

Lesson 11

Last week we looked at Chapter 4, which is one of the most unusual chapters in the Bible. Why? Because it is written almost entirely from the perspective of a pagan king.

And we saw that, although about 25 years had passed from the dream in Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar was once again troubled by a dream from God. And once again Daniel was able to tell the king what the dream meant, and once again it was not good news.

Daniel told the king in verses 23-27 that he would be driven from men to instead dwell with the beasts of the field for seven times, which most likely means seven years. But, Daniel assured him, he would not lose his throne. Instead, like the stump in the dream was preserved, so would his kingdom be preserved for him by God.

Finally, in verse 27 Daniel told the king what he needed to do to delay the judgment - break off his sins and show mercy to the poor. Did the king do these things? Perhaps for a while, but I think the very next verse tells us that he did not do them for very long.

Daniel 4:28-30

28 All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. 30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

Notice that the narrator has switched from the king ("I did this, and I did that") to Daniel ("he did this, and he did that"). The narration will switch back to the king later in the chapter.

Daniel may have hoped in verse 27 that the king might change his ways and avoid this judgment, but verse 28 gives us the sad news. "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar."

What did Nebuchadnezzar see as he strolled about on the roof of his palace? He saw a lot!

Babylon contained two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the hanging gardens and the city walls. The location of the hanging gardens is in doubt but the walls have been found. The outer wall stretched for more than five miles and, according to Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, the wall

had enough space on top to enable a four-horse chariot to turn around.

During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Babylon was undoubtedly the most magnificent (and probably the largest) city on earth. Herodotus visited Babylon about one hundred years after Nebuchadnezzar's time and was overwhelmed by its grandeur.

As for the hanging gardens, according to the Babylonian historian Berosus, Nebuchadnezzar constructed them for his wife (Amytis) who had left the mountains of her native Media for the plains of Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar built a mountain in the city to remind his wife of her homeland. One text stated:

These were elevated gardens, high enough to be seen beyond the city walls. They boasted many different kinds of plants and palm trees. Ingenious hoists had been contrived by which to raise water to the high terraces from the Euphrates River.

Most of the bricks taken out of Babylon in the archaeological excavations bear the name and inscription of Nebuchadnezzar stamped on them. One of the records of Nebuchadnezzar sounds almost like the boast we see in verse 40. The brick reads, "The fortifications of Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever."

What was the straw that broke the camel's back with regard to the timing of this judgment against Nebuchadnezzar? It happened when the king looked out over his kingdom and said "Look what I have done!"

Nebuchadnezzar was not the last ruler to claim all the credit, and neither was he the last to suffer a terrible fate for having done so.

Acts 12:21-23 - And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Nebuchadnezzar, like Herod, was filled with pride at his own achievements. He had not given glory to God despite all that the king now knew about God.

This is an important lesson for the church. Sometimes we may be tempted to boast about all that we have done and all that we have built in God's kingdom. But God deserves all of the glory for whatever

is accomplished in his eternal kingdom.

There is also an important lesson for us here about the danger of human pride. And that is a lesson our society needs to hear, especially in this current month of June, which is now called "Pride Month"!

1 John 2:15-17 - Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, **and the pride of life**, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Sounds like "Pride Month" to me, but those dangers are not limited to "Pride Month." God's lesson to Nebuchadnezzar should be a lesson for us all.

Daniel 4:31-33

31 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. 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. 33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

God interrupts the mighty king Nebuchadnezzar while the words were still in his mouth. I love how Jim McGuigan described it: "The king was bragging one moment and munching the next!"

Poor Nebuchadnezzar. After all that he did, this is what he is most remembered for. Even Shakespeare mentions this episode. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, the clown, after being rebuked for his ignorance of herbs, responds by saying, "I am no great Nebuchadnezzar, sir; I have not much skill in grass."

In verse 31, God says that the kingdom "is departed" from Nebuchadnezzar. So sure was the coming judgment that God speaks of it as already having happened. We see this so often in the Bible that it has a name - the prophetic past tense.

And here is a Bible study tip: When God starts using the past tense, it's time to watch out! The sky is about to fall on someone, and there's not anything on earth that can stop it.

Verse 33 tells us about the condition of Nebuchadnezzar during his insanity. He grazed in the field like a beast. His hair, matted and coarse, looked like eagle feathers. His fingernails and toenails became like claws. This description suggests a long period of time, which is further evidence that "seven times" most likely means "seven years."

Liberal critics claim that this sickness of Nebuchadnezzar is too incredible to be true. Too incredible to be true? These critics need to pull their heads out of their books and watch a little daytime TV. If the talk shows on TV today do nothing else, they prove that nothing is too strange to be true. A man who thinks he is a cow? It wouldn't even make the first cut on the Dr. Phil Show.

Not only is this event NOT that incredible, but it has a name: boanthropy (thinking you are a bovine). R. K. Harrison speaks of an encounter he had with such a person in a British mental hospital. He ate only vegetation and drank only water. His health was excellent and the only physical abnormality noticed was the length and coarseness of his hair and the thickened condition of his nails.

Another example that was mentioned in a commentary was that of a man who believed himself to be a cat for a period of over thirteen years and yet was gainfully employed the entire time. (The commentary failed to answer one big question: what job did he have?)

Here is the really interesting part: No Babylonian record has been found that mentions any activity by Nebuchadnezzar during the seven year period from 582 to 575 BC. What do you think the king was up to? I think he was out standing in his field - literally!

Who was in charge? As we said, it may have been Daniel. Or perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's son, Amel-Marduk, reigned while his father was grazing. Whoever was in charge on earth, we know who was really in charge here, and Nebuchadnezzar was learning that lesson the hard way. God was in charge, and God preserved Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom for him.

But how do we respond to those who complain that this very unusual event is found nowhere in the secular Babylonian histories that have been discovered? Simple. This is not the type of thing that Nebuchadnezzar or his relatives would have wanted preserved for perpetuity in his royal inscriptions. For a modern comparison, we might think of Roosevelt and his rarely seen (even to this day) wheel chair.

Daniel 4:34-35

34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

For the third time in as many chapters, King Nebuchadnezzar seems to get the message. His reason returns to him, and he realizes just how terrible his great pride was.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that God deserves all of the glory and praise because he has an everlasting dominion and an eternal kingdom - unlike Nebuchadnezzar himself whose kingdom could be taken from him.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that God is all-powerful - unlike Nebuchadnezzar himself, whose weakness had been on display for seven years for all the world to see.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that no one can stay God's hand - unlike how God had stayed Nebuchadnezzar's hand.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that no one can question God's actions - unlike how God had repeatedly questioned Nebuchadnezzar's actions.

If it is foolish ask an earthly king, "What are you doing?" as we read in Ecclesiastes 8:4, then how much more foolish is it to ask God, "What doest thou?" (verse 35).

Daniel 4:36-37

36 At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. 37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

As promised, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was returned to him and he was returned to power. In fact,

he says here that even more greatness was added unto him. It sounds to me like Nebuchadnezzar finally understood where that greatness came from - it was added unto him by God. It was not something the king accomplished on his own. This is very different from how the king described his greatness prior to his seven year lesson.

Again, the significant part of this account is that Nebuchadnezzar regained his kingdom. That proved to him and to all the people that his kingdom was not his because of his own power or his own genius. His kingdom was a gift from God - and perhaps at last Nebuchadnezzar understood that. It sounds like he did - but we have been here before!

Did Nebuchadnezzar finally learn his lesson? We don't know for sure because this book will tell us nothing more about him. History tells us he died a natural death after reigning for more than 40 years - both being very unusual events for rulers of that day! So perhaps he did learn his lesson.

Before we start Chapter 5, let's pause to note the historical accuracy regarding Babylonian history that we have seen so far in this book. That accuracy makes it very difficult to believe that the book was written 400 years after its historical setting as the liberal critics would have us believe.

As we just saw, Daniel 4:30 gives an accurate picture of Nebuchadnezzar's building activities:

The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

One commentator has written:

The East India House inscription, now in London, has six columns of Babylonian writing telling of the stupendous building operations which the king carried on in enlarging and beautifying Babylon.

How would a late author have known that Babylon's greatness in the early sixth century was due to Nebuchadnezzar? Modern scholars didn't find about it until recently.

And that is far from the only example.

Nebuchadnezzar had Daniel's friends thrown into a fiery furnace, and yet the Persians will later have Daniel thrown into a lions' den. Why? Because the Persians were fire worshipers. How would someone have known details like that in 168 BC?

Daniel tells us about the participation of women at royal banquets in Daniel 5:3. The Persians did not permit women to feast in the presence of men but the Chaldeans did. How would someone have known details like that in 168 BC?

Here is what one commentator says:

(Lenormant) Whoever is not the slave of preconceived opinions must confess when comparing [the first six chapters of Daniel] with the cuneiform monuments that they are really ancient and written but a short distance from the [time they describe].

(J.D. Wilson) No Jew whose people had been living for centuries under Persian and Grecian rule could relate with such unconscious simplicity the actual condition of affairs in Babylon 370 years before his own time.

(Harrison) The author possessed a more accurate knowledge of Neo-Babylonian and early Persian history than any other historian since the sixth century BC.

In short, we can trust the Bible!

Chapter 5

The fourth chapter of Daniel was focused on Nebuchadnezzar's pride. The fifth chapter of Daniel will focus on the pride of another king, Belshazzar.

The major difference between Chapters 4 and 5 is in the response of each king. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar ultimately repented of his arrogance and was restored to his former position. In Daniel 5, Belshazzar will not repent and will be killed.

We will see Belshazzar's sins on display in this chapter - and we have seen those same sins before: arrogance, blasphemy, and idolatry.

The theme of Daniel 5 fits into a central theme of the whole book: In spite of present appearances, God is in control.

That theme was important in the context of the oppression of God's people at the hands of arrogant

pagan rulers such as Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Do we still face oppression today from arrogant pagan rulers? If so, we should remember the theme of Daniel - in spite of present appearances, God is in control!

Chapter 4 was the end of the story as far as Nebuchadnezzar is concerned in the book of Daniel or in the Bible.

By any measure, Nebuchadnezzar was one of the most towering figures of human history, and certainly one of the most powerful rulers ever to walk the earth. But was Nebuchadnezzar in charge? Was Nebuchadnezzar in control? Or was he just a tool in the hand of God?

And when parents today choose a name for their son - do they choose the name Nebuchadnezzar, or do they instead consider the name of a Jewish exile who, from a human perspective, would have been considered utterly insignificant when compared with the mighty Nebuchadnezzar? We must learn to see things as God sees them! That is a central message of this book.

Before proceeding to Chapter 5, it will be helpful to briefly consider the history that occurred between the events in these two chapters.

Without any warning or explanation, the narrative leaps from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter 4 to the very end (in fact, to the very last day!) of the Babylonian empire in Chapter 5.

As we said earlier, there was a jump of about 25 years between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Likewise, there is a jump of about 35 years between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5.

Later we will see other large breaks in time that occur without warning - but when we see them later, they should not come as a surprise to us because we now know that such breaks occur in the book. We should be on the look out for them!

How do we know when such a break occurs? We look very carefully at the text and at the context, and we also compare what we read with what we know from history.

Nebuchadnezzar died in 563 BC. He was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach. (Perhaps when you name your son "Evil" you have only yourself to blame when he turns out bad!) Evil-Merodach or Amel-Marduk means man of Marduk. (Marduk was the patron deity of the city of Babylon.) He was the king who released Jehoiachin from prison and gave him an honorable place in the court (2 Kings 25:27-30).

Two years later, Evil-Merodach was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, who was married to a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Neriglissar is mentioned in Jeremiah 39:13.

Neriglissar died four years later. He was succeeded by his young son, Labashi-Marduk, who was murdered by the next king after only nine months.

When the dust cleared, Nabonidus was on the throne. Nabonidus may have been of Assyrian ancestry, and he most likely married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to legitimize his claim to the throne.

Belshazzar, whom we will meet in the first verse of Chapter 5, was the son of Nabonidus.

The final year of the Chaldean empire was 539 BC. The ruler who defeated them was Cyrus the Great, and the ruler who took charge of the city of Babylon at that time was someone Daniel calls Darius the Mede. We will spend some time looking at the identity of Darius the Mede, which has long been the subject of great debate.

Daniel 5:1-4

1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. 2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. 3 Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

If we are looking for controversy in Chapter 5, we don't have to look any further than the first word of the first verse - Belshazzar.

In this chapter, Daniel tells us that Belshazzar was the last Chaldean king of Babylon and that Nebuchadnezzar was the father of Belshazzar. Many historians have told us that Nabonidus was the last Chaldean king of Babylon and that Nabonidus was Belshazzar's father. How do we explain that?

For many years, liberal critics said that Belshazzar was a fictional character invented by the author of Daniel. But, as with so many attacks from the liberal critics, archaeology has now confirmed the

Biblical account. Both they and we should remember this when we get to Darius the Mede at the end of Chapter 5! Never bet against the Bible!

Thirty-seven discovered archival texts dating from the first to the fourteenth year of Nabonidus have proved to all that Belshazzar was a real person. We now know both from the Bible and from extra-Biblical history that Belshazzar existed, that he was the son of Nabonidus, that he was reigning as co-regent at this time in history, and that he was in charge of the city of Babylon when it fell to the Persians - all exactly as Daniel tells us here.

Yes, once again the liberal critics have egg all over their faces, but there are some additional questions that we need to consider.

First, why doesn't Chapter 5 mention Nabonidus?

We know that Daniel was aware of Nabonidus. How do we know that? Because of what is recorded in verses 7, 16, and 29 of this chapter. In those verses, Belshazzar promises to make someone the third ruler in his kingdom.

That is very different from the offer that Pharaoh made to Joseph in Genesis 41:40 - he offered Joseph the second position. Why did Belshazzar promise only the third position and not the second position? Because Belshazzar was already the second, and his father Nabonidus was the first! The third was the only open spot! How would a Jew writing 400 years later have known this?

Incredibly, one modern scholar has written:

We shall presumably never know how our author learned that the new Babylon was the creation of Nebuchadnezzar, as the excavations have proved, and that Belshazzar was functioning as king when Cyrus took Babylon in 538.

If that liberal scholar believed in God, he would know!

But why not mention Nabonidus by name? Because Nabonidus did not play any part in the events described in this chapter.

Archaeology has shown that Nabonidus took up residence at Teman in north Arabia and left his son Belshazzar in charge of the northern frontier of the Babylonian empire. So, for all practical purposes for anyone living in Babylon, Belshazzar was the only king at this time.

Our second question is this - why is Nebuchadnezzar called the father of Belshazzar four times in this chapter and why is Belshazzar called the son of Nebuchadnezzar once in this chapter when Belshazzar was actually the son of Nabonidus?

The answer to that question hinges on the meaning of the word "son." One scholar has listed seven ways in which the term "father" was used at this time and twelve possible meanings for the word "son."

"Father" and "son" can simply mean "ancestor" and "descendent." (For example, Jesus is the son of David, and the Jews were the sons of Jacob with Abraham as their father.)

But was Nebuchadnezzar an ancestor of Belshazzar? Possibly.

It is possible that a genetic relationship existed between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. If Nabonidus married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to legitimize his rule, then his son by her would be the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. That view is strengthened by the fact that Nabonidus named one of his sons Nebuchadnezzar and by the fact that an earlier king (Neriglissar) is known to have married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

It is even possible that Belshazzar was the literal son of Nebuchadnezzar. How would that be true?

Only six or seven years elapsed between the death of Nebuchadnezzar and when Nabonidus came to the throne. It is possible that the new king married a wife of Nebuchadnezzar who had a son by Nebuchadnezzar, and that Nabonidus then adopted that son. I would not call this explanation likely, but it is possible.

The most likely explanation is that Nabonidus married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, which means that Belshazzar was a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

Another explanation is that, as one commentary explains, "by ancient usage the term son often referred to a successor in the same office whether or not there was a blood relationship." This may have been the usage in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 27:7 - All the nations shall serve him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.

But why then not just call Belshazzar the "son of Nabonidus?" Because Nabonidus was a very unpopular king. And that may also explain why Nabonidus was absent from the city of Babylon for 14 years.

Also, inscriptions have been found that show Nabonidus claimed to have received his authority from Nebuchadnezzar. So perhaps Nabonidus' sons were required to be addressed as sons of Nebuchadnezzar to stress that connection. Belshazzar and the Queen-Mother will both refer to Belshazzar as the son of Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter.

Once again we have evidence for an early date for this book. Knowledge of Belshazzar seems to have faded by the time of Herodotus (fifth century BC) and Xenophon (fourth century BC). If the book had been written in the second century, the name "Nabonidus" would have been used rather than the then-forgotten "Belshazzar."

Now that was covered **the first word** of Chapter 5, let's study the other words!

It was bad enough when Nebuchadnezzar looted the temple and stole the gold and silver vessels, but now Belshazzar and his friends are using the temple vessels in a drunken feast while they praise their false gods and idols.

The Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon both tell us that a banquet was in progress on the night that Babylon fell. The date would have been October 12, 539 BC, about thirty or forty years after the events of Chapter 4. Daniel is now in his eighties.

What was going on outside the city during this feast? The Persian armies were camped outside the city walls. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Babylonians had suffered a crushing defeat just days before at the hands of the Persians, and Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father) had fled. Only the city of Babylon remained unconquered. The Nabonidus Chronicle also says that the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without any battle, which as we will see is precisely what Daniel 5 also tells us.

What was the purpose of this feast? Was it to rally and encourage the leaders? Was it to give the people a diversion in the face of the Persian onslaught? Was it to eat and drink today for tomorrow we die? Perhaps it was a bit of all three.

Perhaps Belshazzar was simply trying to drown his fears with alcohol. Verse 1 says that Belshazzar drank wine, or more accurately, "tasted the wine." Some commentaries say that this phrase refers to a

ritual that preceded the feast in which the king tasted the wine. But others think that "tasting the wine" is just a euphemism for saying that the king was drunk - which seems to fit the context very well.

Perhaps the feast was intended to build morale and encourage the king's people - to show the king's confidence in the face of the Persians. After all, the walls of the city likely seemed invincible, and the Euphrates River ran through the city; so there was an ample water supply. Herodotus tells us that the city had been stocked with enough food to last for many years.

Or, perhaps when news of Nabonidus' defeat at Sippar, fifty miles to the north, and his subsequent flight two days earlier became known in Babylon, Belshazzar may have moved quickly to proclaim himself the first ruler of the empire, the real king (with Nabonidus being moved to the second slot). If so, then the festival may have been a celebration of Belshazzar's coronation.

Or, perhaps the Babylonians were simply observing a customary festival that happened to fall on this day. Xenophon and Herodotus appear to support that view.

#daniel