

The Prophets

Lesson #39

Daniel 4:1-6:28

Outline

I. *The Life Of Daniel (1:1-6:28)*

- A. Nebuchadnezzar praises the Most High God (4:1-37).
 1. The vision narrated by Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-18).
 2. The vision interpreted by Daniel (4:19-27).
 3. The vision fulfilled by God (4:28-37).
- B. The writing on the wall (5:1-31).
 1. The profanation of the temple vessels (5:1-4).
 2. The handwriting on the wall (5:5-12).
 3. Daniel interprets the writing (5:13-28).
 4. Daniel's honor and Babylon's demise (5:29-31).
- C. Daniel in the lion's den (6:1-28).
 1. The conspiracy against Daniel (6:1-9).
 2. Daniel's detection and sentence (6:10-17).
 3. Daniel's deliverance and his foes' punishment (6:18-24).
 4. Darius's testimony to God's sovereignty (6:25-28).

Notes

Daniel 4:1-18

- This chapter is a kind of an official document, written by the king himself. It is the only chapter in the Bible composed under the authority of a pagan. The king narrates the humiliation of his own pride, perfectly illustrating the principles found in Job 33:14, 17.
- It was at a time of peace and prosperity that God sent this dream to the king, for this dream was really a divine warning to him that his sins were going to catch up with him at last.
- The king summoned his wise men, but they were unable to explain the dream. Remember their boast in chapter 2:4: "Show us the dream and we will explain it." The king did show them this dream but they could not explain it. The wise of the world make their boast of great wisdom, but they cannot understand or explain the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).
- There is a close resemblance between vs. 3 and Psalm 145:13. The word "flourishing" (lit., growing green) in the Hebrew may denote the luxuriant growth of a tree (Psalm 52:8). In view of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, this association may be significant. The portrayal of man in his pride as a lofty tree is an Old Testament symbol (Isaiah 2:12-13; 10:33-34; Ezekiel 17:1-10; 31:3-14; Amos 2:9).

- In a great twist of irony, Nebuchadnezzar had power, riches and glory, but he was unable to unlock the future. Although in his own eyes he had seemed to tower above the whole human race, he was so cast down that he was not even the last among mortals.
- In contrast to the other soothsayers in his court, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that Daniel was inspired by God (or the gods).
- Herodotus 7.19 relates a dream of Xerxes, who, ready to set out against Greece, "imagined himself crowned with olive, of which the branches spread all over the earth." In 1.108 Astyages the Mede dreamed "that a vine grew from his daughter's private parts and spread over Asia," pre-figuring the rise of Cyrus.

Daniel 4:19-27

- It was plain to Daniel that the message of the dream was a sobering one. Daniel wishes that the dream might be for the king's enemies. This wish clearly makes it known that the dream is unfavorable to Nebuchadnezzar.
- God had used the figure of a tree to picture a kingdom elsewhere (Ezekiel 31:1-18; Matthew 13:31-32). A tree is a good symbol of an earthly kingdom because it is rooted in the earth and depends on the earth for its food and stability. Babylon had become a great and powerful kingdom. However, it was not for Nebuchadnezzar to boast, because God had given him his throne and his kingdom.
- The metal restraint suggests a reversal of the treatment Nebuchadnezzar had given Israel (Jeremiah 28:14; 39:7; 52:11).
- God was working this way in the king's life to teach him humility. You will remember that in the king's "image dream" he was pictured as the head of gold; and in chapter 3, the king had made an entire image of gold to attract worship and praise to himself. God would show this proud monarch that he was actually a beast at heart.
- "The watcher and holy one" is never used anywhere else in the Bible of an angelic figure. However, this being must have been an angel of God, appointed to work in the kingdom of Babylon. Daniel 10:4-20 informs us that the angels are very active in the affairs of the nations of the world.

Daniel 4:28-37

- At vs. 28 there is a shift to third person narration. The first person is resumed again at vs. 34. The significance of this shift lies in the fact that during the time of illness Nebuchadnezzar was not "I."
- God gave Nebuchadnezzar a whole year to consider the warning and turn from his sins, but the king paid no heed. In fact, he became more and more proud of his achievements (Proverbs 29:1; Ecclesiastes 8:11). There came a day when judgment fell and the true beastly nature of the

king was revealed for all to see. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar's pride was on his lips as the Lord strikes him.

- Many scholars have diagnosed Nebuchadnezzar's illness as a form of *isania zoanthropica*, such as *boanthropy* or *lycanthropy*, where a human being thinks himself or herself as an ox or a wolf. The appropriateness of this affliction is noted by Fewell, who states, "A man who thinks he is like a god must become a beast to learn that he is only a human being."
- That Nebuchadnezzar could raise his eyes to heaven proves that he was still capable of response to God, despite his dementia. Looking toward heaven is an acknowledgment of God's superiority (Psalm 123:1). Nebuchadnezzar's song of praise is reminiscent of many Old Testament passages (Psalm 145:13; Isaiah 10:17; 24:21; 45:27).
- By divine grace the humiliated king's reason returned. His first response was to praise, honor and glorify God as the eternal, omnipotent Sovereign of the universe. Second, he honored him as the Ruler whose kingdom would never end. Third, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that humans are as nothing before God. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar saw that God is beyond the control of any human being and accountable to no one. In contrast to the transient reigns of human rulers, the authority of God goes on forever.
- Through this event the Jews held captive in Babylon could not help but know that their Lord was the true and living God and that all the gods of the pagans were only idols. They knew for certain that the apparently limitless power of Nebuchadnezzar was under the control of the Lord God Almighty.

Daniel 5:1-4

- When the wine had overcome the king's senses, he ordered that the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in for use (Proverbs 20:1).
- According to Millard what was unusual for this banquet was that men used sacred vessels from a temple. Even if captured and carried off as booty, the equipment of national sanctuaries was normally treated with respect. His blasphemy was carried even further in that it was combined with idolatry.
- Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus, was vice-regent and in charge of Babylon during his father's ten-year absence from the capital city. "Father" in vs. 2 is used in the sense of "predecessor." Quite possibly, the word father carries here the sense of "grandfather." It is thought that Belshazzar's mother, Nitocris, was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. This would explain her knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's relation to Daniel and her willingness to speak so courageously of Daniel in vss. 11-12.

Daniel 5:5-12

- R. Koldewey, the excavator of the palace at Babylon, discovered the walls covered with a white plaster. The writing on the wall would have easily been seen then. The lampstand would also have illumined the writing surface.
- The description of the king's terror details in descending order four bodily manifestations of fear.
- The king called his wise men to interpret the dream, promising great reward to the one who could. Presumably, the wise men could read the inscription since it was written in Aramaic, the common language of the day. They were, however, unable to determine the significance of the writing.
- Daniel (who was probably about 80 by 539 B.C.) was not included among those summoned. The king's mother thought of Daniel as soon as she saw the commotion in the banquet hall and urged the king to stop worrying.

Daniel 5:13-28

- Belshazzar seems to speak contemptuously of Daniel. He intends to put Daniel in his place by reminding him of his exilic status. The king interrogated Daniel without shame, and interrogates him as if he were a prisoner.
- Daniel began by refusing any reward. He was not motivated by a regard for earthly advantage, and would declare the truth, whether it might be pleasing or displeasing to the king. If Daniel read the writing while the king was addressing him, he undoubtedly realized that such honors would be short-lived.
- Daniel used the reference to the past to point out why Belshazzar now stands in great danger. If the most high God would depose Nebuchadnezzar for arrogance, what will He do to you, Belshazzar, for profaning what had been dedicated to him? Nebuchadnezzar's pride reflected a misguided sense of accomplishment. His success led him to think that he was sovereign, when, in reality, the most high God was in control. Nebuchadnezzar ultimately acknowledged his subservience to the true sovereign. Nebuchadnezzar had been guilty of indifference. Belshazzar, on the other hand, was guilty of defiance, for he had set himself up against the Lord of heaven.
- Belshazzar should have learned a lesson from the example of Nebuchadnezzar. Regrettably, he had not, and now he stands on the brink of disaster. In vs. 19 Daniel intimates that Belshazzar's actions were excessive for a monarch who was not the equal of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar in power.

- “Mene,” meaning “numbered” or “measured,” signified that the years of Belshazzar’s reign had reached their end. “Tekel” is related to the word for “shekel,” whose root idea is “to weigh.” In Belshazzar’s case, God found him deficient in his scales and therefore rejected him. “Peres” is derived from a root that means “to divide.” Belshazzar’s kingdom would be divided or separated from him and given to the Medes and Persians then besieging the city.

Daniel 5:29-31

- The fall of Babylon and the Neo-Babylonian Empire is recounted by Herodotus (1.191) as follows: “By means of a cutting he diverted the river into the lake (which was then a marsh) and in this way so greatly reduced the depth of water in the actual bed of the river that it became fordable, and the Persian army, which had been left at Babylon for the purpose, entered the river, now only deep enough to reach about the middle of a man’s thigh, and, making their way along it, got into the town.” Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.20-21) also mentions the attack and records a speech given by Cyrus to his men moments before they marched under the walls of Babylon.
- Destruction was closing in on Belshazzar and his kingdom even while Daniel’s promotion was taking place. Vs. 30 tersely reports that Belshazzar was slain the same night. The government of Babylon was then entrusted to Darius the Mede.
- The exact identity of Darius the Mede has been a difficulty for interpreters. There are a number of possibilities, but Gubaru, a governor under Cyrus the Great, was probably Darius. It has been discovered that the word “Darius,” much like “Augustus” to the Romans and “King” to us, was a title of honor. It would appear, then, that after the fall of Babylon, Cyrus’s presence was needed in another front of his empire. He put Gubaru-Darius in charge, with the title King of Babylon, to rule for a year or so until he could return and be formally coronated as king. After his year of rule, Darius was retained as the governor of Babylon, but the crown was transferred to Cyrus.

Daniel 6:1-9

- With the emergence of the Medo-Persian Empire, the need arose to organize the far-flung rule. This organization was meant to minimize the king’s loss of territory due to uprisings, or in taxation due to graft. The number of satraps mentioned here compares favorably with the 127 mentioned in Esther 1:1.
- In obedience to the law of the land Daniel was impeccable. However, his first allegiance was to his God. Herein lies the tension. If his godliness conflicted with the law of the state, then accusation may arise.

- All the nations subjected to the Medo-Persian kingdom were not required to abandon their own special worship rendered to their gods, but to acknowledge that the Medo-Persian world ruler Darius was also the son and representative of their national gods. For this purpose they must for the space of thirty days present their petitions to their national gods only in him as their manifestation.
- The unalterable decrees of the Medes and Persians is further testified of in Esther 1:19; 8:8. Diodorus Siculus recounts how Darius III “reproached himself for having made a serious mistake, but all his royal power was not able to undo what was done” (17.30), and Charidemus was led away to death.

Daniel 6:10-17

- When Daniel received notice of this new law, he faced a dilemma. Prayer and fellowship with the Lord had safeguarded him from the corrupting influences of Babylonian culture.
- The Bible frequently mentions a roof chamber as a place of prayer (2 Samuel 18:33; 1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:10; Acts 1:13; 20:8). Standing was the normal posture for prayer, but kneeling was common (1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5). The windows open toward Jerusalem is a literal understanding of Solomon’s prayer recorded in 1 Kings 8:35-36, 41-43, 48. The temple, which symbolized the presence of God among His people, was situated in Jerusalem (Psalm 5:7; 28:2). Prayer three times a day during different parts of the day is mentioned in Psalm 55:17; 119:164; 5:3; Acts 10:9, 30; Psalm 42:8.
- The hostile officials waited for Daniel to pray and then burst in on him, catching him violating the new decree. They lost no time in reporting him to Darius, reminding him that he had forbidden all petitions to anyone but himself during the thirty-day period.
- Darius’s response was not what the conspirators had expected. Indeed, he was greatly distressed, probably realizing that he had been manipulated by Daniel’s enemies. Throughout the day he tried his best to save Daniel’s life.
- Daniel’s enemies referred to him as one of the “children of the captivity of Judah,” which cleverly implied an act of rebellion by a foreigner against the royal authority.
- The lion pit presumably was a subterranean cavern with two entrances -- side and top: a ramp for entrance and a hole in the roof by which the food would be fed to the lions. A stone sealed off any avenue of escape. The sealing by both the king and the nobles rules out any possibility of intervention.

Daniel 6:18-24

- Daniel's answer to the king's question proves that Daniel's God is indeed the living God (Deuteronomy 5:26; Jeremiah 10:10; Psalm 42:2).
- Daniel attributes God's intervention to his innocence. Vs. 23 attributes the miracle to trust (Psalm 34:7; 91:9-13; Hebrews 11:32-34). The fourth man in the furnace in chapter 3 is like the angel here in chapter 6. Additionally, just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire with no smell of fire on them (3:27), so when Daniel comes out of the lion's den, no wound was found on him.
- The enemies of Daniel were the ones disloyal to the crown, for they had conspired to deprive the king of his ablest administrator. Accordingly, they were pushed into the darkness, caught in midair and devoured by the ravenous lions. There is a kind of poetic justice in their punishment. It was certainly not because of lack of hunger that the lions did not consume Daniel (Proverbs 11:8; 28:10).
- The solidarity of the family when punishment is meted out is attested in Persian times by Herodotus (3.119) and Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.81).

Daniel 6:25-28

- The sense of vss. 26-27 is like the last clause of 3:29 and 4:3. Three points stand out in these verses: (1) Daniel's God is alive and shows it by the way He acts in history, responding to the requirements of justice and the needs of His people; (2) God's rule is eternal (unlike the empires built by mortals); and (3) God miraculously delivers His people, with wonders in heaven and on earth.
- What the chapter finally seems to be saying to us at this point is that empires rise and kings come and go, fashions and lifestyles change, but the one stable fact in the midst of all this change is Daniel himself -- the man of God who does justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with his God (Micah 6:8).
- The chapter ends on a positive note, highlighting Daniel's continuing usefulness in royal service throughout the rest of the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus (1:21). After the events of this chapter, Daniel apparently retired from public service and gave himself to the study of the scriptures and to prayer. He received the revelations of chapters 10-12 in the third year of Cyrus (cf. 10:1).