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Daniel 4:1-18 "The Full Story of His Conversion  
(Part 1)" February 13, 2022

Let's open our Bibles to Daniel Chapter 4 this morning for our study.

Daniel was 15 years old when he, as well as 3,023 others according to Jeremiah 52, were taken in that first invasion by the Babylonians, who had just really come to world power, Nebuchadnezzar being the ruler of the world he began conquering, and Jerusalem was certainly on his list.

He brought a bunch of young kids to train. He put them in school there in Babylon for three years so that he could use them as emissaries between the captive people that he anticipated would come, and his government, if you will. Daniel and the three boys that we're introduced to in Daniel's book were trained for three years about the culture, the language, the ways of the Babylonians. Their names were changed by the king. They were indoctrinated, if you will. Daniel took his stand there, you might remember, in Chapter 1 about the food that he as a good Jew would eat, and what he hoped he wouldn't have to eat, with a test, with God's help they were able to stand fast. When after three years the examinations, the oral exams were given by the king, they were the best at what they did, and so they were promoted, and God had His men planted in the government, the world government, the Babylonians.

Three years later in Chapter 2, God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a dream. He didn't remember it. He certainly didn't know what it meant. His magicians failed him. He wanted to have them killed, but Daniel stood up and said, "No, no. I'll tell what you've dreamt and what it means. My God is able." As you read the chapter, you realize that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a picture of a vision of a statue, if you will, an image. He was the head of gold. He was the first, or at least from that time forward, the first of the world kingdoms. There had been two others. Then proceeding down this body of this image, the kingdoms that would follow, all the way to the kingdom of the antichrist and then the return of Jesus Christ. That Nebuchadnezzar was told, "You are a world

leader, but your kingdom is not going to last. It's going to have an end."

Well, 23 years after that, Chapter 3, 581 BC, Daniel's away, but the three boys were in town when a more powerful Nebuchadnezzar introduces to the world and to his people a 90-foot-high image of gold. No longer worried about God's word that he's only a part of these world kingdoms, he believed he was the only one. Demand that people worship or die. You remember the story. We went over it about the three boys who decided they weren't bowing or bending, they certainly weren't going to burn. God took care of them. Again, another lesson to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, that he's not as powerful as he thinks that he is, but the God of Daniel and the others certainly was.

This morning in Chapter 4 we jump 20 more years ahead, eight of which is in the chapter itself. Daniel is now about 60 years old. He's been serving in captivity for 45 years. Nebuchadnezzar, historically, has absolutely overthrown the world. There was no one left to fight. There is no threat yet left to deal with. There's nothing for him to face.

Back in Chapter 1 he had taken some of the artifacts from the temple in Jerusalem and put them in the kingdom or the temple of his own gods, kind of mocked the God of the Jews. With passing time, he thought more and more of himself and less and less of the God of Israel. If you've read Ezekiel or Jeremiah, we kind of have gone through some of them just to look at the prophets, God gave to Nebuchadnezzar through these men plenty of warnings about how God allowed him to rule because he was the choice that God was going to use to punish His people, but then he would be responsible to the Lord for his behavior, that God would deal with him. It's been a lot of years, but God's about to deal with him in a big-time way here in Chapter 4, it's time for his pride to be shaken.

With all that God has put him through and showed him, that there's no permanent power, he continues to, as he grows older, be more self-confident and more assured of himself, that absolute power corrupting absolutely.

By the time we get to Chapter 4 here, Nebuchadnezzar is at the height of his success, God gives him his second dream. It is the first step in a very long process, seven-plus years, eight years now, where he was going to finally come out the other end and see that God was good, just, gracious, and most importantly, that the Lord rules in the kingdom of men.

Daniel Chapter 4 is an important chapter because it is written in Nebuchadnezzar's own hand. Daniel just was dictated to and he wrote it down. It's the only portion in your Bible that was written by a pagan gentile ruler to give his personal testimony. It is not written in Hebrew, like the rest of the Old Testament, it is written in Aramaic, it ends with a song of praise to the Lord and to the God that he had come to know.

I can't imagine the impact or how phenomenal it must have been for a fellow that is absolutely the world ruler, no one even close to threatening his power, who writes a tract about his own salvation, then demands that all of the nations of the earth read it. It must have been quite something. He writes about being king of the world. He writes about losing his mind for seven years, becoming like an animal, living in the fields, waking up with the dew of the grass upon him. He writes about the fact that he realized that after seven years, that the Lord was the only one that he could worship, that God would rule in the kingdom of men, that only his rule would last forever. But boy, this guy did not go easily into the good night.

He speaks about God how God changed his life, the peace that the Lord gave him, the joy that he found, the restoration that he had sought. He acknowledges the Lord. It's an absolutely amazing chapter because Nebuchadnezzar is one of the cruelest men in history. Just read about him secularly, you shake your head. But you have to say, look, if God can reach him, He can certainly reach everyone on your prayer list today. This guy was out there about as far as you can. God can even save politicians.

I am convinced that Daniel and the boys must have had Nebuchadnezzar at the top of their prayer list for decades, but I just can't imagine how they must have felt when they saw God was actually able to get through to this man's heart. It reminded me a lot of the centurion when Jesus was asked by him to come heal his servant, and the Lord said, "I'll just come to your house." The centurion said, "Lord, I'm not worthy that you come under my house." And he said that he was unworthy, that he could say to somebody "go" and they'd go, or "come" and they come, or "do this" and they do that. He said, "Lord, if you'll just say, if you speak the word, I know my servant will be healed." He recognized the Lord's authority over life.

That is really what Nebuchadnezzar's going to have to learn

too: God is in charge over our lives. It is, like I said, an incredible, I believe, chapter, just to recognize what God has done in his life.

One of the things that you always notice when people come in contact with the Lord really, like he would, is not only that He changes your life, but one of the things that changes immediately is you recognize His authority. It's something that you can't get away from. All of a sudden, He's the Lord and you're not. Right? More than anything else, you're on your face, and He's the Lord and you're not. Isaiah in Chapter 6 verse 5, when King Uzziah died, he said, "Woe, is me Lord." He saw the Lord high and lifted up. "Woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips. I come from a people like that as well; but my eyes have seen the King."

Peter, when he went fishing with the Lord there in Luke 5, he realized that that person in his boat was not only a good man or a good prophet, he was the Lord Himself, he fell on his face in the boat. "Depart from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man." He fell to his knees. "Lord, please." He recognized the authority of the Lord.

That old saying that if your religion hasn't changed you, maybe it's time to change your religion, that was what's going to happen to this king of the world. God was going to turn his life upside down and begin a work in it that would last forever.

You that have met the Lord and know Him should learn from this chapter, if nothing else, that your personal testimony about how God got to you, how He made Himself known to you is one of the most powerful tools that you have; that in your ministry there and mission to go reach the world with the gospel, that you have a journey with Christ that is unique. Now, you might think it's not as dramatic and this guy's, and I would agree, it probably is not. But that's not what happens, and that's not what matters. You should have a testimony. In fact, I would encourage you to work on your verbal testimony. Sit down, write it out, work on it, develop it, and use it. Let the Lord use you.

I remember going to my ten-year high school reunion with a friend in whose house I got saved, and he was very happy about introducing me to all of our high school buddies as Pastor Jack. He thought this was just hilarious, because I used to deal a lot of drugs. Let's just put it that way. And everybody came and talked to me for two minutes, and then they

ran away. They didn't want anything to do with me at all. But since then, half a dozen, almost ten guys that I know in my graduating class have gotten saved. There's a testimony. You have one. You should use it.

Well, this morning I just want to look at the first 18 verses of this chapter. I want to save the rest for next week. Kind of take it in two steps. But we will begin with the lesson that is repeated six times in this one chapter, in verse 3, and 17, and 25, and 32, and 34, and 35, where we read this: You have to learn that God rules in the kingdom of men.

Somehow the thing that we have to learn more than anything else in that authority structure is that God is in charge. He rules. He rules in our situation, He rules in our government. He rules. And by the time we get to the end of this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar will be saved in the Old Testament sense. I fully expect to meet him one day in heaven. I think you will as well.

Verse 1, Nebuchadnezzar's own writing, all of this written in Aramaic. "Nebuchadnezzar the king," he writes, "to all of the people, nations, and languages that are dwelling upon the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, His dominion is from generation to generation."

I can just see this going out on official Babylonian letterhead. The document of the spiritual autobiography of the king of the world, how he came to know the God of the universe, the Almighty God.

Notice he states the purpose for his writing in verse 2, the lessons that he had learned personally about the Lord that he was now having in verse 3. He sounds extremely different from the guy that you read about in Chapter 3, like in verses 13, 14, 15. If you try to defy me, what God is going to stand against me? Well, he's going to learn now. This man had been changed by the Lord.

Although this was a written decree sent to all of the world, I thought about how amazing would it be if a president would take the State of the Union address in front of the Congress, get on television, say loudly to everyone, "I have come to know the Lord personally. I was a tough guy, I had a lot of pride, I needed to be dealt with severely, to surrender my

life to Him, but He is God alone. He rules in the kingdom of men, He does whatever He wants. He's the Lord." What an impact that must have had on those who got this.

Notice, if you will, as we're reading this, it's all written in the first person. This is a personal testimony from a man whose life has been changed. Here's what I've learned, and here's how I learned it.

Verse 4, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, I was flourishing in my palace, when I had a dream which made me afraid, the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head began to trouble me."

Nebuchadnezzar, because he is now older in life and pretty much towards the end of his reign, has hit the good years. I mean, the word "flourish" means just that. It's an Aramaic word for green or growing, like a field, if you will. His life was at ease. He was on top. There was no one to bother him, no one to challenge him. He could sleep with great self-satisfaction, but unfortunately when he laid his head down, he had a dream that troubled him.

He had never lost a battle. Oh, there were skirmishes historically, but in the big picture he'd never lost any wars, if we put it that way. The world was officially at his feet. He would have been a hard man to reach; certainly, a hard man to terrify, to shake him, if you will, but for the second time in his life, as the Lord had done 40 years earlier in Chapter 2, his life is shaken. He's a slow learner for sure. He doesn't quite put it together.

Now there's been 20 more years that have passed, another 23 years prior to that other one, so it's been years, here's this defiant old ruler, if you will, full of himself and his ways, yet until this time he hasn't been listening to everything that the Lord had showed him: Daniel with the dream and here's what it means, head of gold, but you're never going to last forever; the kids getting thrown in the fire and just coming back out. I mean, he had plenty of reasons to go, Maybe I should pay attention. But he didn't pay attention, which ought to tell you that God can move your life and impress you and shake you and frighten you, make Himself known to you, and you can still walk away. This fellow sure did.

He has this next dream. This one he remembers, the one 40 years earlier he did not. He knew it was about him from what we read. It seemed ominous. It left him greatly afraid.

It's a strong word in Aramaic. He was shaken to the core. The most powerful, prideful man in the world knew that this was not good news.

I don't think I've ever had a dream from the Lord that was predictive or directive. Most of my wildest dreams are having a burrito after Wednesday night service and going to sleep. But I think it would be cool. I mean, I would be happy to hear one.

I was reading, as I was reading I thought to myself, how often does God give dreams to people in the Bible? I went to do some research, one of the things that I discovered is that most folks that were given dreams, kind of directive-predictive dreams from the Lord, were not given those dreams because they were special or spiritual. In fact, it seems to be just the opposite. Most of the time it was God needing to say something to them, even if their hearts weren't necessarily open to the Lord. Pharaoh had that dream about the seven fat cows and the seven skinny ones, you might remember. Laban had a dream in Genesis about God's dealing with him there at the well. The Midianites, as they were assaulting Israel, had a dream and a warning from the Lord. Pontius Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus and she came and shared it with him.

God now speaks to this powerful man, no more powerful upon the earth, in a dream to shake his life for the second time.

We read in verse 6, as he continues his testimony, "Therefore I issued a decree to bring all of the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of this dream. They brought in the magicians and astrologers, the Chaldeans," another word for Babylonians, "and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they didn't make known to me the interpretation. But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying: Belteshazzar, chief of magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation."

As before, back in Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar called out for the best the Babylonians had to offer; the magicians, the cultics, the stargazers. Back in Chapter 2 he disdained them for their phoniness and had ordered to kill them, had not Daniel intervened, because he realized that these guys were

more hustlers than they were truth.

You read this and you say to yourself 40 years later, why didn't he just call Daniel first? He certainly knows he's battling a thousand and God speaks to him. But it's interesting that spiritual blindness doesn't make you sensible, when you're under pressure in the world, you always reach for the familiar; not that it'll help you, but you're comfortable with that. He calls for the guys he's always kind of hung out with. Unfortunately, nothing had changed with him. In fact, back in Chapter 2, they'd made excuses. Now they're just going, "Yeah, we don't know." I think it's because they looked over their shoulder and went, "Yeah, Daniel's coming in next anyway. We're going to look like idiots. Just don't saying anything at all." Daniel had a tremendously good reputation, even better track record.

Nebuchadnezzar calls the religious guys who he tolerated and he was familiar with. Isn't that usually the way the world is? They turn to their familiar gods until it's life and death, then they usually go to you, because they realize the god that they serve can't give them any peace or any hope.

Finally, verse 8 and 9, they called Daniel. Again, the Lord is showing the king the difference between the God of Daniel and these false gods that the Babylonians bowed their hearts to. And the king was about to go from hopeless, fearful, to hopeful as he laid his eyes upon Daniel, remembered the years of faithfulness that Daniel had showed him.

I just want to point out to you that the words that you read here, "In you is the Spirit of the Holy God," is certainly not the way it is written in Aramaic. It literally says it is the Spirit of the holy god, small G, then plural. These are not words of faith, these are words of recognition that there's something different with Daniel, but he certainly isn't crying out to God, or Daniel's God, as the next eight years would unfold and show you. Needless to say, he did see there was a difference between this group and Daniel. Like I said, he was a slow learner.

He does in verse 8 tell us that one of the reasons he changed Daniel's name was to kind of, strip him of his identity and identify him with the gods of the Babylonians. It was that classic kind of psychological ploy.

I like the fact that as Daniel is led by the Lord to help this guy understand this dream, that for the first time in 45 years



Daniel is seeing that the Lord is cracking the armor of this very tough guy. I think it was Vance Havner who used to be the, chaplain for the Congress for years. He said that sometimes when he went to preach, he said he preached, what did he call them? time bombs. He said, "I preach to people and then ten years later it goes off." Well, 40 years later, it's about to go off here for Nebuchadnezzar.

I just point out to you in verse 8 and 9 his outlook upon Daniel was pagan in the sense that he had no spiritual really insight, but he did acknowledge the work in Daniel's life. In fact, in this chapter three times he will mention that Daniel has a different spirit, if you will, than everyone else. I like that, because it seems to me if you're going to go out to the world to be a witness, you shouldn't have to say to people, "I'm a Christian." They should just go, "They're Christians." Right? People should see that in us. Like I said, it was ignored by the king until he needed help, but the minute the wheels came off of his life, he went to Daniel.

I think it was Henry Stanley who found David Livingston in Africa, six months later Stanley got saved. And he said, "It wasn't because Livingston preached to me, because he never did." He said, "But he lived the kind of life and I watched him. I wanted to be like him, I wanted what he had." It's kind of like the rich young ruler watching Jesus. I want what you have. I would say that to you, because so often you walk out of the world and you wonder what the Lord is doing with you. Hey, the world's watching you, especially if they know you are saved. You're claiming a relationship with God. You don't have to say anything, but you're living in a fish bowl, man. People are looking for reasons to not believe you. But at the same time, they're hoping you're right, that they might follow with you.

Here in verse 9, Nebuchadnezzar's assessment of Daniel was that nothing secret would bother him. Though he didn't go to him first, he does seem to say, I trust in him the most.

I found that often that in the world, they just run to their friends and hang out with people, whoever believes like they do. The minute trouble is coming, they call the church. "Hey, could you pray for us?" Well, why you calling us? "Well, you guys, are church." They go to you when the trouble is overwhelming.

Daniel was known as a man who wasn't easily rattled, one that

could keep his eyes on the Lord, wasn't shaken by circumstances. I've watched you, Daniel. Help me out here.

Well, then he tells him this dream, verse 10. "These are the visions of my head while I was upon my bed: I was looking, behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew, became strong; its heights reached the heavens, and it could be seen to the end of the earth. Its leaves were lovely; its fruit abundant, in it was food for all. The beasts of the field would find shade under it, and the birds of the heavens dwelling in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. And I saw in the visions of my head while I was upon my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. And He cried aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree, cut off the branches, strip off the leaves and scatter the fruit. And let the beasts get out from under it, and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump and the roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. And let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and seven times may it pass over him. And this is the decision by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, He gives it to whomever He wants, and He can set over it even the lowest of men.' And this dream I, Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all of the wise men in my kingdom are not able to make known the interpretation; but you are able, because in you is the Spirit of the Holy Gods."

I love verse 13. He saw a watcher. Notice the word "watcher" there is singular. In verse 14 it is masculine, "he." In verse 17 it is the word plural, "watchers." I think it is accurate to believe that that is a picture of the Godhead, if you will. God watching over, His will to be made known, His desire to draw this wicked king to himself. God is knowing, God knows, God sees all. I think that's the point. God is seeing what you're going through here, Nebuchadnezzar, who you are.

I think it was Lewis Sperry Chafer, he is a commentator who wrote "Secret sins upon the earth are open scandals in heaven." I like that. It is something that God sees. When no one else is watching, He still is.

Well, notice in verse 14 that the watcher had a terrible announcement to make, the tree that was flourishing, that it had reached to the heavens, that could be seen from all over the world. Nebuchadnezzar understood he was this tree, or his kingdom certainly was; that he had been just the source of food, comfort and the animals found joy, all flesh found food. He had been that sustainer in many ways. But now comes this terrible announcement, this tree would be cut down. The stump would be preserved. It looked like the end, but it was not. Restoration could follow. He had said back in verse 4, "I'm flourishing in my palace. I am doing so well." But that was about to end.

First of all, verse 15, it, the tree, then to him. God begins to speak to this man he's going to be cut down. Here's the judgment: He's going to be given, verse 16, the heart of a beast. For seven times the word seven times is a word that is used a lot in prophecy to speak of years. You can find it twice, I think, in Chapter 7 of this book. Actually, three times. Then in Revelation 12 as well. For seven years, if you will, prophetically, you're going to be given the heart of an animal rather than a man. You're going to find yourself eating grass in the fields. You're going to lose your mind. There is a psychotic disorder, although it is rare, where people find themselves to think that they are animals rather than people, begin to act that out. This ruler of the world wasn't going to look too good for very long.

There are two, by the way, secular sources. I always like them, that you can go find the years of Nebuchadnezzar's illness. There was a Babylonian historian called **Barcebus** who wrote of it in his annals. There's a Greek historian, **Asidius**, who in 286 BC made reference to the king who had lost his mind for several years.

Here, the king of the world, the guy who's just so proud of himself, will be reduced to this psychotic behavior. He doesn't understand yet. He's just had a dream, but he feels this dream is not going to be very good for him.

Notice in the verse 17 that the decree was made by the Lord, the overseer, that the sentence was given that this was going to have to take place for these years in this man's life to really lose his mind, that he might come out the other side with this understanding that the Lord rules in the kingdom of men, that God will give the oversight of the world to whoever He wants, this isn't just going to be Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, you should read at the bottom there something very

important, verse 17, he will even give it to the basest of men, the lowest of men. In other words, sometimes God puts into power those who are just the worst. The decree was made. I think that's been proved out in government. But God decides. God rules.

Now, put yourself in Nebuchadnezzar's shoes. He's writing this in retrospect. In other words, he's gone through this seven-year period. In fact, he's going to have a year to digest this, then he's not going to listen, then he's going to have seven years of this punishment, if you will, or this horror in his life to come to the right conclusion. But he writes already looking back, God took me through this thing, as horrible as it was, that I might learn that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men; that God appoints human governments, that God oversees them all. Whether it is, the worst or the best; whether it is Pharaoh, or Herod the Great, or Antiochus Epiphanes, or Nebuchadnezzar, or Nero, or Hitler, or in modern times. I can't do that; it hardly means that God approves of their behavior. That's not a conclusion you can draw. But He reserves control of the appointment.

It really doesn't matter to you and I who God decides to place in power. We have the responsibility to submit to them as unto the Lord. It is a horribly difficult concept in our day of rebellion and anger about what we see, but God decides who will rule in the kingdom of men. He gives it to whoever He wants, sometimes it's the worst. He gives it to the worst. Why? Well, just go by your Bible. God used wicked rulers who punish those who are transgressors, to avenge his name being slandered, to purify His own. He does everything well.

What is your responsibility? He rules. Let's submit to Him. Unless we are told by our government to do something God expressly forbids, or we are kept by our government from doing something which God expressly demands, you have an obligation to serve, to honor, to obey.

Moses' parents saved their little boy from the Nile because the order was an offense to the Lord. The boys in Acts 4, when they were told no longer to preach in Jesus' name, went, "Yeah, I'm sorry, we're not going to be able to do that." The boys in the previous chapter, being told to bow down before an image, said, "We won't do that either." But even when defiance is necessary biblically, so is the willingness to accept the consequences of the defiance. It isn't thought, it's just do with me what you want. I can't do what you demand. Otherwise, we are to obey the Lord and the law,

whether you like those over you or not.

Verse 18, Nebuchadnezzar says, "This scared me. What does it mean? Daniel, can you help me? I don't understand."  
Next week we'll find out what it means.