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DANIEL INTERPRETS NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S SECOND DREAM

Daniel 4:1-27

Main Idea of the Text: The Lord is sovereign, even over calamity & desolation.

I. THE TEXT

a. Context

i. Historical

1. Chapter 4 occurs well after the events of chapter 3.
2. Babylonian Record:
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in 589-587 BC, temple destroyed.
 - b. Laid siege to Tyre from 586-573 BC
 - c. Battled Egypt in 568/567 BC
 - d. Therefore, Daniel 4 occurred at least one year prior to Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 BC.
 - e. Likely date between 573-569 BC.
 - f. No official record of the king's illness, though Eusebius of Caesarea & Josephus mention it. Some building inscriptions and silence in some records are compatible with a period of regal inactivity.

ii. Literary

1. Nebuchadnezzar has been forced to admit weakness several times:
 - a. The First Dream (Daniel 2)
 - b. The Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3)
2. Chapter 4 is framed as the king's own personal and public testimony, incorporating an official address under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

iii. Original Audience Situation

1. Jews who have lived through exile, hearing the humbling of a ruler they despised.

2. The narrative reassures them that the Most High rules.

b. Outline

i. Prologue: Nebuchadnezzar Proclaims God's Power & Everlasting Kingdom through Personal Testimony (4:1-3)

1. Nebuchadnezzar addresses the nations with peace. (Dan 4:1)
 - a. Daniel incorporates the official address of Nebuchadnezzar into his prophecy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Ezra-Nehemiah also incorporates official documents into their content.
2. His purpose is personal testimony. (Dan 4:2)
3. He praises the Most High God for his "signs, wonders, kingdom." (Dan 4:3)
 - a. The prologue anticipates the chapter's climax: the king who once demanded worship now declares God's dominion.

ii. Nebuchadnezzar's Second Disturbing Dream (Dan 4:4-18)

1. Though at Ease in the Kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar is Disturbed by a Dream (Dan 4:4-5)
2. Nebuchadnezzar's Magicians Fail and Daniel Succeeds at Interpreting the Dream (Dan 4:6-9)
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes Daniel's Hebrew name. Belteshazzar refers to Bel (Marduk), Nebuchadnezzar's god.
 - i. Marduk: patron deity of Babylon. First appeared in the 3rd millennium B.C. as a Sumerian god.
 - ii. In the Enuma Elish, Marduk fights the chaotic Tiamat.



Marduk (Bel) fights the chaotic Tiamat
Bas relief the small temple in Nimrud

b. c.f. Gen 41:38

3. The Dream (Dan 4:10-18)

- a. The top of the tree reached to heaven. (c.f. Gen 11 – Babel)
- b. Angels often depicted as watchers over the earth. (Ezek 1:17-18; Zech 1:10)
- c. By verses 16 & 17, the dream meaning begins to clarify: someone is about to be humbled by the God who establishes kingdoms.
- d. The decree of the watchers is the decree of the Most High.

iii. Daniel's Interpretation & Exhortation (Dan 4:19-27)

1. Daniel Alarmed at the Dream (Dan 4:19)

- a. Daniel does not gloat. He's dismayed, and his first words are for the king's welfare.
- 2. The Tree is Nebuchadnezzar & His Dominion (Dan 4:20-22)
 - a. Trees were often ancient symbols of kingdoms with the nations and peoples under their shade.
- 3. Nebuchadnezzar Will Be Humbled (Dan 4:23-26)
 - a. The "seven periods" are often interpreted as seven years, but it's an indeterminate time. The focus is not on the duration, but the completeness of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation.
 - b. Nebuchadnezzar will have a complete breakdown. He will be driven from men to live among and as a beast until he recognizes the sovereignty of the Most High.
- 4. Daniel Exhorts Nebuchadnezzar to Repent (4:27)
 - a. Daniel does not merely interpret—he warns.
 - b. He doesn't call Nebuchadnezzar to rituals, but to justice.
- c. Key Observations
 - i. The Sovereignty of God
 - 1. The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. (Dan 4:17, 25, 32)
 - 2. Even the most powerful king can be toppled in an instant.
 - ii. The Humbling of Pride
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar's ease and prosperity (Dan 4:4) and his later boast about Babylon the great (Dan 4:30) expose the heart that the dream confronts.
 - 2. The "seven times" emphasizes the thoroughness of the humiliation.
 - iii. Mercy in the Warning
 - 1. Daniel's alarm and exhortation is a call to repent with the threat of judgment.
- d. Summary of the Passage

- i. Daniel 4:1-27 records Nebuchadnezzar's public testimony of a second dream which Daniel interpreted as God's judgment on his pride, showing that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of men.

II. THE TRUTH

a. Central Theological Theme(s)

- i. God has eternally decreed all that comes to pass, including the rise, prosperity, humiliation, and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar.
- ii. God did not decree this because he foresaw what Nebuchadnezzar would do. The Most High rules the kingdoms of men and gives it to whom He will.
- iii. God's decree establishes real human responsibility. It does not cancel it. Nebuchadnezzar's pride is his own.

b. Confession of Faith & Creeds

i. LCF Chapter

1. Chapter 3 – God's Decree

- a. 3:1 "God hath decreed in Himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree."
- b. 3:2 "Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything, because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions."

2. Chapter 5 – Of Divine Providence

- a. 5:2 Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without His providence; yet by the same providence He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

- b. 5:3 God, in His ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.
- 3. Second Causes: God is the first and uncaused cause of all things. He creates creatures who are responsible for their actions. They are secondary causes in creation.
- 4. Means: That which is used to achieve an end. Second causes are means.
- 5. God's determinations are established by his eternal decree and providentially fall out according to means.
- 6. Therefore, everything occurs both necessarily (according to God's decree) and freely (not by coercion).
 - a. Two Errors:
 - i. Pantheism – collapses everything into God. If everything is God then God is the cause of everything, including sin.
 - ii. Deism – utterly separates God from second causes.
- 7. “This tension appears to contradict logic and human reason. Sam Waldron puts it, “A course of events consisting of a series of free and contingent events is said to produce a predetermined result.”[1] God is accomplishing fixed, predetermined purposes through free, responsible, and contingent agencies. As illogical or contradictory as this may seem,[2] it is nevertheless true, as the following passages clearly demonstrate. Genesis 50:20: ‘But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.’” – Jim Domm
- 8. Compare Prov. 20:18 with Prov. 21:31
 - ii. How the passage illustrates the confession
 - 1. Daniel 4:17 demonstrates LCF 3:1. The Most High does not merely permit the rise and fall of kings; he decrees them.
 - 2. At the same time, LCF 3:1 guards against fatalism; the view that whatever happens does so of necessity and that human choice and effort make no difference.
 - a. God does not author Nebuchadnezzar's pride. Sin proceeds from the creature. The contingency of 4:27 (“that there may

perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity”) is real at the level of secondary causes, even while the certainty of the dream’s fulfillment belongs to God’s decree.

3. God did not decree Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration because he “foresaw” a change in Nebuchadnezzar. Both the humbling and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar are according to God’s totally free counsel.

c. Development from the Text

i. About God:

1. He is the Most High who rules the kingdoms of men. (Dan 4:17)
2. He reveals the future he has decreed and calls pagan kings to repent.
3. His sovereign power extend even to our mental states.

ii. About Humanity/God’s People:

1. Earthly rulers and kingdoms are all accountable to God and his justice. Pride that forgets this will be humbled.
2. God’s people are called to speak the truth to power with clarity and compassion.
3. Even in evil kingdoms, God’s people can faithfully serve for the good of the nation into which God has sent them.

iii. Chair Passages: Daniel 4:17, 25, 32, 35; Proverbs 16:18; 21:1; Isaiah 40:15-17, 22-23; Psalm 2; Psalm 75:6-7; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-6

d. Redemptive-Historical & Christological Connections

i. Redemptive-Historical

1. The tree cut down continues the Biblical pattern of God opposing the proud. (Babel)
2. The empires of Daniel 2 rise and fall by the same decree which cuts down Nebuchadnezzar.
3. The call in 4:27 is not a call to full evangelical repentance, but only a temporal warning to a pagan king.

ii. Christological

1. Christ is the true King whose kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and who, unlike Nebuchadnezzar, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:5–11).
2. Where Nebuchadnezzar's tree was cut down for pride, Christ is the branch from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1) whose kingdom has no end (Dan 2:44; Luke 1:33).
3. Daniel's compassionate warning points forward to the greater Prophet who weeps over the city and calls all to repent before the day of judgment.
4. Believers are united to the humble King; therefore they are called to the same posture: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5).

e. Key Theological Truth

- i. The Lord has decreed, from all eternity, the rise and fall of every king and kingdom. He rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will—not as the author of their pride, but as the Most High whose free and unchangeable counsel is displayed when the proud are humbled and the living are made to know that he alone is sovereign.

III. THE TRANSFORMATION

APPLICATION PROMPTS	YOUR APPLICATION
1. Heart & Personal Life • <i>What idol or fear does this expose?</i> • <i>Where do I need deeper repentance or trust?</i> • <i>How does this comfort or confront me?</i>	
2. Family & Home • <i>How does this shape marriage?</i> • <i>Parenting or relating to parents?</i> • <i>What would change at home?</i>	
3. Church Community • <i>How should this shape LWBC?</i> • <i>Our unity, witness, or worship?</i> • <i>What corporate response is needed?</i>	
4. Work & Daily Calling • <i>How does this affect my work?</i> • <i>Integrity, excellence, or rest?</i> • <i>Witness in the workplace?</i>	
5. Witness to Unbelievers • <i>How does this speak to non-Christians?</i> • <i>What hope or warning does it give?</i> • <i>How can I share this truth?</i>	
6. Mind, Affections & Will • <i>What must I believe more deeply?</i> • <i>What affections need stirring?</i> • <i>What specific obedience is called for?</i>	