

## **A Dream Not to Be Forgotten**

Daniel 4:9-18; Matthew 18:10

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Though King Nebuchadnezzar was not likely a true believer in Jehovah God, nevertheless, the Lord gave to him a dream that revealed God's great power over him and his kingdom, making very clear to the king what the Lord was going to do to him due to sinful pride in refusing to receive the Lord as His alone Savior, refusing to repent of his idolatry (and all sins), and refusing to own the Lord as the only true God and all other "gods" as no gods at all. And though this dream revealed that God would cast him from his throne and would lead him to insanity to behave like a cow in the field, it had no lasting impact upon him to bring about a truly repentant heart and life. The dream with its terrible affliction of insanity was thus fully realized because Nebuchadnezzar did not remember the dream from God nor did he repent of his wicked ways. God warned him in advance, and he did not heed that warning. May God deliver us from all such willful forgetfulness because we do not care.

The main points concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream are: (1) The King Beheld the Glory of the Great Tree (Daniel 4:9-12); (2) The King Beheld the Great Tree Cut to the Ground (Daniel 4:13-16); (3) The King Heard the Purpose of the Dream (Daniel 4:17-18).

### **I. The King Beheld the Glory of the Great Tree (Daniel 4:9-12).**

A. Daniel 4 is unique in that it is the personal testimony of a pagan king who did not listen to the warning God gave to him—stubbornness.

1. King Nebuchadnezzar describes how "the high God" used miraculous means to humble him and to reveal to him and through him to reveal to the world at that time (and in ages to come) that our God rules over all kingdoms, and He never ceases to govern all rulers and kingdoms with absolute power and sovereignty (Daniel 4:1-3).

2. Toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he was given a fearful dream which he remembered this time, but which he could not interpret (Daniel 4:4-5). He called for his wise men (Daniel 4:6-7), whose worldly wisdom failed to interpret the king's dream (just as they did in the first dream in Daniel 2), "but at the last Daniel came in before me" (Daniel 4:8). The king confessed that Daniel was unique and extraordinary because in him dwelt "the spirit of the holy gods" (Daniel 4:8). This may also be translated "the spirit of the holy God" (Genesis 1:27), which seems more likely because of the use of the word "holy" to describe God (which the pagans did not use to describe their gods). The king was willing to acknowledge the holy God, but he was not willing to forsake all of his own gods and worship the holy God alone (Daniel 4:8—that may also be true of many who attend church services each week).

B. King Nebuchadnezzar seems to recognize that what makes Daniel so different from all of the other wise men of Babylon is the presence of the Spirit of the holy God in Daniel's life (Daniel 4:9).

1. Daniel's wisdom (not his mere knowledge) was what made him useful in God's kingdom (as it did with Solomon, 2 Chronicles 1:7-10). Daniel was placed over all of the wise men (Daniel 2:48).

2. The reason that dreams are not a secret to Daniel and do not trouble him is because the God of Daniel knows all things and nothing is hid to him. Though the king does honor Daniel here, he also confesses that it is Daniel's God that is working in and through him (as Daniel himself also confessed, Daniel 2:26-28).

C. In this dream the king is shown a great tree in the earth.

1. It is an extraordinary tree, for there is no other tree in the earth that is mentioned

except this one (it is not among a forest of trees).

2. Scripture uses the language of a tree to represent a mighty ruler or kingdom (Ezekiel 31:3-6—the Assyrian king; Matthew 13:31-32—mustard seed). Even ancient poets of old used the tree as a symbol of a king/kingdom. This may be why the king was fearful (Daniel 4:5)—he saw something in it that spoke of him.

3. This enormous tree reaches into heaven (i.e. to the clouds in the sky above). The tree was beheld in all of the earth. This represents the unique greatness of Nebuchadnezzar in all of the earth at that time—there was none like him at that time.

4. The leaves on the tree were green and healthy, and there was much fruit produced by the tree to feed the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field. There was shelter for all because of the great branches that reached out from the tree. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was so great that many nations were brought under his dominion to find provision and safety from enemies (the same is true in Ezekiel 31 and Matthew 13—the fowls of the air and beasts of the field represent kings and kingdoms). This part of the dream was not what was fearful to the king; it was the next part that terrified the king.

## **II. The King Beheld the Great Tree Cut to the Ground (Daniel 4:13-16).**

A. In the judgment part of this dream, Nebuchadnezzar hears and sees the cutting down of the tree by a “watcher” (Daniel 4:13—watchers in Daniel 4:17). Who is this watcher?

1. A “watcher” describes an angel who continually watches over the providential works of God in the universe—watching without slumber, fatigue, or need of rest. A watcher is not a mere observer, but is vigilant and watchful to carry out God's mighty works by God's power (not their own inherent power) in ministering to God's people (Genesis 19—two angels rescue Lot; Daniel 6—lion's den; Acts 12:7,23—rescues Peter and slays Herod; Hebrews 1:14) and in judging God's enemies (2 Chronicles 32:21—slays the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem; Revelation 8:6—trumpet judgments; Revelation 16:1—vial judgments). Paul even states that God's angels come at times disguised in ministering to the saints, and because that is the case we are to be hospitable to strangers along the way (Hebrews 13:2).

2. This truth is for our encouragement that we have guardian angels that God sends to watch over us (Matthew 18:10) and to judge His enemies (even a host of angels—as with Elisha in 2 Kings 6). How many times, dear child of God, have our guardian angels preserved and protected us and our children from so many dangers? Countless times! I dare say that they are even now with us in the assembly of the saints (1 Corinthians 11—they observe the order/disorder in worship). They are not omniscient. They are not omnipresent. They are not almighty. They were created before man was created to serve God (Satan's fall was after creation week—everything was very good). They are swift to do God will (“Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven”). They are not to be worshipped or prayed to (the Apostle John learned that lesson twice, Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:8-9). There is an orderly arrangement of authority among the angels—a chain of command (Ephesians 1:20-21; Ephesians 6:12).

3. The watcher and the watchers are described as “holy” or “holy ones”. Just as God was previously described as holy (Daniel 4:8,9), so these agents of judgment against the great tree are “holy”. Absolute, infinite holiness and moral purity is uniquely an attribute of God alone. Only He is inherently and absolutely holy. He never acts in an unholy way. All His acts of mercy and love are holy, but also all His acts of judgment are holy and therefore good (this is where we go when we don't understand what God is doing—He is holy). But God imparts a creaturely holiness to the elect angels (who are confirmed therein and cannot fall) and to believers (saints—holy ones—set apart to God). Dear ones, holiness is not a bad word. It doesn't take away true joy or pleasure. It actually bestows true joy and pleasure. Growing in holiness is growing in Christ. If we don't want to be holy, why would we want to go to heaven?

B. Nebuchadnezzar sees one watcher (or watching angel) descend from heaven who orders other

watchers to cut down the great tree (Daniel 4:13-14,17)—the text implies a chain of command.

1. After the great tree falls, the branches, the leaves, and the fruit are stripped away from the tree. The fowls of the air and the beasts of the field are commanded to flee from the fallen tree (Daniel 4:13-14).

2. The great tree is not uprooted so that it cannot return to its original state, but is rather cut down to a stump with a portion of the tree still exposed and the roots of the tree still in place under the ground (Daniel 4:15). A band of iron and brass is set around the stump (like a fence) to protect it for its return to its original state.

3. Beginning at Daniel 4:15-16, there is a shift away from the description of the great tree to the personalizing of who the great tree represents (“let his portion be with the beasts of the field, etc.”).

4. If God is not sovereign over man’s will, how do we explain Nebuchadnezzar’s heart or understanding being turned from a man’s heart to a beast’s heart? Did Nebuchadnezzar choose to have this done or was it done to him? Likewise, the heart of mankind is in rebellion against God and is dead in trespasses and sins due to the fall of man in Adam. For all who come to Christ in faith, God must first work in the mind, affections, and will of man in giving us a new heart before we will ever come to Christ in faith (John 1:13). Man’s will is not sovereign—God’s will is sovereign. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, it was the reverse process—from the heart of a man to the heart of a beast. This truth is so important for all glory belongs to God, not to man in salvation. Moreover, by this truth we learn that it is not our job to change anyone’s heart—it is God’s. We are simply a means God uses through our words and deeds.

5. How long was Nebuchadnezzar to be in this state of insanity? We read, “and let seven times [literally] pass over him” (Daniel 4:16). This most likely was a period of seven years (Daniel 7:25; Daniel 12:7; Revelation 12:14>Revelation 11:2—42 prophetic months).

### **III. The King Heard the Purpose of the Dream (Daniel 4:17-18).**

A. The watcher explains that the purpose and intent of this dream (and its fulfillment) is given in order to teach proud Nebuchadnezzar that it is not he that reigns and sustains his dominion, but is the Most High God that is absolutely sovereign. And the Lord would not only give him a dream to make that point, but would bring it to pass. All rulers need to hear this truth (whether in the family, church, or state). We who have rule are to be God’s ministers (servants) to the good of others. Those who have not learned to obey and submit to authority presently are entirely unfit to govern others. If we cannot control ourselves, how can we control others?

B. The king’s wise men that also worshipped his false god (Bel Marduk) all failed in interpreting the dream. They did not even presume to take a stab at it (knowing the consequences when Daniel provided the true interpretation). Again, the king declares that Daniel was alone able to interpret the dream because the Spirit of the holy God was in him.

C. We often forget the truths that God has mercifully taught us in the past (as did King Nebuchadnezzar). It may not be through a dream that God has mercifully taught us, but through His Word (through our own study, through parents, through preaching/teaching, and through the hard lessons in the School of Christ). Because we are forgetful or because we never learned the lesson that Jesus designed that we learn due to our own self-will and stubbornness, He (out of love to conform us to His moral likeness) will take us through even further painful experiences to humble us that we no longer walk in forgetfulness or rebellion against Him. God revealed this dream to Nebuchadnezzar to display His own sovereignty, but also to show the king mercy to repent before this happened. Dear ones, let us all willingly learn the easy way by way of God’s Word and examples of others, rather than having to learn the hard way by way of experiencing God’s severe chastening. Don’t despair. Even when we have had to learn by more severe discipline, the Lord in

mercy is assuring us through it all that He loves us as His dear children and will not allow us to remain in our rebellion if we truly belong to Him. He is conforming us to His holy image. We who are His beloved children will not regret it, but will praise Him for it.

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