

Daniel 4:19-27 - The Meaning of the Kings' Dream

© 2008-2017 Tony Garland - contact@SpiritAndTruth.org

COURSE COMMENTARY



4:19 - Bad News

- [Troubling Thoughts](#)

Daniel was deeply disturbed by the dream, his concern was apparent to the king.

He hesitated to give the interpretation, even though he understood its meaning. Was Daniel fearful of reprisal?

Since we know Daniel to be a man of prayer (Dan. [6:10-11](#); [9:3-4](#), [17](#), [20-21](#)), he undoubtedly felt genuine concern for Nebuchadnezzar and regularly interceded with God on his behalf (Jer. [29:4-7](#) cf. Dan. [9:2](#)).

Concern for the king (and possibly, loss of favor for the Jewish captives should Nebuchadnezzar no longer be king).

Israel was one of the “beasts of the field” which “found shade under” the tree of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule (Dan. [4:10](#)).

4:20-22 - Tree is Nebuchadnezzar

- [Nebuchadnezzar Provided Shelter](#)

Daniel confirms Nebuchadnezzar’s suspicions that the dream has negative implications.

The tree which will be chopped down represents the king: “It is you, O King!”

4:23-25 - The Interpretation

- [Chop Down the Tree](#)

If Nebuchadnezzar remained on the same prideful path, him and his kingdom would experience a fate similar to that of Assyria and Egypt: his “tree” would be chopped down (Eze. [31:3-14](#)).

I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found (Ps. [37:35-36](#)).

- [Who are “They”?](#)

The question arises as to who “they” are? The royal court surrounding the king who isolated him during his time of mental illness?

Unlikely because “they” are also said to make him “eat grass” and “wet him with the dew of heaven.”

The verbal-phrase “they will make you” (also in Daniel 4:32) should be understood as an impersonal passive form: “you will be driven.”

- **Living Like a Beast**

“Beasts of the field” refers to domesticated animals, such as oxen and donkeys, not wild animals such as lions and tigers.

Nebuchadnezzar would live like behemoth (Job 40:15). See [Image of God or Beast?](#)

A promise of restoration: “until you know.”

- **The Most High Rules**

God’s rule is not only in the world above or in the world to come, but in **this world** : in the kingdom of men.

Daniel’s earlier interpretation of the king’s dream in chapter 2 revealed history will follow a divinely-established sequence of kingdoms.

The prideful inability of rulers to discern the hand of God in the events of their realms is not unique to Nebuchadnezzar: it will characterize Gog and the kings allied with the final Gentile ruler, the Beast (Eze. 38:3-4, 10-11; Rev. 17:17).

A Tree with Food for All



Nebuchadnezzar's dream: the fallen tree. "Ars Moriendi," Marseille - BM - ms. 0089 (f. 024v), 15th century. Image courtesy of culture.gouv.fr. Image is in the public domain.

4:26-27 - Daniel's Advice

- **Break off Your Sins**

Notice Daniel’s courage in giving this advice to the king!

The need of **all mankind** (Isa. 64:5-7; Rom. 3:10-18).

- **Righteousness Through Works?**

LXX: “**atone** for thy sins by alms, and thine iniquities by compassion on the poor”

TNK: “**redeem** your sins by beneficence and your iniquities by generosity to the poor.”

The phrase, “break off your sins,” can be literally translated as: “the sins of you in/with/by righteousness cease.”

The clear teaching of Scripture: no person is able to pay for the sins of any other, much less their own (Ps. 49:6-8).

Genuine repentance is **accompanied by action** (Mat. 3:8-10).

- **Importance of Righteous Rule**

Due to his influence, the king's behavior is especially important (Pr. [31:4-5](#); Jer. [22:1-3](#), [5](#); Eze. [45:9](#)).

The powerful should extend mercy to the less fortunate within society who are unable to fend for themselves. Righteous rulers recognize the common lot of humanity: that they themselves are no different before God than the poorest of the poor and as much in need of grace in God's sight.

- **God Desires Repentance**

"Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

When God predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah by Micah the prophet, King Hezekiah responded positively and God relented (Jer. [26:17-19](#)), even granting the king additional years to live (2K. [20:3-6](#)). Perhaps the most familiar case of God relenting from a threatened destruction is found in the account of Jonah and Nineveh (Jonah [3:5-10](#)).

God desires repentance and restoration over punishment.

Repentance must be genuine (Joel [2:13](#)).

God's merciful patience is demonstrated by His delaying a full year before bringing judgment upon the unrepentant king (Dan. [4:29](#)).