

June 10th, 2018

Killing the Beast of Babylon

Daniel 4

There can be no doubt as to what the purpose of Daniel 4 is. The watcher—the angel of this vision—tells us in **v.17** “The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, *to the end* that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” And this is repeated or alluded to in **vv. 3, 25, 26, 32, 34, 35**.

God reigns over planet earth. Not passively. Not disinterestedly as if He leaves small details to the governance of men. Jesus said “not one [sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from your Father...even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (**Matthew 10:28-29**). And Scripture shows us that no one who has ever attempted to resist his rule has ever succeeded. There is no success against the eternal and immutable decree of God.

In **Genesis 11:7-9**, when Nimrod¹ and his mighty men decided to build the tower of Babel against the Word of the Lord, God confused their language and dispersed them over the earth.

In **Genesis 25:23**, God said it would be Jacob who would receive the blessing, when Isaac attempted to give the blessing to Esau, his plans were thwarted (**Genesis 27**).

In **Genesis 45:5**, we see that Joseph’s brother meant to destroy him, but their plans came to naught. Joseph tells them: “And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.”

¹ Genesis 10:8-10

In **Exodus 5:1** Moses told Pharaoh “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go,’” Pharaoh refused. What was the end of the story? He drowned in the Red Sea. (**Exodus 14:27**).

In **Numbers 22:6**, Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, but God overruled the whole affair and caused Balaam to bless them instead. Balaam said “Must I not take care to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?” (**Numbers 23:12**).

In **Esther 5:14** Haman built a gallows in order to hang the Jew Mordecai, but God turned the events around so that Haman was hung on it himself (**Esther 7:10**).

In **Jonah 1:3**, Jonah refused to preach to the Nineties as per God’s command, so God sent a great fish. Then Jonah obeyed (**Jonah 3:3**).²

The Scripture is crystal clear on this issue. “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD” (**Proverbs 21:30**)

The amazing thing about **Daniel 4** is that it is *not* one of the prophets or apostles that is teaching us about God’s absolute rule over planet earth. It is a pagan king. It’s Nebuchadnezzar. In **Daniel 4**, we do not read that Daniel or his three friends are in danger. Nor do we read that the Jews as a people group are in danger. This account is entirely on how God deals with Nebuchadnezzar. However it was published, as **v.17** says “*to the end* that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.”

There are three parts of that verse, and they will help form our outline. The *first part* of **v.17** says that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men”—that’s God’s Power Over Babylon. The *second part* of **v.17** says that He “gives it to

² I was much helped in this string of God’s sovereignties by A.W. Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 20th Printing, 2002), pg. 44

whom He will”—that’s God’s Pleasure In Babylon. The *third part* of v.17 is that He “sets over it the lowliest of men”—that causes God’s Praise in Babylon.³

☆ God’s Providence Over Babylon

☆ God’s Pleasure in Babylon

☆ God’s Praise From Babylon

The Big Idea...

Your strength, wisdom and accomplishments do not determine your destiny,
only God’s free sovereign grace does

I. God’s Providence Over Babylon

Secret Confessions of an Unlikely Convert⁴

We need to pay close attention to the layout of **Daniel 4**. In the first three verses King Nebuchadnezzar is speaking in the 1st person. He says

“King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! [2] It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

[3] How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and his dominion endures from generation to generation.”

³ Although my titles are completely different, this breakdown was suggested by Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 75

⁴ Borrowed from Rosaria Champagne Butterfield’s title *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey Into Christian Faith*, (Pittsburg, PA.: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014)

So notice three things. 1) Nebuchadnezzar is publishing this to all peoples on earth. 2) His proclamation is an account of what God has done for Him. 3) Praise and worship is the fruit of these events. This is one of the reasons why I believe that Nebuchadnezzar was truly converted. He tells planet Earth the worst things about himself, namely, that He was a proud hard hearted man, whom God made insane, was driven away by his own people, becoming like an animal who ate grass. E.J. Young says here “The concern of the king was to testify, not to his madness, but to the grace of God which is able to abase those that walk in pride. The publication of this edict sheds interesting light upon the open, magnanimous character of the great king. He upon whom the...grace⁵ of God has come cannot but declare His praise and wonders.”⁶ So v.1-3 act as the end of the preface to this story, and v.4-37 are essentially a flashback.⁷

The Flashback: Self-Reliance v. Sovereignty

Now what we are going to see in this flashback mainly is Nebuchadnezzar’s pride set against God’s power. Nebuchadnezzar’s self-reliance set against God’s sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Self-Reliance

So let’s first look at Neb’s self-reliance. Please look at v.4 with me “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.” One commentator estimates that this is 32 years after Daniel interprets his dream in Daniel 2. 32 years of hearing the wisdom of Daniel’s God. 32 years of ignoring it. Not to mention that he witnessed the miraculous rescue of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We must conclude from this that even the greatest displays of God’s wisdom—Dan. 2, or the greatest displays of God’s power—

⁵ Young has the word “efficacious” acting as an adjective describing grace

⁶ E.J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., Reprinted 1980), pg. 98

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 60

Dan. 3 are not decisive for conversion. Humanity is not merely infected with sin, they are enslaved to sin (**John 8:34**). Humanity is not merely sick because of sin, they are dead in their trespasses and sin (**Eph. 2:1**). Humanity is not *merely* natural born children of the devil,⁸ they are in bondage to the devil (**2 Tim. 2:26**). **Romans 7:18** says that in our sinful flesh dwells no good thing.

The greatest signs and wonders that even God Himself produces will *never* persuade someone to come to Jesus. Think about it. Wouldn't it be very natural to think that Nebuchadnezzar would have converted at the end of Ch.3? He saw those men walk around in the fire. He saw the Son of God walking with them. What more proof do you need? Wouldn't you naturally believe that if your unsaved daughter, or son, or brother or sister, or co-worker could *just* see a miracle like this, *then* they would believe in Jesus Christ? But this betrays how radically we misunderstand the nature of sin. We are not sinful *merely* because we do wrong things. We are sinful because at the very center of our being, we are wrong. As Lloyd-Jones says

“The gospel does not pat you on the back, and tell you that all is right. No, the gospel says all is *not* right; not “all is well”, no, but, “In the name of God, all is *wrong*”. And you can never put it right.”⁹

Outside of the new birth, no miracle, no sign, no wonder, nothing will ever convince somebody to believe in Christ.

So here Nebuchadnezzar is at ease. He's prospering. *What does He need from God?* He was head of the most powerful army on earth. He had the wisest counselors surrounding him. He had servants at his disposal, wives and concubines at his beck and call, more wealth than one man could spend, power over all the lives of his subjects, more property than he could ever survey. Nothing was withheld from him. And the dream that he had confirmed this. In

⁸ John 8:44

⁹ Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), pg. 216

his dream, Nebuchadnezzar was this “world tree” (v.22) that reached to the heavens, that could be seen by all the peoples on the earth. It was Neb’s kingdom that all other peoples depended on for food, and shelter, and protection (v.21).¹⁰ He had made it. Nebuchadnezzar represents the most coveted position in the city of man. No wonder he was at ease. What did he have to worry about? He was safe. He had everything he ever wanted.

God’s sovereignty

But then this dream came. The tree was going to be cut down. None of the Chaldean wisemen could interpret it (v.7). So he sends for Daniel. Daniel is at first troubled at the dream because he knew what it meant. Nebuchadnezzar tells him in v.19 “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!”

Then Daniel reveals what the dream means. v.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. [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.”

Five sweeping statements about God’s sovereignty

Look at the five sweeping statements that Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar about God’s control. **First**, God’s control is a *decree* not simple foreknowledge. v.24 “It is a *decree* of the Most High.” Generally speaking, a decree is a decision,

¹⁰ Isaiah 47:10 gives us a picture of the self-reliant spirit of Babylon: You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, “No one sees me”; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.”

a determination, a judgment, an edict, a law.¹¹ As in **Luke 2:1** “In those days a *decree* went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.” Theologically speaking, God’s decree is His predetermined purpose.¹² **1 Cor. 2:7** “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God *decreed* before the ages for our glory.” So everything that Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar here is not happening because God is *merely* predicting it. God’s decree is *not* foreknowledge of events, it is the determination of events.¹³

Second, God controls not just individual and religious events but all political and international events. **v.24** “It is a decree of the Most High, which has *come upon* my lord the king,” **Ephesians 1:11** says “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will,” There is no event that happens in this universe that God didn’t carefully plan.

Third, God controls sanity of all peoples. **v.25** “...you shall be made to eat grass like an ox.” **v.37** tells us that this means that Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind. Think of that—all his power, and wealth, and accomplishments couldn’t secure his own sanity. This is often the one thing that natural man believes they have power over. Pearl Jam released a song in 2002 entitled “I Am Mine”, in it, Eddie Vedder sings,

¹¹ Webster’s 1828

¹² *ibid*

—
Q. 7. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

¹³ Strictly speaking God doesn’t have foreknowledge. W.G.T. Shedd says “Foreknowledge, strictly taken, implies an interval between the knowledge and the event...God’s omniscience from the creature’s point of view is foreknowledge; but it is not foreknowledge from God’s point of view.” Augustine asks “What is foreknowledge but the knowledge of the future? But what is future to God? For, if divine knowledge includes all things in one instant, all things are present to him, and there is nothing future; and his knowledge is knowledge and not foreknowledge.” W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology, Third Edition*, Ed. Alan W. Gomes, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2003), pg. 286

The selfish, they're all standing in line
 Faithing and hoping to buy themselves time
 Me, I figure as each breath goes by
 I only own my mind...
 I know I was born and I know that I'll die
 The in between is mine
 I am mine¹⁴

Vedder believes that he has no control over his birth or over his death. But he's confident that he is in control of his mind. I think most of people believe this. But the truth is that God holds your very ability to reason in His hand. The difference between you being in a mental institution and you being in functional society is His bare sovereignty.

Fourth, God controls all contingencies.¹⁵ What I means is that God controls how people respond to his decree. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar in **v.25** says “you shall be driven from among men.” Meaning, God is determining how Nebuchadnezzar’s citizens would react. Not only at the beginning, but also that they would receive him back afterwards (**v.26**). All human responses are part of God’s decree. He planned for all peoples to respond they way they have.

Fifth, God controls all durations. **v.25** “seven periods of time shall pass over you.” It’s not clear what these seven periods refer to explicitly, whether its moths or years. The point, I believe, is the number itself—seven. The number of completion and perfection in Scripture. This points to “the complete period fixed by God’s decree.”¹⁶ Meaning, this judgment on Nebuchadnezzar would last exactly the amount of time for God to accomplish His purposes. God has a

¹⁴ Part of the tragedy behind the inspiration of this song is found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roskilde_Festival. Vedder wrote this son in a hotel room in Virginia before the band's first show after the Roskilde tragedy in 2000. Vedder said that he wrote the song to "reassure myself that this is going to be all right." I find this particularly sad.

¹⁵ “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” WCF III.I

¹⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 95

set time for every event under Heaven. **Ecclesiastes 3:1** “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.”

Human achievement is not decisive in the affairs on planet earth

What God wants us to see in this chapter is that He rules the kingdom of men. Human achievement is not decisive in the affairs on planet earth. As Bryan Chapell says “No one is truly in charge of his own destiny... We can never know enough, do enough, or have enough to have ultimate control over our lives.”¹⁷ God alone is sovereign over the affairs of men, and He disposes of all things as He sees fit. This is what it means for God to be God. **Isaiah 46:9-10** “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’

And if right now you are thinking to yourself: But how can this be? I don’t understand how God can control every single thought, word, action of every person that ever has or ever will live. I don’t understand how God can control the destinies of all nations and all peoples and still hold them responsible for the choices they make. I can’t comprehend that. If God were a being that you could comprehend, he would not be God.¹⁸

God is aiming at something in your soul in this chapter. He is aiming at stripping away all your self-reliance. He’s aiming at stripping away your ability to say “If only I had (fill in the blank) then I would be safe and secure.” He’s aiming at stopping your taking any credit for anything that you have ever achieved in life. He’s aiming at your inner Nebuchadnezzar in which you are living for yourself, building your own kingdom, acting like you are the center of your own universe. And that’s ultimately why God’s sovereignty is nearly universally despised. Because it humbles the pride of man. No other doctrine

¹⁷ Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 76-77

¹⁸ “If he were a being that we could comprehend, he would not be God.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 108

so decimates human pride as the absolute sovereignty of God. So long as I still retain a little sovereignty over my life then I have room to boast. But if God is sovereign, then all I can do is put my hand over my mouth and say “Not my will, but your will be done.” That’s our first point: God’s Providence Over Babylon. God “will have all men to know, that He is most high over all the earth.”¹⁹

II. God’s Pleasure In Babylon

“Break off your sins”

Here we are tackling the second part of v.17 which says that God “gives it to whom he will.” God by His grace alone, gives the kingdom to whom He will. So let’s return to our narrative. After Daniel announces God’s decree to Nebuchadnezzar, he pleads with him to repent. He says in v.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.” Perhaps a whole message could be preached here on how God takes notice of oppressed and abused people *who are not even in covenant* with Him. Certainly God cares deeply about these things. **Micah 6:8** “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

But notice what doesn’t happen — Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t repent. This is remarkable. According to the modern gospel, Neb had all the prerequisite ingredients to repent and turn to God. He had already seen the spectacular signs and wonders. He had two direct visions from God. He had a compassionate and winsome preacher in Daniel pleading with him. This is all that it takes we are told. If we just show the world that we have a better product, then they will buy what we are selling. You see the modern gospel

¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 109

which appeals to unbelievers as if they all had the ability to receive Christ at any time is false.²⁰ It's true that all men every where are commanded to repent (**Acts 17:30**), but it is not in them to do so. **Romans 8:7-8** "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Unbelievers cannot believe the gospel any more then they can obey the God's law, without a renewal of heart.²¹

"All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar"

And so Nebuchadnezzar goes on his way. Picking up in **v.28** "All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws." Three things to note here. **First**, observe that "in twelve months this king went from having power over the world's greatest dominion to not having power even over his own faculties."²² **Second**, this judgment came suddenly while the words were still in the king's mouth. If you are an unbeliever, don't ever think that just because Jesus Christ has not come back

²⁰ J.I. Packer in his introductory essay in John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2007), pg. 2

²¹ *ibid*, pg. 20

²² Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 77

yet, that He won't. Judgment is always swift and unexpected. **Luke 12:46** says "the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful." **Third** this affliction is known as boanthropy. A combination of the words bovine (relating to cattle) and anthropos (meaning man). Old Testament scholar R.K. Harrison..observed an actual case of boanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946. He saw a man in his early twenties, in fine bodily health but decidedly anti-social, who spent whole days from dawn to dusk outdoors on the institutional grounds...They gave him water from a clean container so he wouldn't drink from mud puddles. But as he wandered over the grounds he would pluck up chunks of grass to eat."²³ This is what came over Nebuchadnezzar as a judgment from God.

Shocking Ordinary Grace?²⁴

Now if you are a Jew in Daniel's time, this is a means for celebration right? 'That dirty pagan king went insane. He finally got what was coming to him! He's been driven into the wilderness, and out of our lives forever. Good riddance!' But then God did something that is shocking for us but very ordinary for Him. He gave Nebuchadnezzar grace.

It's shocking for us, because we constantly have to re-learn that there is no human factor, no human reason, no human work, no human precondition for God giving grace. You see, one way to circumvent God's sovereignty is by reasoning "Ok, so I can't control the events in my life, by my own wisdom or might, but certainly I can gain God's favor by the way that I act. If I act good, then certainly God will reward me with good." Nebuchadnezzar would have laughed out loud at that. Neb chopped off the heads of his servants who disobeyed him (**Dan. 1:10**). Neb threatened to dismember his advisors for not

²³ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 59

²⁴ So much help in this section from Bryan Chapell's *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 80-84

telling him his dreams (**Dan. 2:5**). Neb “ordered the live cremation”²⁵ of anyone who would not bow down to his golden image (**Dan. 3:6**). Nebuchadnezzar’s resume was a train wreck of human carnage and utter blasphemy. The modern day equivalent would be if Kim Jong-un suddenly became a Christian. There is no correlation between our goodness and God’s grace in God’s kingdom. God’s love is not, not, NOT dependent on our good behavior. He does not give us grace because we have been better than other people. God loves us because we are his *not* because we are holy. **v.17** says He “gives it to whom he will.”

This is shocking to us. But very ordinary to God. This is what God has been doing from the beginning. God chose to love the nation of Israel, but not because they were morally superior. In fact He tells them they are not a righteous but a stubborn people (**Deut. 9:6**). He tells them “The LORD your God has chosen you...because the LORD loves you” (**Deut. 7:6-8**). This is true with King David. God chose David to be His man (**1 Sam. 16:12**), though he would sin in such a way that would earn him a life sentence today (**1 Sam. 11**). This is a picture of everyone that God ever redeemed. Paul the murderer. Peter the denier. Sin does not disqualify you from the love of God. No matter what you have done, you can never out-sin the grace of God. God’s grace is not dependent on what you do. John Newton had a woman in his congregation very wisely speak on the subject of God’s saving grace. She said “Ah, I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure He would have seen nothing in me to have chosen me for afterwards!”²⁶ God chose to show grace Nebuchadnezzar, not because of anything in him. God didn’t take into account of his sins, for surely he would have been disqualified. Nor did God take into account any of his righteousness, for he didn’t have any. This is a picture of how God saves all of his children. **Romans 9:16** “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” That’s our

²⁵ Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel According To Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2014), pg. 71

²⁶ John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated From Christian Biography & History*, (London, England,,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 18

second point: God's Pleasure In Babylon. He plucks men and women out of the city of man and gives the kingdom to whoever He wills.

III. God's Praise From Babylon

"I lift up my eyes"²⁷

Here we are tackling the third part of v.17 which says that God "sets over it the lowliest of men." This is why Nebuchadnezzar praises God. Look with me at v.34 Notice that this switches back to first person now. "At the end of the days I, [that is, at the end of the period of time that God set—v.25] Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me," This is significant. This is a spiritually looking up. He *never* did this before. In Nebuchadnezzar's previous two confessions in Dan. 2 and Dan. 3, Neb acknowledged God only as Daniel's God or as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God. But here, He beholds him as his God. He continues halfway through "I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

This is among the most remarkable statements about God's sovereignty that has ever been spoken. And he's claiming three specific things. **First**, that God is the exclusive and eternal reigning King. **Second**, that all of mankind is insignificant in light of His reign. As Isaiah says "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a

²⁷ The Psalmist says "I lift up my eyes to the mountains-- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (**Psalm 121:1-2**). Before he only lifted his eyes to his own kingdom (v.30) but now He lifts his eyes to the King.

bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales;" (**Isaiah 40:15**). Third, that no one, not angels, not devils, not great kings, no one, can question or correct or contain or cancel any part of God's will.

These other worldly statements are not pieces of abstract theology on Nebuchadnezzar's part. This is his proclamation of God's greatness and majesty and glory. But the question that I want to ask as we finish this chapter is: Why is Nebuchadnezzar praising God? Is it just because he got his kingdom back? Certainly he is glad to have his kingdom back. But is that the main cause of his praise? I don't think so. Look at **v.37** "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, **for** [*because*] all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

Nebuchadnezzar is admiring God for his works. And it's the last thing he mentions I want to draw attention to—"those who walk in pride he is able to humble." Depending on how you interpret the seven periods that he had lost his mind, this confession comes 30-40 years after his first encounter with Daniel. 40 years of hearing the word of God. 40 years of hardening his heart. 40 years of sensual pleasures, and self-reliance, and self-righteousness, and worldly thinking, and brutal oppression of humanity. Nebuchadnezzar was beyond saving by all outward appearances. His sin was too great, and his heart was too hard. But God. God claimed Him. "You are mine Nebuchadnezzar. No one else on earth could have humbled your heart. No one else on earth could have pummeled your pride. But I am the Most High God, and no one can stay my hand. Not you. Not Babylon. Not Satan. Not your sin."

That's why Nebuchadnezzar praised God. Because God gave Him a new heart. That's why Nebuchadnezzar was willing to declare to the world his most humiliating experience. God killed the beast in Babylon with sovereign grace.

Application

Our Doctrine: You are the beast in Babylon

I am Nebuchadnezzar. And so are you. Many of you have heard of Rosaria Butterfield. Rosaria was a superstar in the city of man. She was a tenured English professor at a large university, a lesbian who owned two homes with her partner. She was a volunteer for social causes, and an advisor to her students, recruited by other universities to advance radical leftist ideologies. She had created her own kingdom. And then something happened. She says “In April of 1999, I felt the call of Jesus Christ upon my life. It was both subtle and blatant, like the peace inside the eye of the hurricane. I could in now way resist and I in no way understood what would become of my life.”²⁸ Her conversion is recorded in her book *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Now I both love and loathe that title. I love it because it is very catchy. I loath it because it gives the impression that some people are more likely to be converts than other people. There are no such thing as likely converts. All of us have the same basic sin problem as Nebuchadnezzar or Rosaria. The essence of sin, as one put it, “is that I make myself, in a host of ways, the center of the universe.”²⁹ That is the beast. That is what has to be slain—your love affair with you.

Our Delight: Jesus became the beast in Babylon

That love affair with yourself cannot be simply overcome by human inventions. It would be a mistake to think that Nebuchadnezzar redeemed himself because of the suffering he went through. As if his time as a beast served as a penance or a purgatory of some kind. It would be a mistake that transforming Nebuchadnezzar from a beast into a man didn’t cost God

²⁸ *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey Into Christian Faith*, (Pittsburg, PA.: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014)

²⁹ “The essence of sin, as William Temple vividly expressed it, is that ‘I make myself, in a host of ways, the center of the universe.’” Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 89

something dearly. Jesus Christ became the beast in Babylon. Under Levitical law, Aaron was commanded to bring two goats for a sin offering unto the Lord. The first goat he killed and sprinkled it's blood over the mercy seat for the uncleanness of the people. The second goat was different. **Leviticus 16:21-22**

“And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area...”

This goat was called the scapegoat.

You see Nebuchadnezzar's being driven out into the wilderness³⁰ is a picture of the gospel. **Hebrews 13:12** says “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”

Nebuchadnezzar was pictured as this tree at the center of the world that was cut down. Jesus hung on the only tree that ever mattered. **Galatians 3:13** “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”

The kingdom was taken away from Nebuchadnezzar, but Jesus willingly laid down his. **Philippians 2:6-7** “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,”

Nebuchadnezzar endured a small humiliation, but Jesus endured the humiliation of the ages. No one has or ever will be more humiliated than Christ.

³⁰ Daniel 4:33

Isaiah 53:3 “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Jesus Christ bore the beast. He became the beast. He did this for you beloved. He didn't ignore your sin. You were far too vile and vicious and unclean to ignore your sin. No. He took it upon Himself. He bore your sin outside the camp. The most despicable thing about you has been dealt a death blow. And now, no matter what sin is discovered in your life, today or tomorrow or on your death bed, you can know that Jesus Christ has already bore it on himself. He has removed your sins as far as the east is from the west.

But if you have not come to Christ, you are still in the wilderness of this world. You are all alone. What a dreadful place to be. There is nothing more terrifying to be separated from God. You will die one day. As certainly as Nebuchadnezzar is dead, so you too will be dead, very soon. And the Scripture is clear that all who are not written in the book of life will have their share in the lake of fire. Don't resist the grace of God. You know that Jesus Christ is the Savior you need. Call out to him. The Scripture says that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (**Romans 10:13**).

Our Duty: Worship Him who rules the kingdom of men

In **v.34** we read Nebuchadnezzar says “my reason returned to me, *and* I blessed the Most High.” Cause and effect. This *and* is significant. This *thing* happened, namely, his reason returned, *and* so he worships God. Dale Davis says “That is what sane people do—they offer adoration to the God of heaven. Truly rational people talk like this; they confess the supremacy of *the King of Heaven*.”⁵¹

³¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 66

I think there are two types of residual psychoses that can follow us even as Christians that prevent us from coming into the right worship of the King. Either you think too highly of yourself or too lowly of God's grace. For the first group—those who think too highly of yourself—C.S. Lewis offers a simple test. He says “if you think you are *not* conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”³² In other words, if you don't see even your best religious attempts as shot through with corruption you think too highly of yourself. You're arrogant. For some of you, your biggest problem is that they see yourself as a cut above others. You wouldn't say it like that. But your conceit is seen in how you love other people. Jesus said that he who been forgiven much, loves much, “but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Your love for others in in proportion to the way you view yourself. (**Luke 7:47**) If you think high you love low. If you think low, you love high.

For the second group—those who think too lowly of God's grace—you think that you are too much of a lowlife, too dirty, too sinful. Sure perhaps you believe you're a Christian, but a second-class Christian. Not a super-Christian like that guy over there. The story of Nebuchadnezzar reminds that it is the lowliest people that God grants the kingdom to. No matter what type of lowlife you think you have become is irrelevant. God only saves lowlives. The truth is that you are lower than you think. No matter how you paint your moral portrait, it requires blacker shades to make it accurate. You are far more loathsome than you can possibly comprehend, but infinitely more loved than you will ever conceive. Jesus has put away your sin. He became the beast for you.

³² C.S. Lewis, “The Great Sin” in *Mere Christianity*, The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics, (New York, NY.,: Harper Collins, 2002), pg. 72