

Daniel 4:19-37

Today I hope we can complete the story of the Great Tree. To review, the chapter may be divided into the following parts:

- a. The King's Proclamation, vs 1-3.
- b. The Failure of the Wise Men, vs 4-7.
- c. Daniel is summoned, vs 8-9.
- d. The Dream, vs 10-18.
- e. The Interpretation, vs 19-27.
- f. The Dream's Fulfillment, vs 28-36.

The Interpretation, vs 19-27.

Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, 'Belteshazzar, don't be alarmed by the dream and what it means.' "Belteshazzar replied, 'I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you! ²⁰ The tree you saw was growing very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. ²¹ It had fresh green leaves and was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. ²² That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great, your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth. ²³ "Then you saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, "Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals of the field for seven periods of time." ²⁴ "This is what the dream means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king. ²⁵ You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses. ²⁶ But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules. ²⁷ "King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.'

Daniel now interprets the dream. This is a long passage, and we can further break it down as follows:

- a. Daniel's Reluctance, vs 19.
- b. The Meaning of the Tree, vs 20-22.
- c. The Decree and its Meaning, vs 23-26.
- d. The Solution, vs 27.

Daniel's Reluctance, vs 19.

Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, 'Belteshazzar, don't be alarmed by the dream and what it means.' "Belteshazzar replied, 'I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!

In verse 19 it is clear God had given Daniel the interpretation of the dream. He was initially stunned. The Aramaic word means to be appalled, astonished, overwhelmed. The ASV (American Standard Bible) translates this as he was *struck dumb*. Obviously, Neb could read the emotional distress in Daniel's countenance and tries to reassure him. Daniel then wishes the dream and its meaning on Neb's enemies and not on Neb himself.

The Meaning of the Tree, vs 20-22.

The tree you saw was growing very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see. ²¹ It had fresh green leaves and was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. ²² That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great, your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

In verses 20-22, Daniel explains to Neb the meaning of the tree. Note Daniel's integrity. What he has to say is not easy. Daniel has no clue what Neb's response will be. We all remember the phrase "don't kill the messenger," and I am sure a facsimile of that was running through Daniel's mind as he delivered God's message.

Note Daniel begins by recounting the tree Neb had described. It was tall and strong, with abundant fruit and provided shelter for all. Daniel then states the tree is Neb. Also note as the tree *was high into the heavens for the world to see* (vs 11, 20) and had *food for all* the world (vs 12, 21), Neb was given *rule to the ends of the earth*, although he never fully actualized the extent of what God had given him in his lifetime.

The Decree and its Meaning, vs 23-26.

Then you saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, "Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals of the field for seven periods of time."²⁴ "This is what the dream means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king. ²⁵ You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses. ²⁶ But the stump and roots of the

tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.

Vs 23: Then you saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, "Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals of the field for seven periods of time."

In verse 23, Neb sees a holy messenger from heaven. This is a reference to an angel who gives a decree against the tree. Note the tree is to be cut down but its stump and roots will remain. Then the verse makes a transition noting the tree is now a person to be drenched with dew and to live with the animals for seven periods of time.

Vs 24: This is what the dream means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king.

In verse 24, Daniel starts the interpretation. In verse 17 we noted the judgement against Neb was made by the angels (*For this has been decreed by the messengers it is commanded by the holy ones*), but here we see the originator of the decree was God Most High.

Vs 25: You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.

Verses 25 we note the judgement to come upon Neb. Note the following components:

- a. You will be driven from human society.
- b. You will live in the fields with the wild animals.
- c. You will eat grass.
- d. You will be drenched with dew.
- e. You will live like this for 7 periods of time.

The verse concludes with a declaration of the purpose of the judgement: *until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.*

Vs 26: But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.

Verse 26 gives the interpretation of the stump: that once Neb learned the lesson that God was sovereign over all the earth and gave the kingdoms of this world to whomever he chose, he would have his kingdom restored.

The Solution, vs 27.

Vs 27: King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.'

In verse 27 Daniel pleads with Neb to accept his advice which consists of two things,

- a. *Stop sinning and do what is right:* This phrase in the KJV is translated *break off thy sins by righteousness*. What Daniel is saying is Neb lacks righteousness. This is the message of the Bible to all of us. We are all sinners and lack righteousness to be right with God. It is only obtained by faith (Gen 15:6, Rm 4:1-13) This is the hardest hurdle to overcome for anyone to come to faith for we must admit our sinfulness before God before we can accept his gift of salvation.
- b. *Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor.* Here Daniel asks Neb to renounce his wickedness and demonstrate his righteousness by works that follow salvation, which is *to be merciful to the poor*.

The Dream's Fulfillment, vs 28-36.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³²You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." ³³Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. ³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" ³⁶At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

Vs 28: All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Neb did not heed Daniel's advice. This verse is a summary of all that is to follow.

Vs 29-30: Twelve months later he was taking a walk on the flat roof of the royal palace in Babylon. ³⁰As he looked out across the city, he said, 'Look at this great city of Babylon! By my

own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor.'

Here is a description of Neb's sin: we see the occasion in verse 29; he is walking on the roof of his palace surveying and admiring his great city. Note God gives Neb 12 months to repent!!!

Look at this great city of Babylon which I have built. Indeed, Babylon was a great city. Estimated to be roughly 15 miles square, it was home to 200K people at its peak. Though the Euphrates ran through it, it was surrounded by a moat and large earthen walls protecting it from its enemies. It had over 50 temples within it and was known for its hanging gardens, something Neb had built for his wife to remind her of her homeland which was mountainous.

Now note the end of vs 30: *by my own mighty power I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor.* The pride in Neb's heart now breaks through. Note the similarity to Is 14:13-14: *For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north.'*^[e] ¹⁴ *I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.*

Note also Eze 28:17a, *your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor.*

Vs 31-32a: *Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you.*

As the declaration of Neb's pride was still on his lips—judgement is given. *Your authority has been removed and you will live with the wild animals and will eat grass.* Now note Eze 28:17b, *So I threw you to the ground and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings.* God has a way of humbling us when pride becomes an overwhelming issue in our life.

Seven times is a reference to years. Seven is the number of completeness. Note creation is done in seven days. Neb would be judged for seven years and then his judgement would be complete. Note the purpose of the judgment in 32b:

32b: until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."

Neb will be judged until he admits God is sovereign and can give power and authority to rule over anyone he wishes. This seems like a long time to me as after seven hours I would have had enough. God is perfectly fair in his judgements, so Neb needed seven years to break his rebellious and prideful heart. This judgement most likely came towards the later part of Neb's

reign, after the conquest of Jerusalem and the construction of the city. As Neb was on the throne for 43 years, this event likely occurred between 585 and 562 BC.

Vs 33: Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

Judgement is now *immediately* executed. This is a good principle to remember for parents who are dealing with a prideful, willful child. Judgment for Neb is swift. We are not told many details, simply that Neb was *driven away from people and ate grass like an ox*. Two other details are given: he is *drenched with dew*, and his hair and nails grow –so he does not care for himself and lives like an animal. From verse 34 we see he had some form of mental illness which lasts seven years.

Vs 34a: After this time had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever.

Here is the statement of restoration. Note neb *looked up*. His eyes had been focused on the ground for 7 years, and now he looks up for God. The difference between man and beast is man's ability to discern the spiritual, and here Neb humbles himself and seeks God (Ps 19:1-2, *The heavens declare the Glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands, day by day they pour forth speech, night after night they reveal knowledge*). Note he recognizes he has been mentally ill-*my sanity returned*. And the first thing Neb does is to praise God. Now note the progression of belief:

Dan 1:17, To these four young men God gave knowledge an understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.

Dan 1:19, the king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Dan 2:47: Surely your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.

Dan 3:28, Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

Dan 34a, my sanity returned and I praised and worshipped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever.

Neb is finally humbled, and the lesson God had wanted him to learn from verse 32 (*until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes*) is now realized.

Vs 34b and 35: *His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal.* ³⁵ *All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, 'What do you mean by doing these things?'*

Neb then gives some descriptors of God in vs 34b and 35. Note the following:

- a. God's rule is everlasting, (Ps 90:2-3, *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* ³ *You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."*)
- b. He has eternal dominion, (Ps 145:13, *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.*)
- c. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing, (Is 40:17, *Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.*)
- d. He is sovereign over the heavenly realm, (Ps 115:3, *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*)
- e. He is sovereign over the earthly realm. (1 Chron 16:31, *Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!"*)
- f. No one can hold back his hand, (Job 9:12, *If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'*)
- g. And no one can question his will, (Is 45:9a, *"Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'*)

Vs 36: *At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.*

Vs 36 notes Neb's restoration to the throne. Gone for seven years, God allows Neb to return to power. In a world where ambition, intrigue, and the seeking of power was prevalent, God stayed his hand and kept everything in check for Neb to return fulfilling what Daniel had said in Dan 2:21, *He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others.* Also note God's blessing: *Neb became even greater than before.* (see Job 42:12).

Conclusion

God humbles the proud.

How to know you have a prideful attitude (from Alenn Parr Ministries)

- a. Assuming you already know something when someone is teaching
- b. Seeing yourself as too good to perform certain tasks
- c. Being too proud to ask for help
- d. Feeling the need to constantly correct people
- e. Talking about yourself
- f. Thinking you are better than those less fortunate (arrogance)
- g. Disregarding the advice of others
- h. Being constantly critical
- i. Consistent need for attention and affirmation
- j. Unable to receive constructive feedback
- k. Overly concerned with your physical appearance
- l. Unwilling to submit to authority
- m. Ignoring people's attempt to communicate with you
- n. Justifying a sin rather than confessing it
- o. Name dropping
- p. Ingratitude (from Leader care ministries)

God gives grace to the repentant.

God is gracious, yet the time for repentance is limited.

God is Sovereign over all the earth and gives power and rule to whom he chooses for His purposes.