

I Had A Scary Dream!

Scripture Text: Daniel 4:4-27

Introduction

Have you ever had a dream that scared you? Maybe it was you falling off of a cliff. It could have been an intruder breaking into your home. Maybe the zombie apocalypse had happened and you were trapped somewhere fighting zombies. Maybe your house was full of cats! Maybe it was a world that was without music? How about Dave Ramsey had gone bankrupt? Probably all of us have had dreams that frightened or unsettled us. We may have even had dreams that made us wonder what they meant, if anything. People find meaning in their dreams. In fact, God has spoken to many people in the Bible through visions and dreams. Nebuchadnezzar was one such person who had at least two interesting dreams, and each time, God warned Nebuchadnezzar about something. The first time was in chapter two when Nebuchadnezzar was apparently younger and dreamed about a large statue. Now, Nebuchadnezzar was apparently much older and God gave him another warning with much the same message as before. As I mentioned last week, chapter four is unique as it appears to be a letter written by King Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, it is the only chapter in the Bible that was composed under the authority of a pagan king. Last week, we looked at a hymn of praise that King Nebuchadnezzar wrote about God. Today, we read about what led to his praise. So what was this dream that Nebuchadnezzar had?

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and It's Meaning

Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in his palace and he was doing very well. He was taking it easy, resting from all of his many accomplishments. That may sound like a good thing, but this can be a dangerous place to be. When we rest from all our work or we think we have arrived and done it all, we are in a dangerous place. Nebuchadnezzar was in a dangerous place and this dream was his *wake up call*. What Nebuchadnezzar saw in the dream troubled him. As I said, we have all had dreams that unsettled us. Like before, King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know what the dream meant. So, he sent for all of his wise men, so that they could interpret his dream. Back in chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar did not tell his wise men what his dream was, for he wanted to know whether they could actually interpret it. This time, however, he did tell them what the dream was. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar was not worried about their honesty this time since he expected that Daniel could correct them if they tried to deceive him. Like before, they could not interpret the dream, but Daniel was able to give him the interpretation.

In this dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an enormous tree that reached the heavens. The tree reaching to the heavens sounds similar to the Tower of Babel, which oddly enough was in the same region. While the tree was in its prime, when it was at it height, a holy "watcher" came down from heaven and ordered that the tree be chopped down. Like the Tower of Babel, the divine lumberjack brings this mighty tree crashing to the ground, removing its influence and glory. The tree was not completely destroyed, however, like the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's first dream was. Here, the tree's stump remained for

seven periods of time. We do not know exactly what the length of time was, but “seven” often signifies completion. It could be that the “seven periods of time” were seven years. The stump was also bound in iron and bronze. Then the tree was replaced by a man who was humiliated with a beast’s mind. This was done so people will know that the Most High God rules over all kingdoms and He gives power to whomever He wants.

After the other wise men failed to give the interpretation, Daniel came in and told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his dream. He told the king that *he was that tree* in dream. Like the tree had become strong and fruitful and reached the sky, so had Nebuchadnezzar become great and his rule had extended to the ends of the known world at that time. The holy one in the dream, the divine lumberjack, was none other than God Himself, who said, “Cut down the tree”. God was telling Nebuchadnezzar that he would be brought down from his lofty position and made to dwell with the beasts of the field for a time. Nebuchadnezzar would not only lose his power and glory, but he would also lose his mind, so that he would behave like the wild animals. The one who thought of himself in godlike terms would become like an animal so he could learn that he was merely human after all. God was going to do this to Nebuchadnezzar until he acknowledged that the Most High God was the ruler over all and that He gives power to whomever He desires. As for the stump that was bound in iron and bronze, that possibly meant that Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would be protected, it would grow again, and he would eventually be restored *after* he learned to honor the one true God.

Go To The One Who Can Help You

How often do we seek help in all the wrong places? As before, Nebuchadnezzar first sought help from all of his other wise men. Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar said that Daniel had “the spirit of the holy gods” and that no mystery was too difficult for him. One would think that if he really believed this, that he would have gone to Daniel first. In fact, Daniel had proven himself already to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar knew who to ask for help, but he did not always go there first. Why do we turn to all the wrong people to find the answer we need? Why do people look in all the wrong places for what they truly need? But, when the rest failed him, Nebuchadnezzar knew who to ask.

Daniel 4:8–9 ⁸ *At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, ⁹ “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation.”*

Finally, Daniel came in. It was like Nebuchadnezzar went through all of his other wise men and none of them could tell him what he wanted to know, and then, finally, Daniel came in to save Nebuchadnezzar’s day. It could be that Daniel only came to the king after the other wise men failed to interpret the king’s dream. It seems Nebuchadnezzar summoned Daniel for one reason, which he mentioned *three times* in this passage. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that the spirit of the Holy God, or holy gods, was in Daniel. We should notice another thing. Nebuchadnezzar referred to Daniel by his

pagan, Babylonian name. He even reminds us that this name was given in honor of Nebuchadnezzar's god. These things may indicate Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual condition at that time. Did Nebuchadnezzar ever truly trust in the one, true God of heaven? We do not know. What we do know is that Nebuchadnezzar needed a wake up call and Daniel came in to deliver God's message to him. Nebuchadnezzar needed Daniel's help.

Daniel seemed to show some fondness for king Nebuchadnezzar. He was loyal to Nebuchadnezzar and showed him respect and kindness. This is the same pagan king who kidnapped Daniel and his friends. This is the same pagan king who defeated the Jewish people, destroyed the Temple of God, and stole the treasures from the Temple. This is the same pagan king who forced the people to worship an idol and threw Daniel's friends into a fiery furnace. And yet, it seems that at this time, Daniel had grown fond of Nebuchadnezzar, in some way at least. Look at the following verse.

Daniel 4:19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"

Daniel was concerned for his king. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar was not a true believer and a follower of God at this time. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar was still a pagan worshipping his own gods. Either way, Daniel did not want harm to come to him. Maybe Daniel was concerned not only for Nebuchadnezzar, but also for his own people who may suffer from the king's absence. Do we think the same way about our leaders, even those we may not like? Are we concerned as much for our leaders as Daniel apparently was for Nebuchadnezzar? Do we pray for our leaders, even when we know that they are not following God's will? If something troubles you about those who God has placed in authority over you, then know who can help you. Go to the One who can help. Pray to God about the situation, but also, pray for our leaders. Be concerned for them!

God is Sovereign Over All Things

Nebuchadnezzar probably had reason to believe that he was powerful and in charge of his life and the world. However, the main theme of the book of Daniel, the main thing we should learn from all of the experiences of Daniel and his three friends, is that *God is sovereign over all things*. God is in control. Remember, in chapter one we learned that God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish His people of Judah. It was God who was calling the shots, not Nebuchadnezzar. Remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the large statue made of many kinds of material. God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar through that dream that all earthly kingdoms were mere dust to Him. That truth seems to have not changed Nebuchadnezzar's heart, though. He still thought he had supreme power, and he still believed that no human or god could defy his will. Nebuchadnezzar's second dream had much the same message as his first one. It was a message to him that God is sovereign and He gives power to whomever He desires. His kingdom is the only one which will endure for all time. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 4:24–25 ²⁴ *this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, ²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

Nebuchadnezzar would become prideful, perhaps more so than he had been before. He would look at all of his accomplishments and all that God had allowed him to have, and think he was the greatest. Nebuchadnezzar's great and magnificent tree would be chopped down and he would be forced to dwell as a beast in the field until he knew that God rules supremely and that He gives power to whomever He chooses. God raises kings and kingdoms and God tears down kings and kingdoms. He moves them like pieces on a chessboard. The purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and his subsequent humiliation was for him to recognize God's sovereignty. It was for him to recognize who truly was God of the universe. Now, there are a few ways we can respond to this truth.

- 1) God being sovereign should rightly humble us and help us to remember who is really in control of our lives. We are not the masters of the universe. God is!
- 2) God being sovereign should give us peace about the future. God has a plan and He is moving history along as He desires. God knows what is going to happen and He is in control of the future.
- 3) God being sovereign should comfort us in the present. When the world seems to be out of control, and evil seems to prevail, and when we are tempted to ask, "Where is God in all of this", let His sovereignty, His power, and His presence comfort you.

Nothing takes God by surprise. God will never say, "I never saw that coming." We have no reason to fear the future. We have no reason to believe we or anyone else is in control. Do you believe God is sovereign? Do you live your life as though He is?

Repentance Leads to Restoration

The last point is to show God's mercy to Nebuchadnezzar. The very fact the God gave him a warning reveals God's mercy. When God shows us what we are doing is wrong, and He gives us the opportunity to change our direction, we have the choice to make it better. We have the choice to turn from what we are doing and to turn to Him in faith and obedience. That choice may not always be easy, but it is always right. After Daniel told the king what his dream meant, he then challenged the king to change his ways. He told Nebuchadnezzar to repent of his wrongdoing. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 4:26–27 ²⁶ *And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.*

Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to “break off” his sins and do what was right. In a way, Daniel was like the prophet Nathan who confronted King David. Like Nathan told David about his sin, Daniel said, “It is you!” You are that man, that tree, that has grown too great, that has reached too high, and that will be cut down. Daniel (a Jew who believed in the one true God) was telling Nebuchadnezzar (a pagan king) that he should change. Daniel telling Nebuchadnezzar to repent implied that his fate was not inevitable. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream provided him an opportunity to repent of his pride and to change his ways. If he humbled himself, God would not need to humble him further. Daniel also told Nebuchadnezzar to show mercy to the oppressed. Maybe he had not been a merciful king. Or, maybe he had not been treating others cruelly, but he might have done what many people do, practice an indulgent lifestyle and simply ignore the misfortunes of others. By heeding the warning in this dream and performing good deeds, Nebuchadnezzar would prove that he acknowledged God’s supremacy over him.

Daniel seemed to have held out to the king the genuine possibility of averting this judgment. This demonstrated God’s willingness to forgive. God desires for us to turn from sin, from our pride, and from our destructive behavior. God desires for us to seek Him and to seek life. God wants to forgive us. As we find out later in the chapter, God would graciously give Nebuchadnezzar one year to repent and turn from his pride (Daniel 4:29-33). God promises forgiveness and restoration to those who will repent. One of my favorite promises in scripture, one that we read every time we observe the Lord’s Supper, is from the letter of 1 John.

1 John 1:8-9 ⁸ *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Are you in a situation of rebellion to God? Are you not where you should be in your relationship to God? Know this: God is a merciful God. He desires for people, for you, to turn back to Him. What will you choose today? What do you need to repent of today? What disaster are you approaching that could be averted by repentance?

Conclusion

In closing, we see several things from Nebuchadnezzar’s strange dream. We see how important it is to turn to the right people for the right answer. More importantly, we see that it is essential for us to turn to God for the answers. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream also reminds us of the important truth that God is sovereign. He is in control and He is moving history along according to His plan. He wants you to trust Him as He leads us to our eternal home in heaven. Lastly, we see from the passage the importance of repentance. We are reminded of how merciful God is, even to the most prideful and most pagan of people. If God is merciful to Nebuchadnezzar and would forgive Him, would He not forgive you, too. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of God’s grace and mercy to mankind. Through Christ, we have forgiveness and the promise of a meaningful and abundant life, here and for all eternity. Have you received God’s gift? This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!