7

GOD HUMBLES & RESTORES NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Daniel 4:28-37

Main Idea of the Text: Though given a year to break off his sins, Nebuchadnezzar exalts himself, and God banishes him from the kingdom and human society until he humbly confesses his error and praises the Most High.

I. THE TEXT

a. Context

i. Historical

1. The events of Daniel 4:28-37 occur one year after the events of Daniel 4:1-27 near the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Nebuchadnezzar dies in 562 B.C.)

ii. Literary Context

1. Daniel has narrated the arc of Nebuchadnezzar from his victory over Jerusalem through several humiliating setbacks to his eventual banishment from the kingdom and human society.

b. Outline

i. The Most High Humbles Nebuchadnezzar for His Pride (Dan 4:28-33)

1. Chronology: 12 Months After the Dream (Dan 4:28-29)

2. Nebuchadnezzar Praises Himself for Building Mighty Babylon (Dan 4:30)
   a. More than a warrior, Nebuchadnezzar was a builder.
   b. Babylonian histories record his reconstruction of cities and many temple complexes.
   c. *"He adorned the temple of Belus, and the rest of the temples, in a magnificent manner, with the spoils he had taken in the war. He also added another city to that which was there of old, and rebuilt it, that such as would besiege it hereafter might no more turn the course of the river, and thereby attack the city itself. He therefore built three walls round about the inner city, and three others about that which was the outer, and this he did with burnt brick. And after he had, after a becoming manner, walled the city, and adorned its gates gloriously, he built another palace before his father's palace, but so that they joined to it;* ***to describe whose vast height and immense riches it***

would perhaps be too much for me to attempt; *yet as large and lofty as they were, they were completed in fifteen days.* ***He also erected elevated places for walking, of stone, and made it resemble mountains, and built it so that it might be planted with all sorts of trees. He also erected what was called a pensile paradise [hanging gardens], because his wife was desirous to have things like her own country, she having been bred up in the palaces of Media."*** (Josephus quoting Berrosus' "Chaldaic History" from his Antiquities of the Jews 10.11)

d. See images below.

3. A Voice from Heaven Renders Judgement (Dan 4:31-33)

    a. The kingdom has departed from him.
    b. He will be driven from men.
    c. He will become like an ox. E.J. Young suggest a form of Lycanthropy (a condition often associated with the origin of werewolf theory)
    d. The "seven" periods of time reference the totality of his humiliation.
    e. Restoration will not come at a set date, but through Nebuchadnezzar's own personal growth.
    f. "Most High" (*el Elyon*) features heavily in Daniel 4.
        i. 92 Occurrences in the OT
            1. 42 in the Psalms.
            2. 12 in the Pentateuch
            3. 6 in the Prophets
            4. 13 in Daniel: 3:26, 4:2, 4:17, 4:24, 4:25, 4:32, 4:34, 5:18, 5:21, 7:18, 7:22, 7:25, 7:27
            5. First appears in Gen 14:18-22
            6. Occurs again in Numbers 24:16 & Deuteronomy 32:8; both important poems in the Pentateuch.
        ii. 18 Occurrences in the NT
            1. Jesus Christ referred to as "Son of the Most High" (Mark 5:7; Luke 1:32)

ii. The Most High Restores Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:34-36)

1. Chronology: At the End of the Days…

2. Nebuchadnezzar is Restored

    a. Lifts eyes to heaven
    b. Reason returned
    c. Blessed the Most High
        i. Honors the Lord's:

1. Dominion
2. Sovereignty

d. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom & glory restored.

iii. Conclusion: Nebuchadnezzar Praises the King of Heaven (Dan 4:37)

1. Is this Saving Faith & Repentance

i. Calvin argued it was not saving faith.
ii. E.J. Young argues it was.
iii. Others are skeptical

c. Key Observations

i. Whether or not he has saving faith, Nebuchadnezzar has learned humility before the Most High.

ii. God's Sovereignty is continually reaffirmed.

iii. All of this would have been an encouragement to Daniel's audience.

d. Summary of the Passage

i. Daniel 4:28-37 records the final and utter humiliation of the proud king, Nebuchadnezzar, demonstrating the sovereign control and dominion of the Most High God.

e. Excursus: Daniel 4 & the Prayer of Nabonidus

i. Prayer of Nabonidus (4QPrNab/4Q242)

1. Fragmentary Aramaic text from Qumran Cave 3 (Published by J.T. Milik in 1956)

2. First person account of Nabonidus (last king of Babylon) afflected for seven years at Teima with a "bad disease"/skin inflammation by decree of the Most High God.

3. He prays to idols of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, stone, and clay to no avail; a Jewish exile/seer intervenes; he is healed and turns to the God of Israel.

4.

ii. Parallels with Daniel 4

1. Seven years/ "seven times" of affliction.

2. First person royalty confession.

3. Jewish intermediary.

4. Abandonment of Idols for the Most High God.

iii. Manuscript Evidence

1. No pre-Qumran biblical manuscripts of Daniel are known to exist.

2. Earliest extant Daniel copies from Qumran (especially 4QDan^c / 4Q114 and 4QDan^e / 4Q116) date to the late 2nd / early 1st century BC.

3. Recent radiocarbon results for 4Q114 give a range of roughly 230–160 BC — clearly earlier than the 4Q242 manuscript of the Prayer.

4. Physical evidence for the text of Daniel therefore predates the physical evidence for the Prayer, though both are copies of earlier works.

II. THE TRUTH

a. Central Theological Theme(s)

i. While the sovereignty of God continues to feature as the central theological theme, there is a subtheme of faith and repentance connected to Nebuchadnezzar's final words.

b. Confession of Faith & Creeds

i. LCF (1689)

1. Chapter 14 – Of Saving Faith

a. 14:1 The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened. *Proof Texts: 2 Cor. 4:13; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:14, 17; Luke 17:5; 1 Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32*

b. 14:2 By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word for the authority of God Himself, and also apprehendeth an excellency therein above all other writings and all things in the world, as it bears forth the glory of God in His attributes, the excellency of Christ in His nature and offices, and the power and fulness of the Holy Spirit in His workings and operations: and so is enabled to cast his soul upon the truth thus believed; and also acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come; but the principal acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. *Proof Texts: Acts 24:14; Ps. 19:7-10; Ps. 119:72; 2 Tim. 1:12; John 15:14; Isa. 66:2; Heb. 11:13; John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Gal. 2:20; Acts 15:11*

2. Chapter 15 – Of Repentance unto Life & Salvation

a. This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavour, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things. *Proof Texts: Zech. 12:10; Acts 11:18; Ezek. 36:31; 2 Cor. 7:11; Ps. 119:6, 128*

ii. How the passage illustrates the confession

1. Rather than illustrating the confession, the passage shows us the confession of Nebuchadnezzar.

2. Nebuchadnezzar certainly confesses true things about God. But does he cast himself upon the truth? He certainly trembles, but does he rest upon God alone?

c. Development from the Text

   i. About God:

      1. God is the one who brought about the grace of repentance in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

   ii. About Humanity/God's People:

      1. In Nebuchadnezzar, we see human pride ego; our need for repentance.

d. Redemptive-Historical & Christological Connections

   i. Redemptive Historical

      1. In Eden, after the Fall, Adam and Eve are banished from their kingdom (the Garden/Temple).
      2. Israel, due to disobedience, was banished from Canaan.

      3. We are exiles according to the Apostles, waiting to be brought into an eternal kingdom.

   ii. Christological

      1. Christ, though innocent, was banished and crucified outside the gate. (Heb 13:12)

e. Key Theological Truth

   i. Saving faith and repentance are graces. Though we often experience them simultaneously, repentance logically follows faith. We do not turn from our sin in order to come to Christ. We come to Christ in order to turn from sin.