



Daniel

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Lesson 5

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“Certainly, one lesson is that continual contrition and humble repentance is a daily challenge, and that all praise and glory belong to God.”

Chapter four, unlike the first three chapters, is primarily in the first person narrative. That is, Nebuchadnezzar starts with praises to God then tells his own story followed by Daniel speaking from his perspective. There is a brief section in the third person mood (vv. 28-33), then ending once again with Nebuchadnezzar's closing paean.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM OF A TREE

As in chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar has another disturbing dream. Apparently, it frightened him so much that once again he summons his seers to provide an interpretation. Unlike his response to the first dream (chapter 2), the king is willing to convey the content of what he envisioned so that it would be easier for his wise men to interpret. The question arises, why didn't the king immediately contact Daniel who was the only one who successfully interpreted his dream 17 years earlier? We can only speculate, but one explanation is that he felt the dream was vivid enough that those who specialized in such matters would have no trouble in deciphering its meaning. Another explanation is that the king was reluctant to hear what Daniel had to say because, like last time, he feared it would not be good news about the future. We are reminded of King Ahab (300 years earlier) who inquired of the prophets of Baal whether or not to go into battle with the Syrians; to a man they insisted that Ahab would succeed. When King Jehoshaphat asked if there was a prophet remaining in Israel who spoke for the Lord, Ahab grudgingly complained: *“There is one more, Micaiah son of Imlah. But I hate him because he never prophesies anything good for me; it's always something bad”* (1 Kings 22:8). Indeed Micaiah did foretell Ahab's defeat, but Ahab wouldn't listen and died in battle. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar feared the same bad news. However, more than likely, he simply forgot about Daniel's special gift since Daniel was not part of the seers and astrologers, but a civic administrator (although the king called him “chief of the magicians”). Nevertheless, when the Babylonian fortunetellers, magicians, wizards, and wise men failed to interpret the dream, Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was brought before the king.

DANIEL INTERPRETS THE DREAM

As mentioned, this time Nebuchadnezzar relates the complete dream, identifying each element of the dream in detail. He describes an enormous tree

of magnificent grandeur and prosperity that is cut down to a stump by the angels of heaven. The mind of the stump becomes like an animal for a time of “seven periods.” It is further revealed to the king that the reason is to establish God’s predominance over the affairs of men (4:17). Obviously such a vivid dream would be unsettling, if not frightening.

Oddly, the king tells Daniel, who is also alarmed by the dream, not to be frightened, but Daniel knowing the consequences says: *Your Majesty, I wish that the dream and its explanation applied to your enemies and not to you* (v. 19). I suppose he could say this from the perspective of every sinner who shares the good news with someone else, but with “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). When Christians give witness they begin with the consequences of disobedience due to breaking God’s law, and then move to the good news of the Gospel. All of us stand initially condemned and fearful, then relieved when the sweet message of redemption through Jesus is pronounced.

Daniel interprets the dream in a straight forward manner. The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar’s glorious reign (4:20-22), followed by its partial destruction, not Babylon itself, but the king’s reign over it. The stump, representing the king, would turn mad and be like an animal, his mind being bound in bronze and iron, as it were, for seven periods. However the stump would remain firmly rooted and alive ready to be restored when the king would repent and give glory to God. Daniel then strongly urges the king to do so, adding that he should also change his behavior to do what is right and be kind to those that he formerly oppressed.

THE DREAM IS FULFILLED

Nebuchadnezzar failed to heed both the portent and Daniel’s advice. One year later the king boasts of his accomplishments without crediting God and a voice from heaven announces the judgment that was forewarned (4:28-32).

We are reminded of a similar judgment in the New Testament where Herod Agrippa (successor to Antipas) makes a speech and his hearers exclaim: *“This is the voice of a god, not of a man.”* Immediately he was struck down by an angel and died because he did not give God the praise (Acts 12:21-23).

In Daniel, the voice declares his royal authority is

suspended and the king is struck with madness (v.33). Some scholars diagnose his illness as lycanthropy (a schizophrenic condition where a human assumes the characteristics of a wolf).

More modern versions say he suffered some sort of psychological breakdown which included the delusion that he was an animal. The description of his hair and nails may be comparative, i.e., his hair was matted and his nails uncut. The Aramaic text literally reads, *His hair grew like eagles and his nails like birds*. He wanders the fields like an animal until the appointed time.

Nebuchadnezzar says: *“At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever”* (v. 34).

The “seven periods” mentioned earlier are usually interpreted to mean seven years, but the literal meaning is indeterminate. Often the number seven is representative of a divinely fulfilled period of time, as in the seven days of creation, Sabbath the seventh day, the seven pairs of clean animals Noah took on to the ark, etc. On the Day of Atonement the high priest sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat seven times (Leviticus 16:14). The number seven is used 54 times in the book of Revelation (e.g., seven seals, seven vials, seven spirits, seven trumpets, seven stars, seven churches, etc.). In most instances the number seven represents divine completeness.

Whatever the actual length of time, when the period was fulfilled Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and began to offer a litany of praise to God (4:34-35). As predicted the king’s throne was restored and his power and prosperity even increased. So the king publishes his praises and has them read to his subjects, as described at the beginning of the chapter (4:1-2). One wonders why his devotion was not total, but like Solomon, we can imagine he allowed his devotion to God to be watered down by the many deities worshipped in a religiously pluralistic kingdom. We might ask ourselves, how does one guard against such influences today? Do we have to be struck low like Nebuchadnezzar (or like St. Paul on the road to Damascus) to truly pay attention? Certainly, one lesson is that continual contrition and humble repentance is a daily challenge, and that all praise and glory belong to God (4:17).

PERSONAL APPLICATION – DANIEL 5

Heavenly Father, we tend to congratulate ourselves for our achievements like educational advancement, job promotions, acts of charity, and exhibitions of goodness and virtue. Remind us that you value a contrite and humble heart like unto Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Unfortunately he also emulated his behavior.

What evil practice did they share? (3:12b, 5:4)

Consequently, what common sinful trait did they also share? (4:37b, 5:22)

What did Solomon say about this trait? (Proverbs 16:18)

Likewise, what did King David say? (Psalms 10:2-4)

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2. What act of arrogance and sacrilege against God did Belshazzar commit? (5:2-4)

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3. In the following passages name the people involved and the nature of their sin.
2 Chronicles 26:16

2 Chronicles 32:24-25

Jeremiah 13:11

Jeremiah 48:29

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4. During the feast what phenomenon suddenly occurred? (v. 5)

How did the king react? (v. 6)

What solution did the king propose? (v. 7)

5. The king's wisemen were unable to do what two things? (v. 8)

While interpretation may be a mystery, the simple reading of the Aramaic words should not have been difficult. Yet, for the wise men it was.

To understand why, check the footnotes of your Bible. (NIV has a useful one)

What may have led to their confusion about these simple Aramaic words? (Hint:) As units of money, what was the value of each one?

What is their second meaning, that is, what three verbs does Daniel translate in vv 26-28?

Therefore, how did Daniel interpret the meaning and purpose of the words? (vv. 26-28)

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6. List the two reasons for God levying judgment upon the king. (vv. 22-24)

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7. Why should King Belshazzar have known better? (vv. 18-22)

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8. Name some other individuals who should have "known better," and why.
Genesis 3:1-13

Genesis 25:29-34, 26:34-35

Exodus 32:1-4

Leviticus 10:1-3

Judges 8:23-27

2 Samuel 11:2-5

9. From whom and of what should we be on guard according to these verses?

1 John 2:16

Proverbs 8:13

Isaiah 2:17

1 Peter 5:8-9

10. Although Daniel had previously turned down the prospect of a reward (v. 17), after his interpretation the king rewarded him anyway. Belshazzar was co-regent with his father Nabonidus. What royal position was Daniel given? (v. 29)
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Why would Daniel's promotion as triumvirate be in vain? (vv. 30-31)

Who would now share co-regency? (v. 6:28)

11. Who else was offered what reward for his services but turned it down? (2 Kings 5:8-16)
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Why did he refuse a reward? (1 Peter 4:11)

12. Who did the bidding of God unwittingly but not for reward? (Isaiah 45:13)
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13. Many passages in Scripture speak of being rewarded for doing good; that is, being rewarded with peace, a good conscience, the satisfaction of helping others and serving God. (Ruth 2:11-13, Proverbs 9:12, Proverbs 12:14, Jeremiah 17:10) However, salvation is not a reward for our goodness. How do we know this?

Romans 4:1-5

Romans 6:23

Romans 8:1-3
