

the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity” (Daniel 4:19-27).

### Rebuked in the Spirit of Meekness

There is a great lesson to be learned from the way Daniel approached the king with this message of rebuke from heaven. Truly Daniel had observed the king’s failure to follow the light of truth he had previously been shown. Yet he was not rash in admonishing Nebuchadnezzar. He approached this monarch with great prudence and tact, delivering a message that was calculated to humble his pride. Daniel was meek in his approach and it paid off (see Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

The interpretation of the second dream was quite simple. Judging from the king’s response, or lack of one, we might conclude that he was half expecting the warning from heaven. Nebuchadnezzar received this message well. In fact, it made such an impression upon his mind that for one year he continued to prosper in his kingdom. Then one fateful day it happened.

### Applying the Dream

The first two words of verse 28 are most important in the interpretation of this dream. If we are going to allow the Word of God to have its proper place in giving us the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, we must accept the fact that it all applies to Nebuchadnezzar, not some other place and time. In fact, the words of verse 26 make the interpretation of the stump that is left with a band of iron and brass around it very plain: “And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.” Again notice the first few words: “All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar” (Daniel 4:28). It is quite clear that the entire dream applies to Nebuchadnezzar.

“At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (Daniel 4:29-33).

The idea that Nebuchadnezzar became a wild man is as mysterious as Jonah being swallowed by a whale and possibly just as hard for those who lack faith to swallow. Yet there are modern day accounts of men being swallowed whole by gigantic sea creatures and living to tell about it. Just so, “the condition that Daniel described is known by psychiatrists as lycanthropy (the wolf-man syndrome) or boanthropy (the ox-man syndrome). It was fairly common centuries ago, when even civilized people lived close to their animals. It is a mental state in which a person comes to think that he or she has turned into an animal and begins to act like an animal” (*God Cares*, vol. 1, C. Mervyn Maxwell, pp. 59-60).

### The Personal Testimony of a World Ruler

Consider the reason why chapter 4 was written and the lesson that was learned by King Nebuchadnezzar. He states it quite well in his closing thoughts. Let’s read them:

“And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase” (Daniel 4:34-37).

In the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar we find a fitting illustration of the basic principles and issues involved in every person’s conversion.

First, we see ourselves in Nebuchadnezzar as self-exalted, self-reliant, self-deceived sinners. Nebuchadnezzar felt no need of God. He haughtily indulged in the thought that he himself was the source of his successes in life. He needed to be awakened to the greater reality of God’s sovereignty. So do we.

Secondly, we see that the circumstances of divine providence humbled the king. He acknowledged God as the most high. However, much like us, Nebuchadnezzar endeavored to retain his own glory while giving lip service to Jehovah. He mingled with his religious profession a measure of self that would preserve his pride, and it nullified the power of divine truth in his heart.

Finally, again through the course of divine revelation and providence, Nebuchadnezzar was brought still lower that he might abandon every vestige of self-reliance. God must be our all in all or nothing at all. The way to God is the way of the cross. Only through a total renunciation of self-love, self-glory, self-reliance can we truly know who we are and who God is.

God leads, enlightens, preserves and saves even the basest, most sinful of men. Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion extends great assurance and hope to every one of us, no matter how low in sin we have sunk. God’s love knows no boundaries.

It appears that pride was the main obstacle standing between Nebuchadnezzar and God. It’s probably the same with many of us today. We fall into an “inordinate self esteem, an unreasonable conceit for one’s own superiority in talents, beauty, wealth, accomplishments, rank or elevation in office which manifest itself in lofty airs, distance, reserve, and often in contempt of others” (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster, 1828).

No wonder Daniel’s remedy for the king was to break off his sins by “showing mercy to the poor” (Daniel 4:27). Helping the needy rather than withdrawing from them in contempt is a positive approach to eliminating pride. Micah spoke of the same remedy for pride when he said, “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

Through the process of humility the once proud Nebuchadnezzar had become one with his Maker. He definitely didn’t seem to have any immediate complaints about what he had experienced, only thanksgiving. We can be sure he won’t have any complaints when the realities of eternity break upon him. Neither will any who put their trust in Jesus.

# The Unsealing of Daniel

Study Number 5



As the story of the book of Daniel unfolds to chapter 4, we find Nebuchadnezzar fully confident in himself, his kingdom and his gods. After all, he was introduced as the one who “besieged” Jerusalem, taking God’s people captive (see Daniel 1:1). He is described as ruler over all nations, whose dominion stretches “to the end of the earth” (Daniel 4:22). He is the great leader and builder of Babylon’s power. The gods he worships are obviously stronger than any other.

If God’s purposes are to be carried out, and if Nebuchadnezzar and his subjects are to be drawn to do more than just acknowledge the only true God of heaven and earth, something drastic is going to have to happen, something that will shake Nebuchadnezzar’s entire confidence in the wisdom and superiority of Babylon. And that is exactly what Daniel 4 is all about!

Chapter 4 also speaks to each of us today. There is always something in our lives that seeks to push its way to the front and occupy first place, God’s place. Whether it’s a job, material possessions, other people, or some talent, there is a little of Nebuchadnezzar in each of us. The Bible portrays our true position in the words of king David, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14). There is nothing we have, or ever will have, for which we can say, “See, this is what I have done. This originates with me.” All we possess comes from God, whether talent, wealth, intellect, genius, or whatever it may be, all good things come from God. And when we are swallowed up in the diversions of earthly pride, it is the unpleasant job of a God of love to do whatever He can to wake us up to the reality of His plan to save us (see Ephesians 5:13-14; Revelation 3:19).

### A Radical Change

Daniel 4 opens with some incredible words from King Nebuchadnezzar, words that make obvious the radical change which has taken place in his heart.

“Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 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” (Daniel 4:1-3).

It is interesting that this chapter of Daniel was actually written by Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that he was once the despotic ruler of a heathen nation, one of “the

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basest of men,” now turned Bible writer, speaks plenty of the grace of God. Nebuchadnezzar is only one name among many recorded, not to mention the countless millions of names not recorded, whom the grace of God has turned from sin to righteousness. That leaves each one of us plenty of hope.

## Another Dream

Why is Nebuchadnezzar now praising the God of heaven rather than the idols of Marduk? Let’s hear his conversion testimony from the beginning:

“I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof” (Daniel 4:4-9).

Did you notice the language of these last few paragraphs? It is almost identical to Nebuchadnezzar’s experience in chapter 2. He has a dream upon his bed. The dream troubles him. He cannot understand the dream, though he feels it is important. All the wise men of the kingdom are called in to make known the interpretation of the dream, but they cannot help the king. Finally Daniel is called in.

God is bringing Nebuchadnezzar right back to his chapter 2 experience. The king seems to have forgotten how impressed he was with the God of gods (see Daniel 2:47). Now the God of heaven is bringing the king full circle. He does that in our lives sometimes (see Numbers 22). When we forget how God has revealed His will to us in the past, he reminds us in the present. But if we persist in sin, choosing to turn from His love and grace, He will eventually honor our free choice (see Numbers 22:20-35).

At this point Nebuchadnezzar’s new dream is probably bringing back memories of the past. Perhaps the king’s conscience begins to impress upon him how he has failed to acknowledge what God was trying to tell him. He may have sensed that he had a date with Daniel and Daniel’s God.

Notice that he is not as upset with the wise men of his kingdom for not interpreting the second dream. He issues no decrees threatening them to be cut asunder. It is likely he never really expected them to be able to interpret this second dream. He may have called the magicians and astrologers in first, hoping against hope that he would not need to call on Daniel again.

Since his first dream, the king’s loyalty to his profession of faith in God has been somewhat weak. He knows Daniel’s God is the true God, but his failure to honor Him leads the king to avoid those who truly serve and obey Him. “But at the last” he calls for Daniel. He knows Daniel can give him the interpretation; he knew it all along. Daniel will tell him all, and perhaps that is why Nebuchadnezzar calls upon him last. All is sometimes too much to bear for those who are not doing what they know to be right.

The Bible teaches that “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:17-20).

Nebuchadnezzar is caught between a rock and a hard place. More than anything else he wants to understand this dream. He senses its importance as it relates to himself. Yet his conscience knows that the knowledge that comes from Daniel’s God brings responsibility; it calls us to move away from darkness and obey the light (see 1 John 1:7).

## A Mighty Tree

At last Nebuchadnezzar is face to face with Daniel. In a sense of relief, coupled with a degree of anxiety, he shares his strange dream with this servant of God.

“Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts



in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man’s, and let a beast’s heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee” (Daniel 4:10-18).

Now we can really see that God is bringing Nebuchadnezzar over the same ground as in chapter 2. There is one point, one important truth, that must have been impressed upon the king’s mind from the very inception of this dream. Before Daniel or any of the wise men were called to interpret what all of this meant, one message was clear. This dream was given to Nebuchadnezzar, “to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to *whomsoever He will*, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

In chapter 3 we found that Nebuchadnezzar did not like the idea of being replaced by other kingdoms. He sought to preserve his power by setting up an image all of gold and having every subordinate nation bow in allegiance to it. Thus he hoped to defy the decree of God. It didn’t work. God is ultimately in charge of the powers of this earth, which brings us to another important principle, namely, how to relate to the civil powers.

## Obeying Earthly Powers

The words are pretty clear here in Daniel. The God of heaven gives the kingdom of men to whomever He will. He gives it even to “the basest of men.” This does not make God responsible for the cruelty of such rulers. It was never God’s perfect will to allow evil men to exist, let alone to rule over others. It is our own disobedience, going all the way

back to the garden of Eden, that left a God of love with difficult options.

One of the chief points of this chapter is that God has ordained the earthly sword of justice. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” the Bible says, “For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Romans 13:1-9).

Notice that each “Thou shalt not” quoted by Paul applies to our relationships to fellow human beings. Our duty to civil power lies in loving our neighbors as ourselves.

At the same time, there is a counterbalancing principle enunciated in the Bible. It is the idea that “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). And it is true. Look at Daniel’s three friends who refused to bow before the image of gold. They obeyed God rather than the decree of men, though such decrees were mandated by the highest civil authority. Paul recognized this important principle. The thirteenth chapter of Romans encourages obedience to rulers and those in authority in the context of the last six commandments and any other that is encompassed in the command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” He is careful not to mention any of the first four commandments or their summation as given by Jesus to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). In other words, when it comes to the first four commandments, and how we worship God, our obedience to earthly rulers takes second place.

This is why the three Hebrew captives refused to bow to the image. To do so would be a violation of the second commandment. Attending the dedication violated no Bible principle. Thus, they were obligated to obey their earthly ruler as far as was possible while maintaining a conscience void of offense before God.

## The Interpretation

“Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong; for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be 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 is come upon my lord