

## DANIEL 4:1-27, Part 5 Oct 30, 2016

### BABYLONIA DREAMIN or THE RPIDE SLAYER

With unusual rapidity we are making our way through the book of Daniel, coming today to the fourth chapter of the book, a chapter which has long been my favorite. In so doing we wave goodbye to Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego or, as they were known to their parents, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. We will meet them in heaven but not again in our study. Today we meet again, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, and for once he is not angry. For the most part, Daniel, chapter 4 which was written in Aramaic, not Hebrew, was written by Nebuchadnezzar himself. **1** *Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! They had nice greetings back then. They would say, "Live forever, may your peace abound." Stuff like that. I remember when I was in Romania. I had preached in a little church on Easter Sunday morning, and as the worshippers were filing out they would all say the same thing to me. "Pache." Knowing a little Latin which is very prevalent in Romanian, I surmised after a while that this meant *Peace*. That is what they would say as they passed by. This is typical of most cultures. I've learned three languages: Spanish, Greek and Hebrew. In Spanish you say, *adios* which means "unto God." In Greek you say, *Chaire* which means, "grace." In Hebrew you say, "shalom" which means, *peace*. What happened in our culture that we say, *Bye*. What does that mean? Or how about *hello*. What is the meaning of *hello*? Someone ought to invent a better greeting. Maybe Microsoft can do it. Verse **2-3** *It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for 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.* Nebuchadnezzar says that he is offering in this chapter a testimony of God's grace. He speaks of the signs and wonders that God has performed on his behalf. This is precious -- the greatest ruler of his day, from a pagan land, bearing witness to the gracious power of God and extolling not his own kingdom any longer, but the kingdom of God. Imagine Vladimir Putin becoming Tim Tebow and you have an idea what happens here.*

**4** *I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.* This is important. The context is the prosperity of Nebuchadnezzar. He is at ease. His kingdom is stable. Things are well. He is not agitated of spirit. He is the very picture of godless, arrogant prosperity. Asaph wrote of such in Psalm 73 – people who are defiant towards God but seemingly enjoying a carefree, fun life. The Lord allows certain folks to be this way. They are able to shut down conscience enough to

rather enjoy their ill-gotten gains. Nebuchadnezzar was at ease. It says he was flourishing. His projects were meeting with success. He could sing, "It is well, It is well, with - well, with everything except his soul." But what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? God's undeserved favor toward this man will not allow him to remain in this dogmatic slumber. He is about to be shaken out of his ease. And I wonder how many of you can be described like Nebuchadnezzar? You are at ease and flourishing. Everything is well with you, except that small annoying matter that your soul is diseased and you are headed for hell. What will it take to shake you up? What will God have to do to get your attention? Understand it is not God's blessing, but God's curse on you to let you go on in your comfortable state. Nothing is more terrible this side of hell than to prosper in your godlessness. My prayer for you is that you might be visited with disturbing dreams, and anxieties of heart, that God might break the crutches of wealth and health and success upon which you lean, in order to drive you to himself. If you are bold enough yourself today, ask God to do that for you. Ask God to spare no rod in whipping you into shape. See how he works for Nebuchadnezzar **5** *I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.* Once again God comes to this man in dreams. You would think that now he would know where to turn for dream aid, but the king is a slow learner. **6-7a** *So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon; that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them.* This is the same bunch that failed in Daniel chapter 2. I can only figure here that Nebuchadnezzar still was hoping for success via the traditional Babylonian ways. It must have been sort of embarrassing last time, that some Hebrew, with a different religion, was the only one who could discern the king's dream. Nebuchadnezzar was probably not eager to get involved with this Most High God again. This God, unlike the others he worshipped, was holy. This God made some demands on the king. So he figured he would give the holy men of Babylon and their make-believe gods another shot. To make it a bit easier, this time the king describes his dream. **7** *Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.* Surely, they must have tried. Surely, someone took a shot at it, but Nebuchadnezzar knew they had not spoken truly. So, **8-9** *But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, 9 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I*

*know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.* On your outline you will find three subpoints under *the king*. We have seen the king's alarm. Now we see the king's openness. He was not eager to see Daniel again; he was not eager to get involved with the real God again, but he was open to it. Many there are who would rather die than ask a Christian to pray for them. Many there are who would rather go insane than ask a Christian pastor for counsel. And, even some of you, will typically turn to God as a last resort. Well, pills didn't work, surgery didn't work, voodoo didn't work; let's try prayer. Lying didn't work, force didn't work, hustle didn't work; let's try speaking the truth in love. Often God's way is the last thing we turn to. But to Nebuchadnezzar's credit he did consult the man of God.

On now to the king's dream. Follow closely and get the vision clear in your head. **10-15c** *Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. 11 The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. 12 Its foliage was 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 sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it. 13 I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. 14 He shouted out and spoke as follows: chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field.* Notice the transition here. He has been talking about a tree, one that is chopped down, but not uprooted. Now he uses the pronoun "he." The tree is a he. **15-17b** *Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him. 17 This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones.* Both of those are terms for heavenly beings, angels and the like. **17c-18** *In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men. 18 This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to*

*make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.* There you have the king's dream. He has served it up to Daniel as best he can remember it, and now the ball is in Daniel's court. Will he come through one more time?

Let's take a look now at Daniel. And there are three things to note about this great man, the first of which is found in **19** *Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.'* Belteshazzar replied, *'My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!'* I want you to see something here and elsewhere about this brother that is just so very impressive to me, and that is Daniel's respectful speech. Or Daniel's respect. In my observation, it is often the case that courage in the face of men is accompanied by a certain harshness or even disdain for others. In the natural, nice people aren't bold and bold people aren't nice. When both those virtues are at work the spirit of God is probably there. And so it is with Daniel. Clearly, the Lord reveals to Daniel the exact meaning of the king's dream. It is a word about how hard times are coming for the king and when Daniel understands that what does he do? He doesn't think, "this wicked, arrogant, pagan ruler who stole me from my family and homeland is going to get what's coming." That is what some of us would think and even say. But Daniel was distressed by what he learned. He was not quick to speak, but he sat appalled for a while, until, encouraged by the king, he began to speak. Gracious words came first. Daniel was not just going to speak the truth - he would speak it in love. Some of us are good at speaking the truth part, but not so good at the love part. Daniel demonstrates both. He says, "Oh, my king, I would rather say this of your enemies." He lets the king know that he takes no delight in bringing bad news. Have you ever heard a preacher warn others of hell in such a way that he sounded almost glad that they were going to go there? Absolutely. But Daniel showed some sympathy. Likewise, we need to be willing to talk of hell and judgment but to speak of it with weeping and heaviness.

And whenever we address other, let's do so with courtesy, and respect. I have really come to understand this in recent years in a way I haven't before. When I grew up, I was a nice Christian boy in most respects but I didn't respect all those over me in school and elsewhere. I'm sure I didn't address them respectfully. I didn't thank them and praise them. Oh, I said, "Yes, mam and No sir" but that's as far as it went. God says to honor those over us. I used to despise those I regarded as teacher's pets. You know, the ones that made the teacher smile. Now, I see how much better and smarter they were than I. Honoring and esteeming those over us is smart. It makes sense. It is good

for us and it honors the Lord as the one who placed that person where he or she is. Note and then imitate Daniel's respect.

Secondly, we note Daniel's insight. Once again the dreamteller is given supernatural understanding. Let's see what he tells Nebuchadnezzar about his dream. **20-26** *The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth 21 and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged— 22 it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth. 23 In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,” 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 that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. 26 And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.* Alright, we won't tarry on this point. But do you get the dream? God is going to drive Nebuchadnezzar away from mankind. He will become like an animal, living out of doors. But this will not be permanent. The tree was cut, but not uprooted, so it is possible for Nebuchadnezzar to make a comeback and be restored to his throne. That is the end of the interpretation. But that does not conclude the words of Daniel.

Our man Dan began with words of respect and he ends with words of boldness. Subpoint three on your outline is Daniel's boldness. Look at what he says in **27a** *Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you.* Daniel is about to give advice. It will be said respectfully, but it was not kosher to give advice to kings without being asked. Daniel was brought in to interpret a dream. The king never asked for advice. But Daniel is compelled within his soul, to offer that advice anyway. He is ready to use the platform of his dreamtelling powers to speak God's word into the king's life. And here is what he says, **27b** *break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your*

*iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.*’ He says: “This is the application of my sermon and your dream - REPENT and show that repentance with righteous living, one element of which will be a kindness to the poor.” Ahh, there goes Daniel sticking his nose into politics again. Was Daniel out of line? I don't think any of you would say so, but look at what he's doing? He is confronting the king over his sin. He is calling the ruler of his land to righteousness. I know an evangelical pastor who is invited to the white house periodically to meet with the president and I wonder if he ever says these things to him. I wonder how Billy Graham has addressed the president when he was allowed. Do they speak as Daniel speaks? Would I do so if given such an opportunity? Would you?

I remember attending a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America when there was a major dispute was over what we should say as a body of churches to our president, and congress about things like partial birth abortion and same-sex marriage. Some there argued that it's not our job to give advice to civil magistrates. But dear friend, we live in a land ruled by the people. The heroes of faith in God's book lived under kings whose word was law and still they gave advice and spoke God's word and called their leaders to righteousness. There was Moses with Pharaoh, and Samuel with Saul and Nathan with David, and Elijah with Ahab. I think of John the Baptist who was beheaded - why? Because he confronted the tetrarch, Herod, about his relationship with a woman. Luke 19:3 says that John reprovved Herod for marrying his brother's wife, and for many other wicked things he had done. As a result, John ended up in prison and then dead. But he stuck his nose in politics didn't he? That nose got cut off, but would to God I would share the destiny of John the Baptist because I shared his boldness. I think of Paul who spoke boldly and respectfully before King Agrippa in Acts 25 and before Festus and Felix in Acts 24. Look at Acts 24. Speaking of Felix the procurator of Jerusalem **24-25** *some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”* Paul too, was willing to boldly confess Christ before kings and call them to repentance. God keep us from the fear of man that shuts our mouths when we are given opportunity. We see in Daniel, respect, insight, boldness.

On now to our third consideration which is God's purpose behind the king's dream and what would come to pass thereafter. The purpose is mentioned twice in what we read. Did you catch it? First, in the dream itself. **17** *This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision*

*is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.* Then Daniel, when he interprets it, applies it directly to Nebuchadnezzar. He says in verse 25 to the king that "you will become like an animal until you recognize that the Most High is ruler of the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever he wishes." Again in **26** *and in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.* Who did Nebuchadnezzar think was ruling? He thought he was. He thought he was the sovereign one. He thought his will prevailed. God decided to show Nebuchadnezzar who is boss. That is what this whole deal is about. God's purpose, in a word, is to humble Nebuchadnezzar. Now understand - this was not going to be easy. Getting humbled never is, but understand that this was going to be good for the king. Ultimately, this was not wrath but mercy. Something good was about to happen to the king. It didn't look good at first glance. It was scary to look into, but it was a severe mercy, a severe mercy God intended for Nebuchadnezzar. And eventually Nebuchadnezzar saw that, didn't he? This is his testimony of God's grace in his life, and like many such stories, there was a great falling before the rising. At the end though, notice what Nebuchadnezzar has to say **37** *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.* I love that! Praise God for that! He is able to humble those who walk in pride. This is so beautiful when you know the Scriptures because what does it say about the humble? God gives grace to the humble. And he exalts the humble.

Now, how God makes men humble is interesting. I suppose God can do it simply with a movement of His Spirit in our hearts, but He almost always chooses circumstantial means. With Nebuchadnezzar it was going to be a humiliating period of insanity. This brilliant king would become an imbecile for a season to learn just how weak he is. What was it with Paul the apostle? Remember? II Corinthians 12:**7** *Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!* We don't know what exactly this thorn was, but what was this thorn in the flesh for? To keep him from exalting himself, i.e. to keep him humble. God uses all kinds of things to keep us humble. What does he use in your life? A sickness, an injury, a difficult child, a cruel boss, a husband or a wife? Some of you don't need God to do

anything to keep you humble because you play golf, but most of us have those annoying reminders placed in our lives that remind us how puny and vulnerable and dependent on God as we really are.

Sometimes God goes after the mightiest of all to send a message to many. Here He goes after Nebuchadnezzar. When I studied this story I thought of something that happened in our community back in 1998. It was the drowning of James McGriff, a star athlete at Palm Bay High. McGriff was 6'2" 220 pounds of solid muscle, a high-school All-American headed to play football for the University of Florida. His motto, tattooed on his arm was: *Can't lose, Won't lose*. But the waves of the Atlantic took him from this world without breaking a sweat. You know, that is why I like to go pray at the ocean. Out there I see the vastness of the sky and the waters. I hear the power of the waves and I'm reminded that I'm nothing and God is awesome. He's awesome. God has a way of reminding us of that when we grow proud, when we trust in ourselves. What is it that you put your trust in? Riches, skills, connections? Do you know how fragile all of that is? God calls us to be humble, to be broken so that in that brokenness we can know the surpassing power of God. Paul said it. After writing about his thorn in the flesh he tells us what God said next. II Corinthians **12:9-10** *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* When the weight of the world seems to be crashing in upon you, let it. Don't be humiliated only, humble yourself so that God would lift you up. As we close, I urge you to take a minute right now. See if you can identify something in your life that humbles you, something that has humbled you. Can you see it as God's severe mercy? Thank God for that thing, and invite the Lord to use it to soften you and mold you into a humble servant of the Most High. Take time now to think and pray.