

## The Book of Daniel

### I. Comment and Commentary on the Book.

#### Part One: The Ministry of Daniel (and friends) in Babylon (1:1-6:28)

- A. The Emergence of Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court, 1:1-21
- B. The First Perplexing Dream of Nebuchadnezzar, 2:1-49
- C. The Protective Mercies of God-followers in Exile, 3:1-30
- D. The Testimony through Humbling of a Mighty Conqueror, 4:1-37

**Chapter Lesson:** Pride and arrogance are destructive for all of us from the teacher to a king. We must remind ourselves of the lyrics of an of hymn: "Naught have begotten but what I received grace has bestowed it since I have believed. Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I'm only a sinner saved by grace." Position is a privilege; it is not evidence of superiority or worth.

#### General observations

- This chapter records Nebuchadnezzar's second dream and his third encounter with "the Most High God."
- Information within the account suggests that it occurred later in his reign: his massive building projects seem completed for his admiration of such and himself (4:3), and his empire appeared to have been at peace (4:4). For reason's explained below, it seems to have taken place about 571, sometime about his thirty-fourth year of his reign and thirty years after the events of the previous chapter.
- It is the only chapter in the Bible composed under the authority of a pagan, the chapter being the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar.
- The chapter is composed of poetry (vv. 1-3, 34-37), narrative (vv. 4-7, 10-17, 20-26, 28-33), and dialogue (vv. 8-9, 18-19, 27).

1. Introduction: The King's testimony, vv. 1-3
  - a. Nebuchadnezzar's salutation, v. 1  
It is typical of monarchs in this time-period to address nations, suggestive of their supremacy.
  - b. Nebuchadnezzar's purpose, v. 2  
He desired to tell the world of the greatness of the God, "the Most High," that he experienced through the disease that he suffered.
  - c. Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement, v. 3  
The king praises the "Most High" for His power and that His kingdom is eternal. He learned through the experience he subsequently describes that neither he nor the gods He worshipped is the sovereign Lord. No longer would he erect a ninety-foot statue of himself and call for worship.

While the king witnessed a wonderful testimony to "the Most High God," one should not suppose that that He embraced the God of Israel. He later states that he named Daniel, Belteshazzar, ("after the name of my god" and "the spirit of the holy gods is in him" [v. 8, 9,18]).

2. The circumstance of the king's perplexing dream, vv. 4-7

This is the second dream narrative in the section: the first involved future events, here the issue is personal, tragic, and enlightening. Again, the magicians were unable to make sense of the dream though, unlike the previous dream, the king explained it to them.

3. The rehearsal of the dream, vv. 8-18

a. The coming of Daniel, vv. 8-9

It seems clear that Daniel was highly respected by the king for his ability to interpret dreams, which he attributes to “the spirit of the gods is in you....”

b. The disclosure to Daniel, vv. 10-18

1) A huge tree, vv. 10-12

The tree was not only tall; it could be observed worldwide. From its expansiveness and fruitfulness, it provided protection for mankind and animals.



2) A command for its destruction, vv. 13-15a

The command was given to remove the tree leaving only its stump, the animal life losing security.

3) The allusion that the “tree” is a person, vv. 15a-16

The tree is a person, one who rules over a vast field, and yet he will become like an animal in



the field. However, the duration of the devastation is defined as seven seasons or years (the length is left vague), but most scholars take it to be a literal seven turns of the seasons or seven years.

4) The reason for the dream, v. 17

The purpose of what will take place for this person is to teach the lesson of humility. It is a devastating reality check on the falsity of human delusions of grandeur. It is God who is sovereign, not mankind.

5) The request for the meaning of the dream, v. 18

4. The interpretation of the dream, vv. 19-27

a. The initial conversation, v. 19

1) The frightening realization of Daniel, v. 19a

Daniel seems shaken by the devastation that is to come upon the king.

2) The king’s encouragement, v. 19b

It seems that there was more than a professional relationship between the two, a warmth of mutual concern and care.

3) The consternation of Daniel, v. 19c

b. The meaning of the dream, vv. 20-27

1) The “tree:” Nebuchadnezzar, vv. 20-22

Specifically, the “tree” symbolized the king and his vast kingdom.

2) The cutting of the tree: dethronement, v. 23-27

a) The stump remaining: devastating exclusion, vv. 23-25

In the dream the “tree” was cut down by a messenger from heaven; the king would become animal-like and live among them. The affliction today is called boanthropy, Lycanthropy, or zoanthropy, a form of insanity in which the afflicted would think of

themselves a bull or oxen eating grass in the fields. The king's son, Amel-Marduk (or Evil-Marduk) ruled the nation during his father's illness.

It is interesting that archeologists have determined that after 590 there are very few celebratory, laudatory descriptions of Nebuchadnezzar and fewer references to the gods, only palace inscriptions.



- b) The stump and restoration, v. 26  
The king will be restored, the “stump,” to his empire and he will have learned the lesson of the dangers of pride and delusory grandeur.

- c) The advice of Daniel, v. 27

Daniel's advice is immediate repentance that might forestall the inevitable. By not following Daniel's advice, he was refusing to acknowledge God's sovereignty. *What Daniel is doing is encouraging the king to humble himself before he is humbled. The issue is not the salvation of the man because no one is saved by works (repentance does not save [that is a God thing], but we cannot be saved without it). The topic is the possible avoidance of temporal judgment. Writes Calvin, "...while admitting one supreme deity, imagine a multitude of others. So also, Nebuchadnezzar confessed Israel's God to be "Most High;" yet he did not correct the idolatry which still flourished under his sway; nay, he mingled and confused the false gods with the God of Israel."*

5. The fruition of the dream, vv. 28-33

- a. The immediate cause of the affliction, vv. 28-32

A year later mental catastrophe fell upon Nebuchadnezzar; the king being full of pride, unwilling to repent (“Is this not the great Babylon that I have built...”). The city was huge in size with a surrounding, deep moat and multiple walls for defense. The king had three palaces in the city and one of the so-called “wonders of the world of the Ancient World,” the Hanging Gardens.

- b. The confirmation from heaven, vv. 31-32

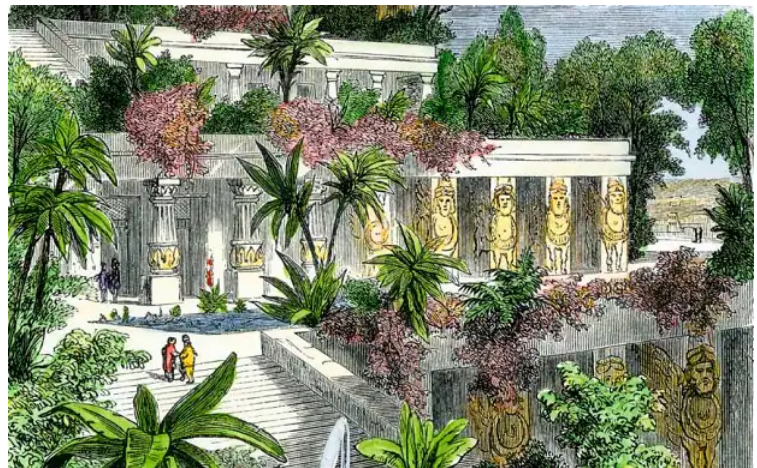
A voice from heaven announced the inevitability.

- c. The actualization of the confirmation, v. 33

The threat became a reality because the king was an egomaniac; he literally became animal-like!

6. Conclusion: The king's restoration testimony, vv. 34-37

- a. The account of the king's experience reverts to the first person; it is the personal testimony of a man who learned a lesson the hard way! The chapter begins and ends with the king's own words.



- b. The praise of the king, v. 34a

Seven years later, the king repented, and he recognized God's sovereignty, at least the power of Daniel's God ("then I praised the Most High and glorified him....").

- c. The content of the praise of the king, vv. 34b-35  
He praises God for his sovereignty and power, realizing that mankind is dependent upon Him and His actions are always right and just.
- d. The restoration of the king to his kingdom, v. 36  
Not only was the king restored to the throne, but his words reveal quite a change: "praising, exalting, and glorifying". He got the lesson: "...those who walk in pride, he is able humble." See also: Prov. 16:18.

#### Thoughts:

1. A proper self-image, confidence, and self-worth is one thing; pride is the opposite. It is a distort of these qualities manifested in self-exaltation and fantasy. It is the plague of American contemporary culture suggesting that self-esteem, the sovereign self, the illusion of personal power and sovereignty to fulfill of our own destinies. It is placing ourselves (our interests, our wants, our desires) as the end of life. It is boisterous, noisy, harmful, and sad. If we have, it is because it has been given. As a friend has commented: "We are all turtles on a fence post. We did not and could not put ourselves there, only God can do that." Accomplishment in life generally, family, or career should cause humbleness of attitude because it is a gift from a merciful and sovereign God. "No one can hold back his hand or say to him, 'What have you done' (v. 3)." Don't become like this king who was given so much but did not realize that it was all a gift!! Accomplishment is a call to humility and thankfulness!!!!
2. Does the realization that God is sovereign, as the potter who shapes the clay, lead you to rest in the fact that God appoints how we are to glorify Him in this life. The issue for us is not our status; it is our unmerited, even uncaused place in life. We did not choose to be born; we did not choose our parents; we did not choose the talent and opportunities that have come our way. Have you thanked God lately for the way He made you, flaws, and all? Pride, which is a cover-up to hide our insecurities preventing us from making the contribution He wants us to make and enjoy.
3. Is it not interesting that some of the most important lessons we have to learn come in the most adverse situations. We all want to avoid the pains, disappointments, tragedies of life and yet, in retrospect, we have been advantaged by them. This is not to minimize the reality of pain at all; it is that there are truths we could not have learned any other way. Is it not often the case, as instanced by Nebuchadnezzar, that insights seem to come the older we get?
4. When God in his great love and compassion increases your learning curve, it should be shared so that others can learn. Is this not one of the take-aways from this chapter?
5. Daniel gives us an important insight for those of us who live in "exile." Though surrounded by a hostile culture to his faith, he sought the best for it through care for people and the firmness of his faith-commitment. He appears to have deep concern for the monarch that in his youth took him from his family and nation.