

Daniel
Heaven Rules (Part 2)
Daniel 4
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Many years ago, when I was in seminary, I heard a story that I have never forgotten because of the incredible point that it makes. The year was 1715. King Louis XIV had died. Louis XIV had reigned over France for 72 years - the longest any European king had ever lasted. And he was by all rights, a magnificent monarch. It was Louis XIV who made the famous statement, "I am the state." His court, the Palace of Versailles, was the most spectacular in Europe, and such was his reign. And such was the influence of France under his reign that he referred to himself as Louis the Great. His funeral was intentionally designed to be spectacular. His body was placed in a golden coffin. He was laid in state in Notre Dame Cathedral and, before his death, he prescribed exactly how it would be staged. There in Notre Dame, there would be a single candle that would be placed on his coffin and all other candles in the entire Cathedral were to be extinguished to illustrate his solitary and unique greatness. Thousands attended the service. Many sat weeping. Others sat in stunned and hushed silence. Louie had asked Mazatlán, his court preacher, to deliver the funeral sermon and as Mazatlán entered the pulpit, before he began to speak, he very slowly and deliberately reached down and snuffed out that solitary candle. And then he began his sermon with these immortal words, "only God is great." Only God is great.

Tonight, we have the privilege of sort of watching over the shoulder as our God Himself, through His Prophet Daniel, teaches the great Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, that very lesson - only God is great. The specific theme of Daniel 4 is that God is completely sovereign over every throne, over every human ruler. It's repeated a number of times throughout this chapter. For example, in verse 17. Nebuchadnezzar is to recognize that the Most High is Ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. That very expression is repeated three separate times in this chapter and in verse 26, it's modified to say you need to recognize that Heaven rules. By the way, that's the only time in the Old Testament, that "Heaven" is substituted for the name of God. This account in Daniel chapter 4 comes about 30 years after the events of chapter 3 and it unfolds in a series of scenes.

Last time, we considered the first scene: A Surprising Introduction (the first three verses). As he greets us, Nebuchadnezzar II The Great, king of Babylon, greets us, to explain why he has written this chapter.

Then in Verses 4 through 18, we saw the second scene: A Troubling Dream. It began with a description of the dream's setting in Verses 4 and 5 and then his search for someone who could interpret in verses 6-9. But then, the heart of that section, in verses 10-18, was a report of the dream's content as we learn exactly what it was that Nebuchadnezzar saw. Now, I'm not going to review that because it is reviewed on a couple of occasions in the passage that continues tonight.

Tonight, we come to the interpretation of the dream and to a shocking prophecy in verses 19 to 27.

Nebuchadnezzar has, at this point, explained the dream to Daniel and by the revelation of the Spirit, Daniel immediately knew what the dream meant. And so, it led to a real consternation on the part of the prophet. Notice verse 19, "Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him." Daniel was genuinely shaken when he came to understand the meaning of the dream. The Aramaic word translated "appalled" means, "to be completely gripped by terror." He cannot believe it. And he was so shaken, that expression, "for a while" is probably to be taken for a pause in his response. He could only remain silent for a moment as the reality of what he has just learned really sinks in. Clearly, he was troubled for Nebuchadnezzar as a person. It seems clear in the interactions he has with Nebuchadnezzar throughout this book that he seemed to genuinely respect and care for this man. But I think he was much more troubled as he considered the implications, especially for the Jewish people.

Under Nebuchadnezzar, because of Daniel and his friends, the Jews had been treated very well. Now, remember the context. This is unfolding, chapter 4 is unfolding, probably about 15 years after the major destruction of Jerusalem in 586. Most of the Jews have been carried back to Babylon and for those 15 years, they have been treated remarkably well. You can read about it in Jeremiah and other places. And the reason was because of Daniel and his friends and God's working through them on the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. If something happened to Nebuchadnezzar, there was no guarantee that the next king would be as gracious and generous to the Jews. Or that he would, for that matter, be as good a ruler.

The king saw that Daniel was visibly shaken to the point that, for a moment, he couldn't speak. And so, verse 19 continues, "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!'" He is truly concerned for this man whom he has come to love. Daniel composed himself and explained the dream's interpretation in verses 20-26. Notice verse 20,

The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth 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

Now, after he recounted that part of the dream, he first makes it clear, big picture, who this is about. Verse 22, "it is you, O king." That tree represents Nebuchadnezzar and his vast Babylonian empire. "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." That huge tree represented Nebuchadnezzar's reign. And his kingdom had brought prosperity - represented by the fruit and the food from the tree - and protection - represented by the shelter that it provided. And the prosperity and protection that he brought extended throughout the empire. Notice it says, "to all the peoples of the earth." That is, to all of the lands under his control. Daniel continues to recap the content of the dream in verse 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.'" There's the dream.

And then Daniel, in verse 24, begins to interpret the dream, "this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king." Daniel began by making it clear that what had earlier been said to be the decree of the "angelic watchers," in fact, was not their decree at all. Ultimately, notice what he says in verse 24, "this is the decree of the Most High," against you, Nebuchadnezzar. And here's the decree, verse 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.”

Nebuchadnezzar, one of the greatest kings in human history, would come to believe that he was an animal. This is the psychological condition, as I noted for you, called lycanthropy in which a person thinks that he's a particular kind of animal and then lives as if he is.

There's an interesting article that was written back in 1988 by a man named Keck. He wrote an article for psychological medicine entitled quote, “Lycanthropy: Alive and Well in the Twentieth Century.” Keck reported that although the condition is unusual in our day, it still does occur. In fact, he recorded that in his study, he had observed people who believe they were wolves, gerbils – now, there's a bad situation – dogs, birds, cats - that's even worse, sorry for you cat lovers - rabbits, tigers, and even unidentified creatures. Sadly, there were people that he interacted with who had concluded that they were, in fact, one of those animals and responded and acted as if they were. There's another interesting article in 1946, RK. Harrison observed a patient in one of the British mental institutions who exhibited almost exactly the same symptoms as Nebuchadnezzar. This patient wandered about the grounds and ate grass as if he were a cow. RK Harrison wrote, “the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the fingernails.”

Daniel explains exactly what form Nebuchadnezzar's lycanthropy be would take. Notice verse 25, “you will be driven away from mankind” (obviously, because of his bizarre behavior) “your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field.” He would live outside with the beasts of the field. That's not wild animals. The Aramaic word points to domesticated animals. And specifically, he would live with the cattle, verse 25, “you will be given grass to eat like cattle.” By the way, the Aramaic word for grass includes grass, but it also includes vegetables and other herbs. The idea is: you will eat like an animal eats. The word for cattle refers very specifically to bulls or oxen. Nebuchadnezzar, he's told, would suffer the delusion that he was a bull or an ox. This is a specific kind of lycanthropy technically called boanthropy. Verse 25 says, “and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven.” Even at night, Nebuchadnezzar would stay in the open field and would not come inside as people do. And as a result, every morning his body would be drenched with dew. “And seven periods of time will pass over you.” Literally, the Aramaic says, “let seven times pass by for him.” The Aramaic word for “time,” as I noted for you the last time

we studied this passage together, can refer to any common time period: a day, a week, a month, or a year. Here, it almost certainly refers to a year for two reasons: one, because of how this same expression is used in Daniel 7 verse 25 (I pointed that out to you last time) and 7 days, or seven weeks, or even seven months isn't enough time for all of the effects we read about here to have fully taken hold, to manifest. So, it's reasonable to conclude, as most all commentators do, that Nebuchadnezzar's insanity was to last for seven years.

“Seven periods of time will pass over you,” notice, “until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.” Here is that recurring thematic expression we see throughout this chapter and it includes two key ideas.

First of all, the word “until” implies that this is a prerequisite for regaining his sanity but it's also encouragement because it implies the certainty of his sanity returning. “Seven periods of time will pass over you” and, at the end of that seven years, you will recognize.” What would he come to recognize about God and His rule? We noted this last time but let me just briefly remind you. God's sovereignty is constant. Notice what verse 25 says, “the Most High is ruler.” He is currently sovereign. His sovereignty is comprehensive. It is over the realm of mankind. There's nothing excluded on this planet. God is sovereign over individual rulers. He bestows it on whomever, on individuals. And, God's sovereignty is unrestrained. He bestows it on whomever He wishes. God, and God alone, gives the nations and kingdoms of men to whom He wishes. Nebuchadnezzar would remain insane until he recognized those realities.

By the way, just as an aside, the same author I mentioned before tells us that that a person with lycanthropy or, in this case, boanthropy, is able to reason well in other areas of life. In fact, that author Keck reported that one man who thought he was a cat for more than 13 years - that really is Purgatory - was able to hold down a job all the time that he believed that about himself. Interesting to work with such person.

Now, as horrifying as the meaning of the dream is, there is hope. Notice verse 26, “and in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you.” Notice that expression, “leave the stumps with the roots.” That means “your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.” The fact that the angelic watcher had said that the root and stumps would remain meant that Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom would be restored, in the case of his repentance.

Speaking of repentance, that brings us to the next part of this. Really, the prophecy has been revealed and now we see Daniel go beyond the prophecy and call the king to the repentance that he is severely lacking. We see lacking contrition. Verse 27, “therefore, O king,” Daniel now is calling for a response. He says, in light of this dream that you've had and its interpretation I just explained, “may my advice be pleasing to you; break away,” (the Aramaic word is “tear away” or “break off”) “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.” Daniel confronted, notice that, Nebuchadnezzar for his sins and his iniquities. Folks, that is courage.

Daniel also begs him to turn. Now, notice, he doesn't mention specifically his sins – although, clearly the primary one is what? It's Pride. It's how, the chapter ends. Those who walk in pride, He is able to humble. That's a huge issue we'll see in a moment.

But Daniel also urges him here to show mercy to the poor. Why would he say that? Well, Nebuchadnezzar was known primarily for his building projects and, historically, it has been common for kings who are into great building projects to really not care about the people that are caught up in those projects. Often, Kings treated them harshly (those that they conscripted), sometimes even brutally. It was not uncommon for hundreds to die because of the extreme heat or the working conditions on such massive ancient projects. Or, perhaps, Daniel is alluding to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar simply enjoyed his indulgent lifestyle and ignored the needs of others. But regardless, show mercy to the poor.

Daniel pled here with Nebuchadnezzar, notice what he's doing, to turn in faith to Yahweh from his sin and to demonstrate the fruit of his repentance by his behavior. Now, don't misunderstand this verse. Sadly, some following Jerome's flawed translation in the Latin Vulgate believe Daniel is here advocating works righteousness. Jerome, unfortunately, translated a word very poorly. He translates an Aramaic word, “redeem yourself,” and that word is not in the text. And, in light of that, an entire works righteousness system has been built, along with other texts that have been misunderstood and mistranslated. That's not what he's talking about here. That's contrary to what we'll see in the rest of Daniel. It's contrary, as well, to the rest of scripture.

There are two possibilities for what Daniel meant in verse 27. One of them is that temporal repentance would bring temporal blessing. If you will turn from your sin, you're not going to

reap the immediate temporal judgment that your sins deserve. There are some who take the view that that's what's being said here.

I disagree with that. I think the second possibility is the correct one and that is, he's telling him in verse 27 that repentance and faith would bring genuine salvation, regardless of the consequences of his sin. In other words, if Nebuchadnezzar turned from his sins, which is what he's calling him here to do, break off, turn away from, tear yourself away from your sins - that would be genuine repentance. And if he heeded God's warning through his prophet, that would be an act of faith. He would be acknowledging God's supremacy over him and he would experience God's forgiveness. That's the shocking prophecy.

The fourth scene in this great drama is an unchanging sentence, verses 28-33. And, it begins by explaining to us that God's patience is the restraining cause in this whole situation. Notice verse 28, "all this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king." Tragically, the horrific predictions that we've just seen together would all be fulfilled, verse 29 says, "12 months later." The judgment was to fall, but don't miss the incredible patience of God in allowing Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to respond. I can't tell you what went through Nebuchadnezzar's mind during those 12 months. Maybe he tried to shake it all off as just a bad dream. It's not really going to happen. You know, a lot of people go through life that way. They read the scripture and it says, "it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment," and they think, "that's not going to happen to me." They read about standing before God at the Great White Throne Judgment and God hurling people who have not believed in His Son into the eternal Lake of Fire and, somehow, they conclude, "won't happen to me. I'm too good a person." I think Nebuchadnezzar did something like that. I think he tried to talk himself into the fact that this wasn't true. Romans 2:4, "do you think lightly of the riches of his patience not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" I think Nebuchadnezzar did think very much lightly of God's patience.

That was the restraining cause and when God's patience gave way, it did so because man's pride was the precipitating cause. Verse 29,

"Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'"

Now, don't misunderstand. Nebuchadnezzar is not claiming to have built Babylon from the ground up. The truth is, it had begun almost 2,000 years before and it was already a wonderful city by the time Nebuchadnezzar came along. However, Nebuchadnezzar was an incredible builder and he had added greatly to the splendor of this magnificent city. Babylon, understand this, Babylon is one of the greatest cities in human history. In the 6th Century BC, when these events are unfolding, it was probably the largest city on the planet, and it was certainly the most beautiful and the most magnificent. A hundred years after this event, Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, visited Babylon and he was completely overwhelmed with what he saw. I'll describe to you next time we study Daniel together a little bit of what he experienced. More than 200 years after Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great visited Babylon and he was so impressed by the city that he planned to make it the headquarters of his city, I'm sorry, of his empire. In fact, ironically Alexander the Great died in Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

Now, when you piece the reports together, we discover that Babylon was built in a rectangular shape. It was surrounded by an impressive moat that was filled with water that had been diverted from the Euphrates River. You can see in the drawing here how the river flowed through the city but then it was diverted around the city as well, the inner city, to form a real moat. We'll learn more about the city walls in chapter 5 but an intricate double-wall system surrounded the entire city. The first set of double walls encompassed the main city and Nebuchadnezzar later added a second set of double walls that were 17 miles long. Think about that, now. Walls - a double set of walls 17 miles long and wide enough at the top for two chariots to pass.

There were eight gates by which you could enter the city. The most impressive and the most celebrated was the Ishtar Gate. This is actually a reproduction in a museum in Berlin archaeologists pieced together from the ruins that they discovered on the site. You can see the people in the foreground and get some idea of the size of the Ishtar Gate. It was a massive set of twin towers rising to a height of 40 feet and, some believe, there were other ramparts that proceeded up beyond that.

But, the most impressive thing about the Ishtar Gate, was that it opened on to a thousand-yard-long sacred processional road. Ten football fields long and sixty feet wide. Along that road there were all of these amazing pieces of tile and artwork – 120 lion, 575 dragons and bulls representing Babylon's gods imprinted in bright colors on a glaze, blue background. The road

ended at three great sites in Babylon: at a citadel, at a temple of MarDuk, and at a massive Ziggurat that historians tell us was 288 feet high (almost a hundred yards high). There was also a 400-foot-long bridge that spanned the Euphrates River connecting the eastern and western parts of the city.

Babylon was also home to what the Greeks considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. It's hard to recreate it but Josephus tells us that, according to the Babylonian historian Berossus, Nebuchadnezzar built an artificial mountain for his wife who had had to leave the mountains of her home, Media, to be his queen. There, on the plains of Iraq, he built an artificial mountain. All of this to remind her of her homeland. It was covered with unique plants, and trees, and palm trees.

Within the city of Babylon, think about this for a moment, there were 53 temples and at least 3 palaces. The largest Palace, and Nebuchadnezzar's principal residence, covered an area (see if this is your home) 200 yards by 350 yards - two football fields by three and a half football fields. That was his primary residence.

From the roof of that palace, Nebuchadnezzar looked out on all that I have shown you and more, and his heart was lifted up with pride. Notice the first person pronouns in verse 30, "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'" That verse is filled with pride. He refused to acknowledge that he was what he was, and he had accomplished what he had accomplished through divine assistance and help. He refused to acknowledge God and he refused to give God glory. As one author put it, in his pride the king took for himself the glory that rightly belonged to God and invited divine judgment.

God's patience was the restraining cause for 12 months. Nebuchadnezzar's pride was the precipitating cause. God's faithfulness was the terminating, or ultimate, cause.

It was, believe it or not, God's faithfulness. Look at verse 31, "While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you.'" God had been very patient, but His patience was done.

By the way, that is a frightening thought. If you're here tonight, and you are presuming on God's patience - either as a believer living in some pattern of unrepentant sin, or as someone who has never confessed Jesus as Lord thinking, "someday, I'll get around to it" - to presume on the patience of God is a disastrous choice because God is incredibly patient. He gave Nebuchadnezzar 12 long months and then His patience ended.

While the king was literally still speaking, what we read in verse 30, apparently, an audible voice (at least audible to him) spoke from heaven and announced immediate judgment.

Nebuchadnezzar was used to passing sentences on others but here one falls on him. The voice was probably the angelic watcher - the angel from the dream. Heaven had issued its decree, "sovereignty has been removed from you." It's already happened, Nebuchadnezzar, and the angel repeats the content of the dream and its interpretation. Verse 32, "and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, 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."

There's no way Nebuchadnezzar is missing the point of this story. And, by the way, I think the point in repeating the story, the dream and its interpretation several times almost word for word, is to underscore that without repentance, God's faithfulness required Him to execute His judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. He had promised it and He was bound to keep His word.

Verse 33, "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws."

Immediately, the prophecy, this horrible prophecy, was fulfilled exactly as Daniel has prophesied that it would happen. Probably while Nebuchadnezzar was still on the roof of his palace having just spoken the words and while they're still in his mouth. And that began seven long years in which this great king acted like a bull because he thought he was one.

I'm sure, immediately thereafter his closest attendants came to interact with Nebuchadnezzar as would've been their custom they would have immediately noticed his bizarre behavior. Probably, they would have, shortly thereafter, contacted the key leaders in the kingdom and said, "there's a problem. Houston. We have a problem." The key leaders assembled. Undoubtedly, deliberated on the best course of action. They understood, as I think you understand, when a king is unable

to rule, everything is unstable. And so, they wanted, as best they could, to hide this knowledge. Likely, they determined the king was to be isolated somewhere - maybe in one of the palace gardens, maybe in the royal woods secluded but where he could be cared for - but making sure that only a handful of people knew his real condition. He began eating what cattle eat. He constantly lived outdoors, exposed to the elements. And by the way, that would have been a real hardship. In Iraq, where this unfolded, the temperature can be between a 110 and a 120 in the summer and well below freezing in the winter. His hair became matted and coarse until it looked like eagle's feathers. His fingernails and toenails, of course, were not cut and so they came to resemble birds' claws. This man who once considered himself superior to everyone, who looked down on everyone else, has now become like an animal, like a beast. Some have tried to argue that this is an apocryphal tale and there's no evidence for it in secular history but, as I noted for you last time, there actually are two sources that refer to a time when the king was absent, and they connect a sort of vision with his absence without detail. In addition, we have very little information on Nebuchadnezzar's last 30 years. Add that to that the fact that it is highly unlikely that such an unflattering account as this would end up in the official royal archives. As one author puts it, royal families do not leave memorials of such frailties. During those seven years, it's likely that Nebuchadnezzar's son, Amel-Marduk, and the king's counselors continued to run the government in hopes that Nebuchadnezzar would recover. Seven years. I just want you to think for a moment about what you were doing seven years ago. That's how long this was his condition.

In God's goodness, it changes because the last scene in this wonderful chapter, I've called: The Lasting Lessons (verses 34-37). Here we turn. Once again, Nebuchadnezzar, begins to speak to us in the first person and he explains directly to us the lasting lessons that he learned from this account. There are several of them. I want you to see them.

First of all, God's greatness is worthy of worship. God's greatness is worthy of worship. Verse 34, "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me." Finally, after seven long years, Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes toward heaven. Clearly, in that expression, we are expected to understand that it is more than just looking up. This is an act of submission to the true God. This is a recognition of his desperate need of God's intervention. After all, Yahweh had more than proven to him that He was the Most

High by humbling the greatest king on earth, the head of gold. In response to his simple act of humility and repentance - lifting his eyes toward heaven - God restored his reason. I can't read that expression without remembering the prodigal who, there in the pig pen, came to himself. In God's goodness, Nebuchadnezzar came to himself and he raised his eyes toward heaven in humility and repentance. And God restored his reason, his sanity. Verse 34, here's his immediate response as soon as his reason returns, "I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever." As soon as he has his sanity back, Nebuchadnezzar praises and worships God for two compelling expressions of God's greatness. First of all, God's sovereignty. You are the, "Most High." That's Daniel's favorite name for God, El Elyon - the Highest One, the One above Whom there is nobody else. And, for God's eternity, "Him who lives forever." Now, he responded to God's greatness with worship and praise.

That brings us to the second lesson Nebuchadnezzar learned: God's sovereignty is unending. Verse 34 goes on to say, "for His dominion is an everlasting dominion and His kingdom endures from generation to generation." God's rule extends forever. Let that settle into your mind for a moment. We worship a King who will always be King. Nothing will ever unseat Him, and His reign is never interrupted. Think about this: Nebuchadnezzar's reign has just been interrupted for seven years when he comes to these conclusions. Seven long years he didn't sit on his throne. His reign was interrupted but God's never will be. He is from generation to generation.

A third lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned about God is: God's Power's Unstoppable. Verse 35, "All of the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing." This is really a reflection of what Isaiah had said a couple hundred years before. In Isaiah 40:17 it says, "all the nations are as nothing before Him. They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless." That doesn't mean God doesn't care for those creatures made in His image. "God so loved the world He gave his only begotten Son." Of course, He regards us as worthy of that. Not deserving of that but because we are made in His image, He has responded in that way. So, what does it mean less than nothing? This is the point: if every human being on this planet were to join forces - contribute all of their wealth and all of their resources, and focus all of their collective power against God to unseat God - if every person on this planet, every person who's ever existed or ever will exist united together in one great conspiracy to unseat God, the Most High God, it

would be as if absolutely nothing had happened at all. His power is unstoppable. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing

Number four: God's plans are unchangeable. "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing," verse 35, "but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth." He does what He wants. He works out His plan and nothing stops it. Psalm 33:11 says, "the counsel of the LORD stands forever." In other words, what God, in his own council, has come to decide is the best, that stands forever. And then the psalmist says, "the plans of His heart from generation to generation." God's plans are unchangeable. He goes on in verse 35, and I love this, "no one can ward off His hand." You know what that expression probably refers to? It refers to the practice of a parent slapping a child's hand. Nobody can slap God's hand. No one can tell Him to stop. Dale Ralph Davis writes, "No one plays parent to God and slaps His hand as though He had made a mistaken move." No one has the power to challenge God's actions. His plans are unchangeable.

Number five: God's wisdom is unquestionable. "Or say to Him," no one can say to God, "what have You done?" We understand that expression, right? You walk into your child's room and, after their time of rest and play, there's crayon all over the wall. "What have you done?" What is that? That's a question of the wisdom and the reasonableness of their action. "You shouldn't have done this." Nebuchadnezzar learned; nobody can do that to God. Nobody can walk into a context where God has acted and say, "what have You done?" No one has the wisdom to question God's actions.

The next in our little list is: God's mercy and grace are unfathomable. Verse 36, "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored." Notice "my reason returned to me," but "my majesty and splendor were restored." By whom? By God. "For the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out." That is, they began approaching Nebuchadnezzar for counsel. They recognized, word got out to that closed circle, that he was normal again - that he had snapped out of this seven-year insanity. And they began to seek him for counsel and, eventually, to restore his rule. Verse 36, "so I was reestablished in my sovereignty and surpassing greatness," notice this expression, "was added to me." Who's he talking about? He's talking about God. It "was added to me." In the remaining years of his life - and we don't know exactly how long that was, at least a year, maybe longer - he experienced

even more honor and surpassing greatness. Now, why would his counselors have been quick to restore him to this position? Well obviously,, he was one of the greatest kings of history. I just showed you some of the things he engineered and some of the things he executed as king. When it was clear to his counselors that his sanity had had returned, they were eager to restore him to power. He'd been such a great blessing, in one sense, to the kingdom. But the real cause, don't miss verse 36. The real cause of his complete restoration was the mercy and grace of God. It is unfathomable that such a wicked man would experience such mercy and grace. But thank God that he did because it reminds us, it assures us, that God will respond to us in the same way in response to our repentance.

God's salvation is sovereign. Verse 37, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven.” In Aramaic, those words “praise,” “exalt,” and, “honor” are all participles and they all indicate constant, continual praise of Yahweh. This is now the pattern of his life, he says. There are some expositors such as even John Calvin who believe that Nebuchadnezzar was never actually converted. I cannot see that. I mean, when you look at the language of verse 37 and when you look at the fact that God allowed him to write a chapter in our Bible, I think both of them point, as many commentators do, to his genuine salvation. I'm convinced that one day, we will meet Nebuchadnezzar in heaven and the sole explanation for his redemption, for his salvation, is the same explanation as it is for you and me. It is God's sovereign grace. There is no other explanation for Nebuchadnezzar coming to the place where he praises and honors and exalts the kingdom of heaven.

All God's works are true. Verse 37 says, “for all His works are true.” Everything God does is right. It always corresponds to God's own standard of righteousness. And God's ways are “just.” That's a different expression. That means: the methods with which God executes His will are also always equitable and fair. Not only what God does but the way God does it is just and right.

And then, finally, he learned in verse 37 that Gods goal is humility. Verse 37, “and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” In a real sense, there's the ultimate moral of the story. Think about this. This story is really a conflict of sovereignties. It's the sovereignty of the greatest king of his time - one of the greatest Kings in human history - against the Most High God and the sovereignty of the Most High God. When those collide, verse 37 happens. “He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

In fact, this is part of the job description of God. Let me show it to you. Go back to Job 40. Job 40:1, The Lord confronts Job. After all of the discussion, the Lord said to Job, “will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?” This is a Job 40:2 now:

Let him who reproves God answer it.” Then Job answered the Lord and said, “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more.” Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said, “Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. “Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? “Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His? “Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity, And clothe yourself with honor and majesty. “Pour out the overflowings of your anger, And look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. “Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him, And tread down the wicked where they stand. “Hide them in the dust together; Bind them in the hidden place. “Then I will also confess to you, That your own right hand can save you.”

Then, you'll be God, but until that happens, recognize who you are. Here's the point: ultimately, God wants the right perspective between mankind and Himself and that is one of utter humility and dependence on God. But we, in our pride, are exactly the opposite and God seeks - it as part of His person and character - to humble those who walk in proud in pride. Why? Because God Himself is humble. Think about Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is the antithesis of His person.

So, let's talk briefly about the application. Just a couple of points.

First of all, a personal point of application: understand pride is endemic to the fallen human heart. By nature, we are all a bunch of Nebuchadnezzar's - easily impressed with ourselves and attempting to take complete responsibility for all of our successes. But when you think about it, it's really a form of insanity. Sanity returns when we humble ourselves before God and we begin to look up in humility, praise, and worship. Let me just say tonight, if you're here and you don't know God, that's the starting place because, the reality is, whatever you might think about your own condition, whatever you might think about yourself, the fact that you are walking separate from your Creator and His commands means that you are exhibiting pride. That's pride, in its

essence. And the way back starts with that look up that says, “God is God and I’m not and I humble myself before Him.” In fact, Matthew 5:3, Jesus said here’s the way into My kingdom, “blessed are the poor in spirit,” the beggars in spirit, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You want to start your journey toward God? It begins with humility. It begins with saying, “God, I’ve got nothing. I got nothing you want. I got nothing to buy my way into your favor. I have nothing at all to offer you. I’m a beggar and I’m here like Nebuchadnezzar looking up saying, ‘help.’” That’s where it begins. Blessed are the beggars in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. I plead with you tonight to do just that. Your route back to God comes with the humbling of your pride as it has for many people around you, for all of us who are in Christ, and recognizing that Heaven rules and He has a right to rule. And then technology His son Jesus Christ Whom He sent into the world to pay for all of the sins of those who would believe in Him by His death - even pride. That’s the personal application.

There’s also a political application. Today, the point of this chapter is: God reigns over every human leader on this planet. I love the way Dale Ralph Davis puts it in his commentary. He says, “human governments are interim arrangements that God appoints to fill space until the power and glory of Jesus’ kingdom.” Human rulers - tyrannical or democratic - are God’s lackeys who have tenure only at His pleasure. At any point God chooses, He is able to humble them as He did Nebuchadnezzar and to remove them completely from power. Even more remarkably, God in His mercy and grace is even able to redeem the worst, the most powerful, and the proudest, and the make them trophies of His grace. This chapter reminds us, in one sense, there is no one ever beyond the reach of the mercy and grace of God, in Christ. So, understand this: don’t be impressed with the human rulers of this world. Respect them. Pray for them. Pay your taxes, but don’t be impressed. They are God’s lackeys - serving their tenure at His pleasure until He chooses otherwise, That’s today. Someday, and this is where we’re going in Daniel, someday God’s Son will come and, like the dream in Chapter 2, like that stone cut out of the mountain without hands in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, God’s only Son will come and God, as it were, will hurl him at the earth and crush all of the kingdoms of this world to powder. And He will reign over the empires of this world forever. That’s what we live in hope of. Until you recognize that the Most High rules over the realm of mankind and He gives it to whomever He wishes. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for this wonderful chapter. Thank You for allowing Nebuchadnezzar to write it to us and the inspiration of Your Spirit. Father, thank You that we have the confidence that You saved this man and that someday we will meet him in Your presence, now a humble man who understands that you rule. Father, may we reflect that same spirit and attitude. Lord, for those of us in Christ, help us not to give in to the temptation of pride that is with us all. Father, help us to see how antithetical to Your person pride is. That You give grace to the humble. Help us to hate it and every root of it in our hearts and lives. Father, help us to trust You. To remember that You rule. Today, You rule and someday Your King will come. Your son will establish His rule on this planet forever. And then the new earth. Father, we thank You and praise You. I pray for those who may be here tonight who have never humbled themselves before You who walk through this life in pride, use even this chapter to humble them through the story of one of history's greatest kings. May they seek you even tonight as a beggar crying out for Your mercy through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.