

DANIEL

Week 12, chapter 4 continued

We've been exploring King Nebuchadnezzar's tree-dream in Daniel chapter 4 and will continue it today. Chapter 4 is rather unique as the entire chapter is narrated by Nebuchadnezzar himself. So we have an entire chapter of the bible that is the words of a non-believer. At the same time this fact makes properly understanding this chapter a challenge because what we have is the Lord giving a pagan king a divine prophetic dream. So the king is viewing the heavenly dream through the lens of his Babylonian theology and culture and common understanding of how the spiritual sphere operates. Thus he is quoted in chapter 4 using non-Hebrew theological terms like Holy Watcher in place of what is clearly a heavenly angel. The king receives a puzzling vision of a gigantic tree that is at the center of the earth, and this tree is the focal point of all earthly activity. It provides food, shelter, and security for all living creatures, human and animal. But then the visions suddenly shift to it being divinely ordered to be cut down (a vision that he instinctively knows is bad news, even if he can't quite figure out precisely what this bad news amounts to). His Babylonian god-doctrines also make him assume that it is the Holy Watcher (the angel) who is both the author of the dream and the one with the power to make its pronouncements come about.

The king calls for his royal Chaldean seers to tell him the meaning of this unsettling dream, and they can't. He next calls in the Jewish Daniel because the king understands that the same God that gave him the vision of the statue of 4 metals is no doubt the one responsible for the vision of the tall tree. And Daniel is intimately connected with this particular God.

Before we read some more of Daniel I want to back up for a minutes and discuss the issue of the geographical location of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream-tree, that is said to be planted at the center of the earth. The description of the tree was provided in Daniel 4 verses 7 – 9.

Daniel 4:7-9 CJB

⁷ Here are the visions I had in my head as I lay on my bed: I looked, and there before me was a tree at the center of the earth; it was very tall.

⁸ The tree grew and became strong until its crown reached the sky, and it could be seen from anywhere on earth.

⁹ Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant; it produced enough food for everyone. The wild animals enjoyed its shade, the birds in the air lived in its branches, and it gave food to every living creature.

From Nebuchadnezzar's viewpoint Babylon was the center of the world, because Babylon was the capital of the world's biggest empire. Coupled with God's statement to Daniel that He had given Nebuchadnezzar dominion over the entire earth, and that the Lord considered the king as His servant (and Daniel told the king that this was the case), it is clear that the king thoroughly embraced that thought. We have also seen that the king felt it necessary for every nation, tribe and tongue on earth to declare allegiance to his Babylonian one-world government, and that event occurred upon the dedication of the almost 10-story tall golden statue in Dura where every last person (without exception) was to bow down to it. These main story elements should set off alarm bells in our minds because they ought to have a familiar ring to them. It is in the Book of Revelation that we hear of a heathen one-world government, at the top of which is the Anti-Christ, and its capital is in Babylon. Some bible scholars and commentators say that Babylon is code for Rome, where the future one-world government will be headquartered. Perhaps. But I lean more towards accepting it literally and that the city of Babylon (which is in Iraq) will rise from the ashes and again become the seat of world-government and the center of world finance. Whatever is the case, I think many listening to me will live to see this come about.

While I cannot say it with 100% assurance, I do feel sufficiently confident to claim that our Daniel tree-dream narrative is at once true (it happened in the past in the mid 500's B.C.), but this it also a foreshadowing of an event that is future to Daniel and is still future to us. And at the same time it also serves as a good example of what is called an anti-type. An anti-type is something that mimics the pattern of the divine original, but its purpose is in opposition to the purpose of the divine original. Thus we have Christ and His anti-type, the Anti-Christ, whose

purpose is to oppose Christ. Whereas the divine type is made for good, the anti-type is made for evil. Thus it seems to me that the enormous dream-tree that turns out to represent Nebuchadnezzar (and by extension his kingdom) is an anti-type of Yeshua and His kingdom. And so at the center of this pagan gentile kingdom of Daniel 4 is a huge tree, symbolizing an anti-type that mimics another huge tree that is found at the center of God's kingdom: the divine Tree of Life.

Let's examine a few Scripture verses about the Tree of Life, starting with the first mention of it in Genesis.

Genesis 2:9-17 CJB

9 Out of the ground ADONAI, God, caused to grow every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river went out of 'Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided into four streams.

¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it winds throughout the land of Havilah, where there is gold.

¹² The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there.

¹³ The name of the second river is Gichon; it winds throughout the land of Kush.

¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it is the one that flows toward the east of Ashur. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ ***ADONAI, God, took the person and put him in the garden of 'Eden to cultivate and care for it.***

¹⁶ ***ADONAI, God, gave the person this order: "You may freely eat from every tree in the garden***

¹⁷ ***except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die."***

The Tree of life was at the center of the Garden of Eden, which itself was at the center of the earth. The tree provided good food for the world's first inhabitants, it was beautiful, and it was associated with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Notice how Nebuchadnezzar's dream tree was at the center of the earth, provided food for the world's inhabitants, was beautiful and it was located in Babylon on the Euphrates River not far from the Tigris.

CJB Revelation 22:1 *Next the angel showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

² ***Between the main street and the river was the Tree of Life producing twelve kinds of fruit, a different kind every month; and the leaves of the tree were for healing the nations-***

The future Tree of Life will be at the location of the earthly throne of God's Kingdom; Nebuchadnezzar's dream-tree is at the location of the earthly throne of the King of the heathen world. The leaves of the Tree of life were for the healing the nations, meaning gentile nations. The leaves of the dream-tree were for the benefit of the world's gentile nations.

But then consider this about the dream-tree that Daniel says represents the king, who represents Babylon: it is to be cut down and shall fall. We see a similar thing in the future in the End Times regarding Babylon.

Revelation 18:1-3 CJB

CJB Revelation 18:1 *After these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, the earth was lit up by his splendor.*

² *He cried out in a strong voice, "She has fallen! She has fallen! Bavel the Great! She has become a home for demons, a prison for every unclean spirit, a prison for every unclean, hated bird.*

³ *"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of God's fury caused by her whoring- yes, the kings of the earth went whoring with her, and from her unrestrained love of luxury the world's businessmen have grown rich."*

So the metaphor of the future Babylon "falling" is used and it even speaks of how Babylon will be a home for unclean birds. The one-world government, operated by a pagan king, will be cut down and fall and the entire world will see it. And we're told in Daniel 4:11 that the branches that at one time were a home for birds are no longer suitable for the birds' nests because all of the trees leaves will be stripped away.

Revelation 18:9-12 CJB

9 The kings of the earth who went whoring with her and shared her luxury will sob and wail over her when they see the smoke as she burns.

10 Standing at a distance, for fear of her torment, they will say, "Oh no! The great city! Babel, the mighty city! In a single hour your judgment has come!"

11 The world's businessmen weep and mourn over her, because no one is buying their merchandise any more-

12 stocks of gold and silver, gems and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, all rare woods, all ivory goods, all kinds of things made of scented wood, brass, iron and marble;

So just as for Nebuchadnezzar and his Kingdom of Babylon, when it is merrily humming along and everything seems to be going well this dream tree that is the source of false life and false prosperity and false security for the world will be divinely cut down; so will it come as a great and terrifying shock when in the future Babylon falls again just when everything seems to be going great. Babylon will arise again as the pagan, gentile center of the world. It will be the center of human government and the center of wealth and commerce. In the tree-dream we get a pattern or a type that will be repeated in the latter days that are just ahead of us. But, the city of Babylon itself is also an anti-type to Jerusalem because whereas Babylon is the secular humanist capital of the world, the economic and the one-world human government capital of the world, Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the world, the redemption capital of the world, and the capital of God's Kingdom on earth where our Messiah shall reign forever!

So now we see some of the connections between Daniel and our future, which is expressed in events of the past. And we see how the Book of Revelation is dependent upon, and

interconnected with, the Book of Daniel not only for its prophetic revelations, but also for its prophetic imagery and symbolism.

Let's read some more of Daniel 4.

RE-READ DANIEL CHAPTER 4: 20 – end

We learn that since the dream tree was Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom, then the remaining tree stump represents the still-living but diminished Kingdom of Babylon and is also a remnant of the king's rule. And this is why in earlier verses the tree stump was called "he" and "his". But then in verse 21 we find that the means of the King's fall is that he will be driven from human society and will take on the nature of a beast of the fields. He will live like an ox, eating grass, being drenched with rain, and this will go on for 7 units of time; but we're not told what unit of time is contemplated. Is each unit a year, a month, a season? We don't know. But the king will remain in this diminished capacity, with the mind and nature of an animal, until he learns that the Most High (the *illay*) rules over the entire human kingdom (so this is not speaking to the animal kingdom or the plant kingdom) and the Most High will give dominion over it to whomever He pleases.

Notice that the NAME of the *illay* (the Most High) is again left out. Nebuchadnezzar is quoting Daniel, here, and either this is precisely what Daniel said (the most likely) or it is how Nebuchadnezzar heard it (that is, through the filtering lens of his pagan worldview). So at this point as the king listens to Daniel, he can continue making his own determination as to exactly which god it is that occupies the position of the Most High. What we will see as time goes on, however, is that as much as the king respects Daniel's god, he still doesn't understand Yehoveh's attributes or know acknowledge His name.

Verse 24 has created all sorts of problems in centuries past, and the residue of those problems still clogs the arteries of many doctrines within the modern institutional church. The problem is that when Daniel says that if the king is wise he will stop sinning and instead do acts of charity; and stop with his crimes and instead show mercy to the poor, some are convinced that Daniel is preaching an Old Testament work-your-way-to-salvation doctrine (which, by the way, is an oxymoron because there is no such doctrine in the bible). And that reasoning comes mainly because of what seems like an intentional mistranslation used in the Septuagint (the Greek bible version).

Here is the Septuagint translation:

LXE Daniel 4:27 *Therefore, O king, let my counsel please thee, and atone for thy sins by alms, and thine iniquities by compassion on the poor: it may be God will be long-suffering to thy trespasses.*

Did you catch the mistranslation? Here it implies that the king's sins may be **atoned for** by giving alms and by showing compassion to the poor. And if the king does this then God will be patient and look away from the king's past sins. The Vulgate (the Latin bible), many early church fathers, Theodotion, and a number of Rabbis therefore translate this passage to read: "redeem your sins by well-doing; buy freedom from your sins with charity". And what this gives us is a works-righteousness meaning that is hung around the necks of the Jews and the Hebrew bible.

However the Aramaic original uses the word **peraq**, which means to break away from, or to tear away from, your sins. It in no way means to atone or redeem for sins. So the idea is to quit sinning and instead to be charitable and kind, but not that doing so is HOW the king might atone or be redeemed for his trespasses against God.

Even so, the concept of God judging mankind according to our deeds is front and center; but also is the idea that if we repent from our sins the just punishment due us for those sins might be averted, even if only for a time. And this is not a new concept found only in the Book of Daniel.

Listen to the Word of the Lord as given to the Prophet Jeremiah that precisely deals with this concept.

Jeremiah 18:5-11 CJB

⁵ *Then the word of ADONAI came to me:*

⁶ *"House of Isra'el, can't I deal with you as the potter deals with his clay?- says ADONAI. Look! You, house of Isra'el, are the same in my hand as the clay in the potter's hand.*

⁷ *At one time, I may speak about uprooting, breaking down and destroying a nation or kingdom;*

⁸ *but if that nation turns from their evil, which prompted me to speak against it, then I relent concerning the disaster I had planned to inflict on it.*

⁹ *Similarly, at another time, I may speak about building and planting a nation or kingdom;*

¹⁰ *but if it behaves wickedly from my perspective and doesn't listen to what I say, then I change my mind and don't do the good I said I would do that would have helped it.*

¹¹ *"So now, tell the people of Y'hudah and those living in Yerushalayim that this is what ADONAI says: 'I am designing disaster for you, working out my plan against you. Turn, each of you, from his evil ways; improve your conduct and actions.'*

Here is another famous example that speaks to this issue of turning from our sins, doing what is right, and the Lord possibly relenting on the judgment He had decided upon us.

Jonah 3:1-10 CJB

CJB *Jonah 3:1 The word of ADONAI came to Yonah a second time:*

² *"Set out for the great city of Ninveh, and proclaim to it the message I will give you."*

³ *So Yonah set out and went to Ninveh, as ADONAI had said. Now Ninveh was such a large city that it took three days just to cross it.*

⁴ *Yonah began his entry into the city and had finished only his first day of proclaiming, 'In forty days Ninveh will be overthrown,'*

⁵ *when the people of Ninveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least.*

⁶ *When the news reached the king of Ninveh, he got up from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes.*

⁷ *He then had this proclamation made throughout Ninveh: "By decree of the king and his nobles, no person or animal, herd or flock, is to put anything in his mouth; they are neither to eat nor drink water.*

⁸ They must be covered with sackcloth, both people and animals; and they are to cry out to God with all their might- let each of them turn from his evil way and from the violence they practice.

⁹ Who knows? Maybe God will change his mind, relent and turn from his fierce anger; and then we won't perish."

¹⁰ When God saw by their deeds that they had turned from their evil way, he relented and did not bring on them the punishment he had threatened.

So if you want hope for a lost family member, your community, your nation that is redefining morality in a secular human way, maybe even your backslidden self, here it is. If you are a sinner, step 1: believe God (NOT believe IN God because James points out that even the demons do that). Step 2: sincerely repent and confess. And step 3: change your path and your ways. And then maybe, in His sovereign will, God will not punish you; or perhaps He will postpone it. But that is not for us to know or to choose. Rather, in faith we end our trespassing, do what is right in God's eyes, and let the chips fall where they may. Any other attitude on our part simply proves that we haven't sincerely repented and we sure don't trust God. Rather, what we are really seeking is only better circumstances for ourselves (a self-centered motive).

Verse 25 puts it bluntly: "All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar". But verses 26 and 27 explain WHY God's threatened judgment upon him happened. 12 months after hearing Daniel's prophetic message of judgment, tempered with a ray of hope if the king changed, Nebuchadnezzar had essentially decided to continue on in his same path. So one day he was walking on the rooftop of his lavish palace, and pride overcame him. There could be no more perfect illustration of one of Solomon's most apt proverbs than Nebuchadnezzar.

Proverbs 16:18 CJB ¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and arrogance before failure.

Looking admiringly upon the amazing metropolis that was Babylon, the king credited himself for it. Basking in the glory of the work of his own hands, his intelligence and his cunning, he complimented himself profusely for what lay before him. Essentially, he defied God in not such a different way that Nimrod did when he climbed up the Tower of Babel, shot an arrow towards

the heavens, and dared God to do anything about it. Well, in both cases, the Lord took up the challenge and the outcome was one-sided.

Verse 29 repeats the consequences of Nebuchadnezzar's hardness of heart towards Yehoveh, and verse 30 says that immediately the promised punishment happened. The question that begs is: exactly WHAT is it that actually happened to him? Did he turn into some type of animal? It is nearly unanimous that what is being described is mental illness; the king went mad. Some commentators go so far as to give a modern name to condition that the king suffered: Lycanthropy. It is a well-documented (but rare) type of mental illness whereby a person literally thinks of him or herself as being changed into an animal and so behaves like one. This sort of thing was documented as a medical condition by a Greek doctor in the 4th century A.D. Was this what happened to Nebuchadnezzar? Possibly, and from our 21st century vantage point it is the probably the best explanation.

Not surprisingly, the school of biblical criticism offers this matter as perhaps the best example in Daniel of its sheer fantasy. Another reason, they say, is because no other ancient writing has been found that corroborates the biblical claim of Nebuchadnezzar's sudden insanity. However is that really the case? Let's spend a few minutes with this to end today's lesson, because with some effort and research it's not that hard to reveal the secular human nonsense concerning the Book of Daniel that has sought for well over a century to disguise itself as intellectually honest Christian bible commentary.

The church father Eusebius, who was the Bishop of the Church in Caesarea Maritima (in the Holy Land), wrote a quotation in his famous work called "Preparations for the Gospel", which was taken from a fellow named Abydenus. Abydenus, a pagan, was a respected Greek Historian who is most known for his work titled "A History of the Chaldeans and the Assyrians", written late in the 2nd century. Here is what he says was known about Nebuchadnezzar and this incident of his sudden disappearance. Remember: this was Babylonian history he was citing, and not any biblical source.

"And afterwards, the Chaldeans say, he went up to his palace, and becoming possessed by some god or another he uttered the following speech: 'O men of Babylon, I Nebuchadnezzar here foretell you of the coming calamity, which neither Belus my ancestor nor Queen Beltis are able to persuade the Fates to avert. There will come a Persian Mule (this was referring to Cyrus), aided by the alliance of your won deities, and they will bring you into slavery. And the joint author will be a Mede, in whom the Assyrians glory. O would that before he gave up my citizens to some Charybdis (the name of a legendary sea monster), or the sea might swallow him up utterly out of sight;

or that turning in other directions he might be carried across the desert where there are neither cities nor foot of man, but where wild beasts have pasture and birds their haunts, that he might wander alone among rocks and ravines. And that, before he took such thoughts into his mind, I myself had found a better end.' He (Nebuchadnezzar) after uttering this prediction immediately disappeared".

Insanity was described in ancient times as possession by a god or demon. Thus His disappearance is not meant to describe a magic trick, but rather that he retreated entirely from public view. And in this case no doubt he was hidden away from the Babylonian citizens due to his mental illness and bizarre behavior.

The Babylonian writer Berossus, a priest of Marduk, wrote in the 3rd century that Nebuchadnezzar fell ill, and this eventually led to his death after 43 years on the throne. As a number of scholars have pointed out, the cause of death in almost everyone was eventually dying of illness, so there is no point in mentioning getting sick and dying. Thus to speak of Nebuchadnezzar's illness meant that something serious and out of the ordinary had occurred.

Interestingly we also find out according to the Uruk King list of Babylonian and later kings of the region, which was discovered by archeologists about 100 years ago, some oddities and seeming inconsistencies with the way Nebuchadnezzar's descendants are listed. We'll discuss this more to begin chapter 5, but the bottom line is that sometimes the numbers of the years of reigning don't add up. And when that happens (whether in the bible or in other ancient documents), it is almost always because there was a co-regency occurring for a period of time. That is, a king and his heir ruled together, simultaneously, for any number of reasons. This was not at all unusual. We saw it with David and Solomon for instance.

So there is every reason to accept that Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach, ruled for a while as a co-regent with his father under a couple of different circumstances. First, when Nebuchadnezzar went mad the king's son became the public face of the throne. And then next, after Nebuchadnezzar became well again, his son continued to rule with him as a co-regent because it would have been unthinkable to demote Evil-Merodach after having been the public face of the ruling family for that period of the king's infirmity. And later, of course, when Nebuchadnezzar died of old age his son became the sole ruler of Babylon. And if these reasonable suppositions are true, it also says that likely the period of the king's insanity was not 7 years, but perhaps 7 months or 7 seasons (meaning something closer to 2 years).

I want to close by saying that a spiritually caused mental illness that comes from extreme cases of pride, arrogance, and greed are presented in the bible (as with King Saul and Nebuchadnezzar), and we have seen it in modern times as well but political correctness doesn't usually allow us to label it for what it is. The incredibly wealthy and prideful Howard Hughes went utterly insane for no good physical reason that's been discovered. The greater his accomplishments, the greater his arrogance and pride grew, and the more strange and inward he became. He eventually withdrew himself entirely from public view and lived out his final days in a Las Vegas hotel room. In fact the description of his physical appearance is eerily similar to what is ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar as having his hair grow like eagle's feathers and his nails becoming like bird's claws. Then we have Bernie Madoff who stole billions of dollars of people's investments in a Ponzi scheme that ruined the lives of hundreds and hundreds of people, and those nearest to him say he seems to have no remorse whatsoever for what he's done. It is as though it never happened and he is completely divorced from his actions. Perhaps a psychologist would label him a Sociopath, but if that's the case that is a form of mental illness.

Next time we'll see that after the divinely appointed time of judgment comes to an end, the king regains his senses and resumes rule over his kingdom.