovereign – He gives, and He takes away

There is so much discord in the world. The idea of resting in the sovereignty of God runs counter to the narrative that often surrounds us. Whether it's a conversation

of culture, politics, parenting, or education, the prevailing theme is usually one of fear about the future. But nothing surprises God. He doesn't need to adjust His plans to accommodate us! God is sovereign.

Sovereignty is not a word you hear every day. Psalms 135:6-7 says, "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses." (Psalms 135:6-7 NIV)

Sovereignty has to do with power. It often describes a person who has supreme power or authority, such as a king or queen. God is described as "sovereign" in several Bible translations. Jesus said in Matthew 28, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18 NKJV)

Total sovereignty rests solely with the Creator. Peace and rest in God's sovereignty come when we fully understand there is no boundary to His reach. God's authority extends to all of creation, including the circumstances of your day, and the outcome of the future.

Free will does not deny the sovereignty of God. Isaiah 41:10 reminds us, "Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10 NKJV)

When God restored Nebuchadnezzar, the first thing he did was give glory to God and share his testimony. Even in our greatest despair, we can trust these words in Lamentations 3, "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning; Great *is* Your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23 NKJV)

God is sovereign, whether we recognize it or not. We will fall in fear when we do not believe God is sovereign over our lives.

Peace comes when we rest in God's goodness and provision. David wrote, "The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD *is* the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalms 27:1 NKJV)

III. Free-Will operates within the limits of God's Will

The Bible teaches that God's will is for *all* people to be saved, based on evidence that Christ died for all people (1 Timothy 2:6; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:14) and offers His grace to everyone.

Salvation is the work of God, totally free and independent of good works or merit (worthiness), yet we must meet certain conditions. The responsibility we have is believe and accept what Christ offers us. The Bible says that *whoever believes* may have eternal life. Faith in Christ is a condition for salvation. It is not an act of merit but simply accepting the condition laid down by the Lord.

We can either accept God's grace or reject it. The power of choice remains with us. Salvation is based upon our response to the offer God makes. By our own free will, we must determine whether we will accept or reject His offer. The offer of salvation includes everyone who wants to be saved.

Conclusion

When God changes your heart and mind, you begin to realize just how great God is! Nebuchadnezzar said, "I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me." God wanted to restore Nebuchadnezzar. The goal wasn't to destroy him but to bring him to his proper place first, before God, and then among others.

Nebuchadnezzar learned that those who walk in pride God is able to put down. If we can learn from Nebuchadnezzar's experience, we might be spared a similar lesson in humility. The lesson is simple. James says, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

There have been many who rise from humble origins to great glory and then fall. Most, if not all, fall through pride. A proud look is number one on the list of God's most hated sins. Proverbs 6 tells us, "These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren." (Proverbs 6:16-19 NKJV)

We would do well to remember these simple truths:

- Personal testimony is the best form of witness
- Distractions distort and frustrate our focus
- Self-attainment is a poor source of security
- Integrity is always reliable
- Miracles impress but do not convert people
- Humble yourself or be humbled by someone else
- Truth is not ambiguous
- Humility is the best reaction to judgment
- Repentance is the first step towards salvation
- Recognizing God's sovereignty is the first step towards restoration