

Lesson 10

Chapter 4

Daniel 4 is unique in all scripture. Almost the entire chapter is written from the perspective of a pagan king - notice the personal pronoun "I" that starts in verse 2 and continues through the end of the chapter in verse 37. That pronoun "I" refers to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Apparently what happened is that Nebuchadnezzar instructed Daniel to write a largely dictated account of what occurred, perhaps as part of a government record, which Daniel then did.

What can we say about the inspiration of Chapter 4?

In Chapter 3 we saw some statements from Nebuchadnezzar about the fourth person in the fiery furnace, and we noted that, although inspiration tells us that the king actually made those statements, inspiration does not vouch for the accuracy of what the king said.

For example, Genesis 3:4 accurately records what Satan said to Eve ("Ye shall not surely die") - but we know that statement was a lie because God had said the opposite in Genesis 2:17.

For another example, think for a moment about the book of Job. In that book, Job has extended debates with his three friends. What does that mean for us? What it means is that we need to be very careful when we start picking verses out of that book to support some argument of ours? Why? Because Job disagreed with his friends on most things, which means they can't both be right! Many of the statements in the book of Job about God are wrong! How do I know that for sure? Because that is what God says at the end of the book:

Job 42:7 - And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: **for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right**, as my servant Job hath.

So be careful if anyone ever asks you if every statement in the Bible is true - that is a trick question! In some cases, inspiration is telling us only that a statement was made, not that the statement is true.

So which is it here in Daniel 4 with this long statement from Nebuchadnezzar? Inspiration tells us that the king said it; but does inspiration also vouch for the truthfulness of what Nebuchadnezzar said?

And, if so, how is this situation different from what we saw in Daniel 3 or in Genesis 3?

I think that inspiration does vouch for the accuracy of what we read in Daniel 4, even though it is a recorded statement from a pagan king. Why?

For starters, much of the chapter is a quote from Daniel himself interpreting yet another dream from the king. Yes, the quote is from the king recounting what Daniel had said to him - but Daniel is writing it down, and Daniel knew what the king had said to him about the dream. And Daniel also knew what he had told the king about the dream and that what he had told the king about the dream had come from God. I don't believe that either Daniel or the Holy Spirit would have allowed any inaccuracies on these points to enter the Bible - even if Daniel is just recording the king's recollections about the events.

The king's recollections were correct (which I believe) or Daniel would have corrected them, or perhaps the Holy Spirit would just not have included it in the book of Daniel. That we have this historical account tells me that it is correct, even though this is a very unusual chapter. (In fact, perhaps we can see such corrections by Daniel when Daniel reminds the reader in this chapter that his real name is Daniel and not Belteshazzar.)

Also, later in the chapter we will see Nebuchadnezzar made like a beast in the fields, and he certainly was in no condition to record what was happening while in that condition. That we know what happened to him is because of this inspired account written down by Daniel.

Much of what the king is saying in this chapter had come from Daniel in the first place, which again is evidence of its accuracy.

So, yes, even though Chapter 4 records the statements of a pagan king, we can trust the accuracy of these statements. Chapter 4, as with Chapters 1-3, is intended to show God's power over the Babylonians - and that power would not have been shown had King Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel provided an inaccurate report of what happened.

In Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar learned that God is all knowing. In Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar learned that God is all powerful. In Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar will learn of his own weakness and folly before God and of his own utter dependence on God and of the terrible danger of human pride.

Nebuchadnezzar was but an instrument in God's hand. Nebuchadnezzar will come face to face with the two central themes of this book: The absolute sovereignty of God, and God's faithfulness to his

covenant people. The first of those themes is repeated three times in this chapter:

Daniel 4:17 - This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

Daniel 4:25 - That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

Daniel 4:32 - And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

By the end of Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar may have finally learned this lesson.

Daniel 4:1-3

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 2 I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

King Nebuchadnezzar is much like us - his spiritual life has its ups and downs!

After Daniel interpreted his first dream, Nebuchadnezzar praised God, but in the very next chapter Nebuchadnezzar made a giant graven image. After God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar again praised God. And here in Chapter 4, we see Nebuchadnezzar once again praising God, but (as we will see) he is doing so only after he has undergone a very humbling experience.

Even if Nebuchadnezzar's motives are dubious, he speaks the truth about God. God's kingdom (unlike Nebuchadnezzar's) is an everlasting kingdom, and God's dominion (unlike Nebuchadnezzar's) is from generation to generation.

This is also what Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar earlier about the church.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and **the kingdom shall not be left to other people**, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

That the kingdom will not be left to other people is just another way of saying that God's dominion is from generation to generation. That is not at all like an earthly kingdom. No matter how powerful an earthly king is, that king knows someday he will die and leave his kingdom to someone else. Not so, with the eternal kingdom of Christ.

And while that is all true of Christ's kingdom (the church), it is also true in a larger sense. The church has sometimes be called a kingdom within a kingdom, and that is an accurate description. Why? Because the entire universe is God's kingdom.

Jesus is (not will become) King of kings and Lord of lords. That means that Jesus is King and Lord over everyone and over everything. Why? Because "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3), and because God (not us) crowned Jesus king (Hebrews 2:7-9).

God's kingdom and dominion are eternal. God has always and will always rule over everyone and everything. Nebuchadnezzar thought his own kingdom was eternal, but it was not. Human rule is transient. God's rule is permanent.

Yes, the church is a kingdom, but the church is a kingdom within a kingdom because the universe is also a kingdom of God. The eternal kingdom of Christ consists of God's faithful people, while the universal kingdom consists of everyone and everything.

History is full of kingdoms that thought they would last forever: Babylon, Greece, Rome, Nazi Germany, and on and on. Hitler's thousand year Reich lasted only eleven years! And perhaps Daniel 4 contains an important message for those today who would wrap a flag around the Bible. The United States is no more permanent than any nation or kingdom that came before it.

There is but one eternal kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar finally understood that - as will all earthly rulers someday.

And we see something interesting here in Nebuchadnezzar's statements about God. They don't sound

much like the typical Babylonian descriptions of the false Babylonian gods. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar's statements sound a lot like the Old Testament.

Psalm 145:13 - Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

Isaiah 40:17 - All nations before him are as nothing

Isaiah 14:27 - For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

So here is a question for us: Where did Nebuchadnezzar learn all of this Hebrew terminology that we reading here in Aramaic? Nebuchadnezzar is starting to sound a bit like Isaiah here. How do we explain that?

Simple. Nebuchadnezzar had been hearing words like that from Daniel since they first met. Most likely about 25 years has elapsed between the end of Chapter 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4. And so Daniel is now in his forties, and the king is in his fifties or sixties (about ten to fifteen years older than Daniel). And after being with Daniel all that time, Nebuchadnezzar was starting to sound a lot like Daniel!

And that raises another question for us: What sort of words and phrases are our friends picking up from us? Are they starting to sound like us, or are we starting to sound like them? Are our friends starting to quote the Bible more and more as they hear us quote the Bible?

Matthew 5:13 - Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?

Colossians 4:6 - Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

When we are around others, do we lift them up (as Daniel did with Nebuchadnezzar) or do they pull us down? Or worse, do we pull them down? Again, we have a good example to follow from Daniel.

Daniel 4:4-7

4 I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof.

Poor Nebuchadnezzar. Every time things seem to be going well, he has a troubling dream. Here we have a repeat of what we saw in Chapter 2.

Verse 4 tells us that the king was at ease and was prospering. Verse 30 later in the chapter will suggest that Nebuchadnezzar's building activities had been completed when this all occurred. If so, that means these events probably took place after Egypt had been conquered and after Jerusalem had been destroyed and likely about eight or nine years before the siege of Tyre in 573 BC, which is mentioned in Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 26:7 - For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people.

What that means is that the seven year illness of Nebuchadnezzar that we will see in this chapter may have been from 582 to 575 BC, a period in which we know of no military operations by the king.

In the quarter century between Chapters 3 and 4, it seems that perhaps the king had mellowed a bit. Notice that he does not make any threats in verse 6.

Notice also that Daniel was no flash in the pan. After 25 years, he was still master of the wise men (as we will see in verse 9). And that success had not changed Daniel; he was still faithful to God.

And so the king was at ease and was prospering - and that may have been a big source of his problems! This chapter reminds us of Jesus' parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21. There we had a man who had everything except God - and God called him a fool.

There is a big change in the king's peace of mind between verse 4 and verse 5. He goes from being at ease to being afraid and being troubled. And again, in response, the king makes a decree. (He does that a lot, doesn't he!) This decree commands that all of the wise men be brought forward to interpret his dream.

The astrologers mentioned here were not mentioned in the list found in Chapter 2. The king seems to be grasping at straws in his increasingly desperate attempt to understand his dreams.

As before, the Chaldean wise men are unable to interpret the dream. Note that unlike in Chapter 2, this time Nebuchadnezzar tells them what the dream was. Their inability to interpret it means that it must not have been listed in their dream manuals. But even if they knew or guessed the meaning, they probably would have lacked the courage to tell the king. Even Daniel will hesitate to tell the king what the dream means.

Daniel 4:8-9

8 But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, 9 O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.

Why was Daniel the last one called and not the first one called? There are many possible reasons.

- Perhaps Daniel was out of town or was ill.
- Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to ask Daniel unless it was absolutely necessary. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar did not like having to go to Daniel for answers.
- Perhaps Daniel deliberately delayed his coming to first give the pagan wise men an opportunity to prove their inability to interpret the dream.
- Daniel was the master of the wise men, so perhaps the boss was just the last one called.
- Finally, perhaps the king already suspected what the dream meant, and he just wanted to delay the inevitable. Perhaps the king was hoping that the Chaldeans would give him good news about the dream!

It is clear from verse 8 that Nebuchadnezzar is still a card-carrying polytheist. When Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel, he reminds us that Daniel's Babylonian name is Belteshazzar "according to the name of

my god." The king also says that Daniel has the "spirit of the holy gods."

As we said earlier, Nebuchadnezzar's "god" was presumably Nebo, and Belteshazzar means "Nebo, protect my life." Let's see whether Nebo will be able to protect the king.

Daniel 4:10-12

10 Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. 11 The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: 12 The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

So far so good: The king had dreamed of a giant tree that gave shelter and food to all the beasts and birds of the earth.

Already the king was likely identifying himself with this tree. He like the tree had grown tall and strong with roots and limbs covering the earth. He like the tree provided health and wealth to those who lived under him.

This looks like a happy dream so far. What was troubling the king? We are about to find out.

Daniel 4:13-14

13 I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; 14 He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:

What troubled the king was that this beautiful tree was going to be cut down, and its foliage was going to be stripped away. And one effect of cutting down the tree was that the birds and beasts that had found shelter under it would be scattered. First, the head of gold came tumbling down in Chapter 2, and now the giant tree is cut down.

The order to cut down the tree came from "a watcher and an holy one" who "came down from

heaven." Who was this?

The word for "watcher" (and its plural in verse 17) used here occurs nowhere else in the Bible. The word does occur in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (a commentary on Genesis), where it is used to denote an angel. This usage has caused some to believe that the watchers are a special class of angels whose duty is to watch and patrol the earth and who are responsible for executing the decrees of God on the earth.

But, as with many things about angels, we can quickly run out of scriptural support and enter instead the realm of speculation. I think that what C.S. Lewis said about demons could also be said about angels:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

The Babylonians believed in heavenly beings whose task was to keep watch over the earth - and perhaps the king is just substituting his own Babylonian word for what he saw, which was likely just an ordinary angel sent by God to cut down this tree (if the word "ordinary" can ever be applied to an angel!).

Daniel 4:15-16

15 Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: 16 Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him.

Although the tree would be cut down, the stump would be left, and the stump of the tree was to have a band of iron and brass placed around it. Most likely these bands of iron and brass are intended to protect and preserve the stump, and to keep it from being removed along with the rest of the tree. But I think we are also seeing a glimpse of what is about to happen to that stump - it will be strongly bound and controlled in some way.

Why iron and brass? Commentaries seem to be stumped on that question, with one calling it a "mystery to interpreters." Perhaps the best suggestion was that it points to "fetters of iron and brass,"

which is a metaphor for the binding of men, and we are about to see that this stump is a man.

Although Daniel has not yet interpreted the king's dream, I think we can now see why the dream was so troubling to the king. Look very carefully at what the watcher said at the end of verse 15:

And let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

The watcher quits referring to the stump as "it" and begins instead to refer to the stump as "he"! Even before Daniel provided the interpretation, the identity of this stump was likely already very clear to the king.

So what was going to happen to this stump/man? The heart of this stump was to be changed from that of a man to that of a beast. Some translations have "mind" in place of "heart," and that is the correct sense of how the word "heart" is used here. Perhaps those fetters of iron and brass would be used literally!

How long was this change going to last? It was to last for "seven times." What does that mean?

Most commentators take the phrase to mean "appointed times" or "seasons," which would mean that "seven times" refers to seven years.

Another possibility is that "seven times" denotes an indefinite period of time that is long enough for the lesson to be learned. As we know, seven (when used figuratively) denotes perfection, and so this period of seven times might denote a period of time that would be just right for Nebuchadnezzar to learn his lesson. This view may be supported by the wording used later in verse 25:

And seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

But I think the better view is that a literal seven years is meant here. We have not yet arrived at the apocalyptic sections of this book, where we would expect numbers to be used figuratively. But just because the number seven here is literal does not mean it not also figurative. God chose this number, and when God chooses a number to use for a literal purposes, we often see a figurative meaning as well. For example, I think we also see that with the 70 years of captivity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have a bizarre view of the "seven times." They say that the seven times

denotes seven years, each day of which also denotes a year. Using 360 days for the number of days in a year, they get 7 times 360, or 2520 years. They refer to this period of 2520 years as the "times of the Gentiles" - the period of Gentile opposition, which they say is depicted by Nebuchadnezzar's madness. This period of 2520 years supposedly began in 607 BC when they say the temple was destroyed. (That event actually happened in 587 BC.) Counting 2520 years from 607 BC brings us to AD 1914, which is when the Jehovah's Witnesses say the kingdom was established.

That is what the Jehovah's Witnesses say. What did Jehovah say? He said in Daniel 2 that the eternal kingdom would be established in the first century - not in the 20th century!

Daniel 4:17

17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

Notice the *plural* "watchers" and "holy ones" here in verse 17. Although only one "watcher" was mentioned in verse 13, there are apparently more than one involved in this decree. The watcher who is speaking continues to give the decree, and he gives the reason behind the decree, which happens to be one of the central themes of the entire book - the absolute sovereignty of God. It is God who rules, and it is God who sets up earthly rulers such as Nebuchadnezzar.

The term "basest of men" in verse 17 is interesting from several perspectives. God chooses who will wear the crown, and God has often chosen those who are humble and of low social standing.

1 Samuel 2:7-8 - The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them.

But this term "basest of men" also has a particular application to the history of Nebuchadnezzar. The lowly origin of Nebuchadnezzar's family was otherwise unknown until an inscription made by his father, Nabopolassar, was found in which he referred to himself as "the son of a nobody," "insignificant," "not visible," "the weak," and "the feeble."

This knowledge of the lowly origin of Babylon's greatest king would have quickly been forgotten - but

the author of Daniel knew about it. How could a Jewish writer writing after nearly 200 years of Greek rule have produced such an accurate record 400 years after the fact? The answer is that he did not. Daniel wrote the book near the time of Nebuchadnezzar, not 400 years later.

Daniel 4:18

18 This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.

The king turns at last to Daniel for the interpretation of the dream because the other wise men could not interpret it.

Daniel will get the interpretation from God, but I suspect that Daniel could have done pretty well interpreting this dream all by himself.

For starters, the portrayal of man in his pride as a lofty tree is common in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 2:12-13 - For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan.

Isaiah 10:34 - And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

Ezekiel had used a very similar picture to describe Assyria just a few years before Nebuchadnezzar had this dream.

Ezekiel 31:3-6 - Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.

And I suspect the Chaldean wise men also had a pretty good idea what was meant by the dream, but they were too cowardly to explain the bad news to the king. Daniel, on the other hand, was willing to proclaim the whole counsel of God to Nebuchadnezzar.

But while the general meaning of the dream might have been clear, there were some specific details in the dream that were not clear. What, for example, did it mean that the stump had a band of iron and brass? And what was meant by the "seven times"? That part of the interpretation would have to come from God, which means that the king has finally called the right person to interpret his dream.

It is clear that there is something bad in store for the king, but what is it?

Daniel 4:19

19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.

The meaning of this dream is so bad that Daniel is reluctant to tell the king what it means. In fact, Daniel is shocked at the meaning of the dream. The Aramaic used here literally reads "he was stupefied for one hour" but the word used here for "hour" can simply mean a short period of time.

This verse gives us an interesting picture of the relationship between these two men, who as we said had now known each other for about 25 years.

Daniel could have been vindictive against the king who had exiled him and who had destroyed Jerusalem, but he was not. Instead, we see that Daniel was not happy at all about the bad news he had for the king. I think we can see not only loyalty to the king, but also perhaps some friendship with the king.

And notice also the concern of the king for Daniel. After seeing Daniel's reaction, the king says, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee."

Their relationship seems to have involved mutual respect and perhaps mutual affection. Their concern for each other in verse 19 seems very genuine.

But with that said, there could have been a personal reason for Daniel's distress at the bad news he had for the king. Nebuchadnezzar evidently had treated the Jews well throughout most of his reign. If he were deposed, there would be no guarantee of a like-minded replacement. A ruler could easily arise who knew not Daniel, as happened with Joseph in Exodus 1:8.

When Daniel at last begins to speak, he begins by wishing that the dream would apply instead to Nebuchadnezzar's enemies - but Daniel, the king, and the reader all know that such will not be the case. What Daniel is about to say will apply to the king, and it is not good news.

Daniel 4:20-22

20 The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; 21 Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: 22 It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

Daniel has both good news and bad news - and he starts with the good news.

As we and everyone else suspected, the mighty tree represents Nebuchadnezzar in all his military success and genius. His kingdom stretched from what is today Egypt to western Iran and from modern Syria into Saudi Arabia.

But did Nebuchadnezzar's dominion extend to the end of the earth as verse 22 says? No, and neither did it reach unto heaven as that verse also says. The hyperbole used here is just intended to describe the incredible extent of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

It takes three verses to tell the king that he is the tree. I don't know about you, but it seems to me that Daniel is taking his time with the good news to delay the bad news as long as he can.

Daniel 4:23-27

23 And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even

with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; 24 This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: 25 That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. 26 And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. 27 Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Now for the bad news.

The decree of the watcher, Daniel says in verse 24, is a decree of the Most High. This judgment, whatever it will be, is a judgment from God. It may have been relayed by a watcher, but the decree itself is from God.

And the bad news? The bad news is that the king is going to lose his position, his kingdom, and his sanity until "seven times shall pass over" him and he understands the lesson that God wants to teach him - that God rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he will.

And the banded tree stump? The banded stump represents Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom while the king is driven from men by the watchers.

That the stump was protected is a promise to the king that his kingdom would not be taken away permanently. And why was that important? Why not just remove Nebuchadnezzar permanently?

If Nebuchadnezzar lost his kingdom while he was out of the picture then that would prove Nebuchadnezzar's point. That is, it would show that Nebuchadnezzar was the real power and that it was his genius that kept the kingdom together. And once the great king was gone, his kingdom fell apart.

But God wanted to show Nebuchadnezzar that the opposite was true. Nebuchadnezzar ruled and had his kingdom only because it pleased God for him to rule and to have his kingdom. If God could keep Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom together while the king was out in the field living the life of an ox then God clearly did not need Nebuchadnezzar's brilliant leadership to hold his kingdom together. God

could put Nebuchadnezzar in power, God could remove him, and God could put him back in power - and that is exactly what happened.

In the ordinary course of events, any ruler suffering from such an illness would have been immediately deposed and replaced. History tells us that Nebuchadnezzar's sons were worthless, and we know that they were unable to retain power very long after his death. But it was God's will that the kingdom would be returned to Nebuchadnezzar after he recovered - so that is what happened.

And how did God accomplish that? We aren't told, but I think we know. I think it must have been Daniel who held things together for those seven years. By this time, Daniel was no doubt already powerful, but he must have quickly become much more powerful as he likely became the de facto ruler for this period of time. Only through God's hand could Nebuchadnezzar's throne have been preserved during his period of insanity.

Verse 27 ends with a bit of a good news.

There was still a possibility that Nebuchadnezzar could avoid or perhaps just delay this misfortune if he would amend his ways and acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God.

What did the king need to do? Verse 27 tells us that the king needed to break off his sins by righteousness and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. That's good advice for any earthly ruler, but not every earthly ruler has this incentive!

Did Nebuchadnezzar do this? Perhaps he tried because verse 29 will tell us that the judgment was delayed for a year, but we are also told that the judgment eventually came.

#daniel