

Two kings. Two choices. Two Outcomes. Will the kingdom survive or will it fall?

Tonight we will look at the first king, greatest king of Babylon, and the last king, the weak king of Babylon.

As we study this, it is interesting that Daniel, the Judean captive lived in Babylon for its entire heyday. That tells us that Daniel lived a long time, and it also tells us that Babylon had a fairly short time of supremacy as kingdoms go. Daniel came to Babylon in its ascendancy and was there to witness first hand its demise when Belshazzar was killed by the conquering Medo-Persian army.

God used Daniel to speak to each of these kings. One responded: The other one did not. For him it was too late. Both messages were messages of judgment.

In chapter 1, it is recorded that Nebuchadnezzar had taken the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. He had stored them in a place of honor.

Here in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar received a warning, which at first he ignored. Then he lost his mind. But eventually he bowed to Jehovah and his sanity returned.

Belshazzar used the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem to serve his own vices. He dishonored them. He did not listen to the lessons of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. And he met judgment that night that he defiled the vessels of the Temple of Jehovah, at the hands of the Medes and Persians. That will be our next study this evening.

So we see the themes of worship and judgment, and deliverance continuing.

Let's review the structure of the first 7 chapters of Daniel.

First is Chapter 1, basically an introduction.

Then we have:

A: Daniel 2. Rise and fall of kingdoms

B: Daniel 3. Persecution

C: Daniel 4. The fall and rise of Nebuchadnezzar

C': Daniel 5. The fall of Belshazzar

B': Daniel 6. Persecution of Daniel

A': Daniel 7: Rise and fall of kingdoms.

A and A' are thematically connected.

B and B' are thematically connected.

C and C' are thematically connected.

C and C' are the chapters we are looking at tonight

With that reminder, let's proceed. We are going to hear from the king in his own words.

Daniel 4:1-3 (KJV)

1. Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

2 I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me.

3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

This chapter, which may well be a copy of an official document, begins with praise, and ends with praise. Wouldn't you love to find the clay tabled that this is written on!!

This is one lesson that we would do well to remember. God only wants the best *for* us, but he also wants the best *from* us. Our praise to God reminds us who created us and who sustains us.

Nebuchadnezzar has quite a story to tell.

This probably happened in the middle third of his reign, because early in his reign and towards the end of it he was involved with military campaigns. During the middle of his reign he was more concerned with embellishing the great city of Babylon.

Daniel 4:4-7 (NKJV)

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.

⁵ I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

The king had received a dream from God before. The dream of the great metal man which we will be studying later. At that time the king did not remember the dream and demanded that the wise men tell him the dream and the interpretation. They *could* not.

This time the wise men were told the dream, but they *would* not give an interpretation. When they learned the dream, they feared for their lives if they told the king the apparent meaning of the dream.

Interestingly enough, in the first instance, Daniel was a junior part of the wise men.

In this case he was called after the junior wise men could not interpret the dream.

Daniel 4:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ 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:

⁹ "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.

The dream was a vivid one.

First scene: There is a huge tree that was visible from a great distance. It provided shade and food for the animals and birds that lived around it.

Second scene:

Daniel 4:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ "I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven.

¹⁴ 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.

At this point the angel makes a transition moving from the symbolism of the tree to what it actually represented.

Daniel 4:15-17 (NKJV)

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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ '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.'

Nebuchadnezzar had a clear remembrance of the dream. It had burned itself into his mind. But he wanted to know what it meant.

Now if you were one of the king's wise men, how would you have interpreted this dream? Would you apply it to the king? Would you look around for one of the king's enemies to apply it to?

Again, one thing that you would not want to do is apply it to the king. It was too easy to lose your head when you were involved with the king.

How could something so horrible happen to the king? Things were going well for him right now, and didn't that indicate the blessings of the gods?

Of course having read the whole story we can piece it all together.

Daniel 4:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ "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."

You don't have to wonder why the wise men did not want to give the message. It is interesting that in Daniel 2 the wise men could not interpret the dream. In this case the wise men would not interpret the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar urges Daniel to go on. He has had messages from God before.

But Daniel is not eager to do this. Finally in a show of what I believe to be affection and loyalty, Daniel begins to tell the dream's meaning.

Daniel 4:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:

²⁵ 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.

He affirms that the tree does indeed represent the king. Then Daniel urges the king to be righteous, stopping his iniquities, and showing mercy to the poor, so that perhaps this will not come to pass.

What would repentance look like for king Nebuchadnezzar?

For one thing, he would have to admit that much of what he felt good about accomplishing was not good in the eyes of God. The wars, the captives, disregard for the poor.

God gave him a year of probationary time.

Daniel 4:28-30 (NKJV)

²⁸ All *this* came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

²⁹ At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.

³⁰ 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?"

The response was swift. As he was finishing the words, those things which make us human, our minds and reasoning, were lost.

Now in fairness, Nebuchadnezzar had enlarged and embellished Babylon. It was probably one of the most beautiful cities ever known. He had added new outer walls which strengthened the city and also enlarged it. He built a new palace. He expanded the city across the Euphrates River.

He was proud of the city that he had built. He had thousands of bricks stamped with his name, extolling his greatness.

He also created an empire which included Persia and stretched all the way to Egypt.

He ended up reigning for 2/3 of the entire time of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom's existence.

But all of that took a toll in human lives: His soldiers that died. The slave laborers that built the great walls and buildings.

It used to be thought that Nebuchadnezzar's reign was one powerful rule. We know from clay documents that in his 10th year was a revolt that was so serious that he himself was involved in hand to hand fighting!

But he survived. And he was proud of it.

So he boasts of his prowess, and those were the last intelligent words he was to speak for 7 years.

There has been a lot of discussion about what happened to the king. It has been described as boanthropy, where a person believes that they are a bovine creature, think bull. It has also been described as lycanthropy, which means wolf-like. There have been documented cases of each one down through time.

But regardless, he was not in his right mind.

You might wonder how Nebuchadnezzar survived those 7 years. Apparently, when people had mental illness in those days the belief was that if you killed them, the demon that caused that insanity would pass on to you. That is good enough reason to let someone live. That is probably part of what protected him.

However, and I cannot prove this, I think that it is possible that Daniel took a personal interest in the king and watched over him. Daniel knew that God had a special interest in Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, he would have also cared.

But that is not the end of the story.

Let's let the king finish it himself.

Daniel 4:34-37 (NKJV)

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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?"

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ 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.

Up to this point Nebuchadnezzar had recognized the God of the Hebrews as one of the gods, though a very powerful one. After hadn't Marduk given him the power to conquer Jehovah of Judea?

Nebuchadnezzar gets a great awakening. One comes out of this experience worshipping one God above all other gods.

The king learned his lesson the hard way. One commentator said that God made Nebuchadnezzar lose his mind so that he might gain his soul.

Do we get the message? Monarchies, democracies, capitalism, socialism, communism, political parties display their pride and power. All will come crashing down together when the great stone of Daniel 2 fills the earth. The only thing that is of significance is our relationship with the God whom the stone represents.

The great tree that was cut down: Remember, it was banded with brass and iron to preserve it? This was a reminder from the great image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in Daniel 2. The iron of Rome and the brass of Greece would preserve the roots of Babylon down through the end of time. That will make more sense as we go along.

Babylon's pride, Babylon's haughtiness, Babylon's worship of many gods, Babylon's mocking of Jehovah, which we will see in the next chapter, was not to fall, for it is indicative of the human condition, and will only be totally eradicated at the end of the world.

Be sure to be here for session 9 when we get into that in a detailed way.

In the end, Nebuchadnezzar began to understand the concern that God had for him. The king was praising God in spite of the trouble he brought on himself. And he shared God's justice, truth, and his ability to bring people to reality.

Today the choices we have are the same as King Nebuchadnezzar had. Are we going to have the spirit of Babylon and worship ourselves, our handiwork, or are we going to worship Jehovah-God? Are we going to follow the path of Babylon, become Babylon-ized, or are we going to take the road to the New Jerusalem?

Our Gospel text is:

Luke 14:11 (KJV)

¹¹ For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

The choice is ours.