

Empathy for the Wicked – Nebuchadnezzar

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MAIN VERSES

[Daniel 1:2](#) • [Daniel 2](#) • [Daniel 2:24](#) • [Daniel 2:26](#) • [Daniel 2:46](#) • [Daniel 3](#) • [Daniel 4](#) • [Daniel 7](#) • [Genesis 1:26-31](#)
• [Genesis 11](#) • [Revelation 7:5](#) • [Colossians 1:15](#) • [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) • [John 10](#)

Welcome to Founded in Truth

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love? A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God? Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

Empathizing with the Wicked

So this week we're continuing our series in Empathy for the Wicked. Hopefully it's been edifying for you. It's been edifying for me to dive in and take a look at areas of the Bible that many times we just pass on over. When we take a look at people—the despicable people, the villains of the Bible, the evildoers, the wicked of the Bible—we stand in judgment against them so often, as the Bible tells us we should. And we look down on these people who are wicked and sinful and have done these awful things, and we move on with our life without ever considering how did they become the way that, what downfalls did they not overcome that molded them into a villain, into this wicked, wicked person? Because if we do not take the time to look at what the biblical authors told us about these characters, if we just pass them off as wicked and I know not to be like them, we may inadvertently end up just like them. If we don't know where they fell short, how are we going to know what to watch out for?

And so we've been exploring this series on empathizing—not sympathizing, but empathizing—with the wicked of the Bible. Those in the Bible that are typically passed off as just the villains, and they were born that way. They weren't. They became that way. And this week we're going to be exploring a famous king. One that goes on to lurk the backbone of the entire biblical story,

representing the overtone of what happens when you find yourself in exile from God. Today we're going to talk about and take a look at King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon during the Neo-Babylonian era. This was the king that not only ordered the destruction of the temple, but enslaved the Judeans, the Israelites in the area, kidnapped them and put them into slavery, leaving them with no hope, trapped and abandoned in a foreign land.

And it's during this period of time that Israel finds themselves sitting by the river, sitting on the curbs of the streets, sitting in their apartments, looking out the window, knowing, feeling that this is not their home. This is not where they're supposed to be. It is during this time that a people were overtaken by a culture, by distractions, and by the opportunity to be completely consumed and only lose their identity. That's what was at stake here.

The New Testament and God's Promises

It was also a period of time where the prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah rose up to give hope to the people. Promises were made. God speaks through these men, these prophets, and out flows from their lips the promises of God, the promises of redemption, the promises of forgiveness, how God promises to restore them. God promises to have mercy on them, promises of complete restoration, promises to send a king, promises to establish a kingdom that will overtake the world that he reigns over.

And we know from reading the rest of the story that these promises are birthed completely in the person of Yeshua. That's why the New Testament is so important. We sometimes read the New Testament and see it as a bunch of letters or a bunch of guys testifying of what the Old Testament already says. No, no, no—that is a complete dismissal of everything the authors of the New Testament had at their fingertips and were trying to portray. The New Testament is not simply some witness of the Old Testament. No, the New Testament is a witness of the climax of the promises of God. Without the New Testament, without Jesus, the God of the Bible is just a God who does not keep his promises. The New Testament is the written testimony that our God can be trusted, that our God does not abandon his people, that our God does not abandon his promises. It is the witness of everything Yeshua is, and it is the foundation of the house, the foundation of our faith.

Can't stand it when people go and jump through hoops to try to somehow minimize the testimony of the greatness of our God shown forth in Yeshua, shown forth in the climactic character of the Son of Man mentioned in Daniel. It is the testimony of everything of who our God is and our vocation of what we are called to become.

The Book of Daniel

Back to Babylon. When we read things like Daniel, Daniel is a very fun book. It's a very difficult book. It's like a roller coaster, the way it was compiled. It's actually written in multiple languages. And near the beginning of chapter two, it switches from Hebrew to Aramaic, just randomly. Like, why would you do that? It's an amazing book.

And unlike many other narratives in the books of the Bible that are constantly telling the people to go back to Torah or go back to the covenants of God or lean to... Daniel, if I could say, seems to be a message to a people that even though they find themselves far from the garden, exiled away from Eden, that they are not to lose their identity of an image bearer that was birthed out of that garden. And this period of the biblical story in Daniel is the groundwork for defining the context and all future and past usages or references of Babylon.

Everybody's heard of Babylon in the Bible, right? It's a big, great Babylon, right? It's like the key that unlocks the lock that some of us never knew existed. For example, Daniel chapter 1 verse 2. We're pulled into this story where this king besieges Jerusalem. And he's allowed to do this because of Israel's commitment to rebelling against God and disobedience towards God. And this king takes some of the holy objects out of the temple. Maybe the menorah, the ark, all of the holy objects. And he takes them and brings them to a treasure house in a place called Shinar.

There we go. Daniel chapter 1 verse 2: "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar, along with some of the articles of the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his God in Shinar and put them in the treasure house of his God."

Now, if you're reading a more updated version like the NIV or the ESV, it won't say Shinar there. It'll probably say Babylon or Babylonia. It's Shinar. Matt, why are you harping about this Shinar thing? What's so grand about that?

The Tower of Babel and Babylon's Meaning

Shinar is an ancient, antique way of saying Babylon, and it refers to that concept of that land. It's only used a few times in the Hebrew narrative, but what the author of Daniel is trying to do here is take you back to the very first time Shinar is used. He's trying to set the tone for the rest of the story in this instance, and the very first time that this word Shinar, this place, this land is

mentioned is in Genesis chapter 11. You remember there was a tower? So Genesis chapter 11—let me read this. Yeah, this is great.

"And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there. And they said to one another, okay, so here's the land. Who are the people that occupy this land? What does this land boast of? What is the culture of this land? And they said to one another, come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. They made brick for stone and tar for mortar. And then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower and with its top to the heavens. And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the earth."

So right off the bat—and this is the Tower of Babel, if you haven't caught on to that—right off the bat, the author of Daniel is telling you, guess what? Guess what? I'm telling you a story, and it's that story, and it's happening again. This is the theme. This is the story of when humanity chose to overtake the earth with their own rule instead of God's, to choose to take for themselves the knowledge of good and what is evil, to rule the earth in their way instead of God's.

What Babylon Really Represents

This is what Babylon represents in the story. It's not some Illuminati-run conspiracy-driven culture. It's not. It's not this subterranean government conspiracy that's waiting to jump out and tackle you and take you over. No, it's likely just you, Babylon. It is choosing to make life decisions that only serve you. It's choosing to live a cushy life that makes you comfortable. It's choosing to ignore that the world and the people around you are suffering. It's choosing to live at the expense of others. It's refusing to suffer alongside the world that is suffering around you. It's refusing to serve God's kingdom. It's acting like a beast of the field instead of a human made in God's image. It is saying, I will take for myself the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. It is saying, I will rule this world apart from God. It's saying, I want to be molded in the image of something else other than God. That's Babylon. That's Babylon.

A kingdom of people that live for themselves and not others. A kingdom of people that have rejected the vocation of becoming an image bearer of God. So [Revelation 7](#)—you guys are familiar with this scene? Oh, apocalyptic literature. It's kind of fun. There's this gnarly-looking chick that rides upon this beast, right? You guys familiar with this imagery, right? The beast of Revelation.

Mystery, Babylon the Great

And a whore who rides the beast. And the beast is like the underlying force of this great evil that comes against the world and kind of fuels it — it's the voice of the serpent in the garden, if you will. But the woman, the woman's kind of like the face of this, and she's the face of the power that she rides on, the beast. And do you know what it says about her? You're familiar with this — [Revelation 7, 5](#). What's it say on her forehead? It says, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, mother of harlots, abominations of the earth." Mystery. Epic music playing in the background. Babylon the Great. What is John wanting to force you to think about right now when he's writing his vision? You're reading this and you see great Babylon, Babylon the great, referenced. And where would you go back to if you're familiar with the Hebrew story, the biblical narrative — where does your mind go back to? It would go back to the book of Daniel, right? Where Babylon is known as the great Babylon. Even back to [Genesis 11](#). That's where your mind goes. Here is the woman that represents this. It's happening again.

And it's funny, because a lot of times this reference, Babylon the great, becomes a type of fear tactic. Anyone ever been preached at about Babylon the great? Like it's this big and scary thing? Just me? Okay. Left Behind series, Tim LaHaye. Okay. Many times we're sold this idea that our lives will end and mystery Babylon is going to kill us and our entire family, and this great Babylon the great mystery is going to win, and we are so weak and we're so out of control, and oh, there's no hope, and I need to get my guns ready, and I need to get my RV, and I need to get my water purifier, because mystery Babylon the great is coming to overtake us. And although some of those things are kind of a depiction in Revelation, that isn't the point of the vision. That's not what John is trying to write. It's not the picture he seems to be trying to paint.

The Beasts of Daniel

John's vision is about world powers, the beasts of the world that go to trample the people of God — especially in Daniel. And guess what, you ever notice that, that there's beasts in Revelation? Do you know what the angel is trying to get you to refer back to? It's Daniel, [Daniel 7](#), where the beasts are roaming the world, where Daniel has this very similar vision to what John is having in Revelation, where these wild, monstrous beasts are trampling all over the world. Remember, in [Genesis 1](#), the beasts are the ones that are ruled over, not the ones that have rule. The humans are the ones that have rule. So here are the beasts. And in Daniel's vision, there's one big beast that rises up and takes out all the rest — a really gnarly-looking, wicked-looking beast. And then later in the chapter, we see this figure known as the Son of Man that the beast actually conquers. The beast tramples on this Son of Man and conquers him. But

God steps in and vindicates this Son of Man figure, and he brings the Son of Man up on a cloud of heaven to sit on an empty throne beside him. And what does he offer? He vindicates the Son of Man figure, and he offers him ultimate authority over creation — rule, reign, dominion, even over God's kingdom.

It's an amazing vision, and it's probably the most frequently referenced one in the New Testament. Revelation is talking about God's victory over the beasts that have risen up. It isn't there to scare us. It's there to give you hope. It's there to give you encouragement. It's to remind you of the fact that Jesus won. We're not even waiting on a victory — it happened, and the vindication has taken place.

You Could Be an Ambassador of Babylon

Babylon. Babylon. These people who want autonomy apart from God to rule the world the way that they want. Babylon. And what the world looks like when these people reign. Babylon may not be this evil, wicked subculture out of sight, lurking beneath the earth. You could be an ambassador of Babylon right now. Is that too close to home? The beasts are kingdoms made up of people like that — people possibly that you see in the mirror. Mystery, Babylon the Great. You could be an ambassador of her right now, because that's what Babylon is.

And so we're going to jump into the story, and that's kind of my soapbox. These are the images that Daniel brings forth. This is why Daniel is just such a neat, weird book in the Bible. And we're going to start the narrative this week. If you haven't been with us, I'm telling a story, and I'm going to try to paint Nebuchadnezzar in a way that makes him look like a man we can, or are able to, empathize with, so we can understand and watch out for the potholes in our own life.

Daniel Before the King

We're going to start the narrative around Daniel chapter 2, verse 24. And this is a point in time when Nebuchadnezzar — Nebuchadnezzar, or Nebuchadrezzar in Akkadian — has a dream, and instead of allowing his magicians to tell him the interpretation of the dream, he's like, "No, I want you to tell me what the dream is," and none of his magicians can do it. So he does what the most beastly kingdom in the world would do — how would they react? He talks to his executioner. "I want you not just to kill, chop up all of the wise men in the kingdom into tiny little pieces. I'll show them what happens if they can't interpret my dream." And guess who is among those? Daniel, and all of the other wise men that were recruited from Judea.

And the executioner goes to Daniel, and Daniel's like, "Hold up, Ariok" — I think that's what his name is, it means the butcher in Hebrew — "hold up, man." Like they're friends, they sit down and talk this out. Like, "Oh, you've come to kill me." And you can just imagine — "Yeah, I'm coming to kill you." "It's like, hold on. I can interpret the king's dream. Just take me to him." And this is where the story takes place.

Imagine the Throne Room

So I want you to imagine — I want you to imagine Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadrezzar, "Nebu is my protector," sitting there, the throne room in silence, the royal executioner standing right beside Daniel, ready to act. There, standing before the king, the ruler of the known world, the conqueror of peoples. "Belteshazzar, don't you know your life's purpose is to protect me?" See, Belteshazzar was the name that Nebuchadnezzar gave to Daniel. Daniel means "God is my judge," right? But Belteshazzar, that means — Bel, not Bael like Hadad, not the Bael of Canaan. Bel, that's like the protector of the king. So Daniel's position — his name is changed from "God is my protector" to him kind of advocating the pagan god protecting the king. I just find it's irony in the scripture.

So he's looking at Belteshazzar. "Daniel, Belteshazzar, as you know, I had a dream that was troubling. I want the interpretation, but I also want to know that whoever interprets it is legitimate, you understand. And I can't find anyone in my own royal ranks. Not one wise man can tell me what my dream was and what it means. You're bold for coming here, standing before me. All of my elders have failed me, and you, you believe that you can step over their experience and their wisdom. You're one of the seed eaters, aren't you?"

Daniel, kind of caught off guard, slightly confused. "Seed eater, your majesty?"

"Yes, I was told you refused to eat the meat of the courts. You prefer only seed-bearing plants. A seed eater. Something about the way of a place called Eden."

"Eden. Yes, your majesty. My people are called to reflect the majesty of our God's reign. We're called to bear his image, a command that was originally given, in our tradition, on the cosmic mountain, where man only ate seed-bearing plants."

"Intriguing. A God whose image are his people, and a people that don't like the famous Babylonian goat cuisine prepared by my chef. Well, hopefully you enjoyed your last meal of leaves, Belteshazzar."

The Interpretation

Daniel chapter 2, verse 26, and the king asked him, "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

Daniel, becoming slightly nervous at the proximity of the executioner's blade right beside him, but standing firm, showing nothing but confidence. "My king, there is no wise man, no enchanter, no magician that can explain the mystery of your dream." The king pouts, an unentertained expression, signaling the executioner to cut his time short. Ariok nods. Without hesitation, he raises the blade to begin the process of preparing food for the dogs. "Daniel, but — but there is a God in heaven. He is the revealer of mysteries." Imagine the king kind of holding his hand out, the executioner's blade mid-strike, ready to act. Daniel continues, unfazed. Daniel continues, "It pleased you. It was awesome in appearance. Enormous. Beautiful. It was peculiar, though, because as your majesty began to look and examine the statue, you became perplexed. The head was made of gold, as it should be, but as you looked down to the feet, there was a diminishing level of materials. The shoulders and chest were silver, not gold. The belly and loins were bronze, not silver. The legs were made of iron, not bronze. And the feet — the feet were mingled plaster of iron and clay."

"Go on. Go on."

"— and it struck the feet of the statue, causing it to explode. The statue erupted in such a spectacle it covered the earth with ash and debris and smoke. But when the smoke cleared, there was nothing left of the statue — only the rock that fell from the mountain."

The king interrupts, completely humbled, surprised, excited, scared, full of emotions. What's he to think of this? None of his trusted elders, the greatest in the world, none could tell him the things that this Judean captive just did. "You truly are a servant of the God of mysteries."

But what does the dream mean? Well, your majesty, the dream was not finished. The stone that struck the statue, it began to grow. It overtook the valley where the statue stood. It overtook the mountains that surrounded the valley. It continues to grow. It overtook the entire kingdom. You would think it stopped at the oceans. It overtook the oceans and even the isles far off until it finally consumed the world. Imagine the king bracing for the explanation now. Like, whoa, this is interesting. The king nods, unfazed by the flattery. I know. Imagine Nebuchadnezzar, I'm the gold, all right, smiles a little bit looking at Belshazzar. After you, though, another kingdom will rise up that is inferior to yours, O great king. After that kingdom rises and falls, a third kingdom will arise, one of bronze, and it will reign over the earth. Finally, a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything it collides with. And with iron, things

break, and it will break all of the others. Intrigued, the king leans forward. What of the feat of iron and clay? Your majesty, the fifth kingdom that rises out of the shatters of the fourth will be mixed. It will be divided among several powers. It will have the strength of the fourth kingdom, but it will also break apart easily. The people will not be united. And the stone from the mountain, the stone from the mountain of God? Yes, sir. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up another kingdom. This mountain, it will be the foundation of a new temple. It will be a new cosmic mountain. It will be a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It will never be overtaken. It will never be ruled by another people. It will crush all of those kingdoms and bring them all to an end. Only it shall remain.

A Kingdom That Will Never Fall

For how long will this kingdom remain? Imagine Daniel with such sternness. Forever. Forever. This is the meaning of the vision. The rock cut from the mountain, not made of human hands, it will smash the iron and the bronze and the silver and the gold to pieces. Imagine the king, doesn't know how to act, fighting the pride within him. This dream had frustrated him, haunted him even. Could this Judean truly be a gift to him from this God of heaven? He told him his dream. He must have been sent from the gods. And if he was sent from the gods, then he must tell the truth. Even if he tells the truth, then that means the gods have plans, or this god has a plan to overthrow the rule of earth, even his. This god truly is great. Nebuchadnezzar, he broke under the weight of being in the presence of such divine truth as it manifests as if he was looking at a god manifest before him. The presence of the great God stands before me, revealed not in an idol, but in truth. Revealed not in a statue, but in a human being. Overcome with confusion, excitement, awe.

Divine Truth Before Him

Daniel chapter 2 tells us in verse 46. King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and worshipped him, offered that an offering and an incense would be presented to him. You did not read that incorrectly. Nebuchadnezzar prostrated himself before Daniel and worshipped him. And a lot of the translations, N-I-V, E-S-V, modern translations will say like paid homage to him, like gave respect to him. No, it says worshipped. And do you know how I know that's actually what it was? Make a sacrifice to him. Burn incense before this man. Imagine this king, the ruler of the earth, bows down before—well, there's no statue of this God, but there is an image. There is an image.

So the story in Daniel stops abruptly here at chapter 2 and picks up with an almost complete reversal of the scenario in chapter 3. Chapter 3 begins with Nebuchadnezzar creating a statue. Everyone familiar with that story? He creates a large, long, golden statue. 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. And we don't know what the statue is. The Bible never says it. The Bible never even says that it was a god. We don't know what it is. It infers that it could be some deity. There's a lot of debate over what is taking place here in chapter 3. The king has a statue set up, and he does what? He commands everybody. Everyone must bow down when the music plays. Everyone must bow down to the statue.

The Reversal

What was Nebuchadnezzar thinking? He just submitted and proclaimed that the God of Daniel is the one true God. The Hebrew actually says he prostrated, worshipped before Daniel. Kind of giving a nod to the son of man figure who will rule and reign beside God and be worshipped along with God in [Daniel 7](#). This man who's right? The true image bearer. This is a nod towards that chapter. So we don't really know what Nebuchadnezzar was thinking. When you read the rest of Daniel, it doesn't change. But what if, what if, and this is total speculation here, total speculation for the sake of conflating the story like I already have. Can we venture into even a greater depth of imagination? Don't have a choice. So I could be totally wrong with how I continue the story. There isn't enough evidence to even assert it. So don't go and assert how I portray the story to anybody because it likely is not the case.

Imagine the king not able to sleep after this experience with Daniel. Days go by. He can't get Daniel out of his head. He cannot get the vision out of his head. He doesn't understand this God of gods, this God of mysteries. We destroyed his temple, but there was no image inside of it. There was no statue, just an empty throne, an ark that contained a few items. How? How do we worship this God properly? Daniel said that his people are his image. Among all the sorcery in Babylon, nothing of such a convoluted scenario has ever been put forth. This was truly the greatest God, but how do I show him honor in my kingdom?

The God Without an Image

Imagine Nebuchadnezzar looking out his window. This God is not bound by a temple. This God does not need to be imprisoned in walls. He looks over in the distance at the patron deity, Marduk, the temple of Marduk. How can we honor such a God? Laying in bed, he stares at the ceiling. His eyes shoot open. We will honor him like no other god. We will build him a statue, an image that reflects his power and his might. There will be no face on this statue. No, this

will be a symbol that all will recognize. And we won't build it inside walls like the other gods. We will build it out in the open for all to behold. This is how we will honor this god of mysteries. You okay with this? Okay, okay.

It ends the same way in the story, whether this is the context or not. So Nebuchadnezzar does what? He has a statue built, a huge glorious statue reaching to the heavens. All must bow before it. And we're going to play a new song with all the musicians to this God of mysteries. Nebuchadnezzar, he thought to himself, look at the honor I give to this God. Surely he will bless me. Surely he won't take my kingdom. He stands beside this great pillar so high. Looking up at it, the gold is reflected by the sun, shiny like the neck of a wealthy woman, like a diamond in the rough. He looks out. As all the people have gathered, this is how I will honor God. He nods. The music begins to play. It was glorious. Everyone bowed down before the statue. Nebuchadnezzar soaked in the power and glorious attention, the acknowledgement that whatever he says goes.

All Must Bow

He's the gateway to the glory of this God. His nirvana was interrupted when his royal guard whispered into his ear, they are not bowing. The Judeans that you have appointed over the provinces are not bowing. The king looks down at the section for the royal ranks, and there are three bodies standing erect among the sea of prostration. The king had planned for this. He was told that there might be some stubborn Judeans that he himself blessed, willing to rebel against his decree. And here they stand, refusing to bow, even to the statue devoted to their god. So be it. Take them to the furnace. These Judeans will be offered before this image in fire. You know what else? Heat it up seven times.

The flames erupt out of the furnace. They grow larger and larger until the heat becomes so intense that the licking flames disappear and all that is seen is the glowing of a bluish hue just radiating from the entrance. It almost looked inviting, peaceful even. Throw them in. At that moment, the three men were grabbed by warriors of the king's army, lifted up, taken to the opening of the furnace, tossed like small children into the blue glow. As soon as the men left the arms of the guards, their clothing erupted in flames as if the furnace reached out to kiss them. Burning, rolling around, the king instantly dismisses any guilt from his heart. Rolling his eyes, he yearns to simply sit on the throne under the statue in the valley, gazing at the power that God himself has given to him, gazing at his subjects bowing. He glances once more at the haunting furnace before rising, and then he notices movement, men walking among the rippled air.

He begins to count. One, two, four. Guard! Guard! How many did we toss in this furnace? Well, three, your majesty. Shh! Why is there a fourth? The fourth figure, slightly taller, slightly larger build than the other three figures. A radiant yellow glow contrasting the blue flames surrounded him. This one, this one looks as if he is a son of the Elohim. He rushes towards the open entrance of the furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, I see you walking in there with another. Come out here at once. Show yourselves. He demanded this as if he was still king over this situation. The king knew exactly what had happened. That statue you have built is not our God.

We do not bow to it. We serve God and his kingdom only. Blessed be Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who trusted in the God of mysteries. The king, filled with passion to serve the God of Judeans, anxious to assume the status of a servant of God. He makes a decree to the entire nation in haste.

Displaying God's Reign

Remember, Daniel, Daniel, Daniel is what it looks like to be the image bearer of God, to be the one that is the reflection of God's reign and God's kingdom. And Nebuchadnezzar is told that God wants to place you in that spot too. God gave you rule and domain over all of the earth, over all the animals, over all the birds, right? That's the vocation from Eden. You too can display the reign of God.

So here is the decree that Nebuchadnezzar makes after seeing the awesome power of God and humbling himself and wanting to reflect the reign of our God in heaven, the God of mysteries. This is what he says. Therefore I make a decree. Any people, nation, or language that speaks against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins. For there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way.

You're supposed to laugh because that's not the kingdom that God is wanting to set up. That's the complete inversion of everything that God wants his kingdom to promote.

Nebuchadnezzar seeks to please God. He seeks to reign with God's blessing. He has seen God work in his life, and right before his eyes, he's seen the miraculous display of God's power.

Chapter 4: A Dream and a Warning

Chapter 4, the very next chapter in Daniel, opens with Nebuchadnezzar singing heartfelt praises to God. His reign endures forever. He's committed to God. He's committed to putting God at

the top of his life. He's committed and he's submissive to God's kingdom coming to reign on earth. If you read it, it's a beautiful worship song.

And then he has a dream in chapter 4. He sees a large tree that reaches the heavens, and this tree—it gives food, it gives shelter, it gives life and vitality to the birds in the air as well as the beasts of the ground, the beasts of the field. It gives refuge and food and protection. It is a tree that gives vitality. It is a tree of life. And then suddenly a messenger from heaven is sent to cut it down, leaving only a stump. The tree falls, and the messenger is told to strip the leaves and cut off all the branches. The birds flee from out of it. The beasts of the field below it, they run away. And the tree lies there, cut down, soaked with the morning dew of heaven, laying in the grass.

So he has this dream. So who do you think he calls to come interpret it? The Tel Shazar. Daniel.

The Interpretation

Now Daniel knows the interpretation, but it actually says he's a little scared. He's anxious. He's nervous. But he goes on to tell the king that the tree, the tree is him. The tree is Nebuchadnezzar. The tree is the king of Babylon. And God had placed him in a position where he rules the world. Dominion over man, dominion over animals, a life source for all of creation. This is what God has given to him.

But because of his sins, because of his self-seeking service, his self-seeking attitude, his self-worshipping ways, he will be cut down and he will fall. And his heart, his heart and his mind will be transformed to that of a beast, of a beast. For seven years, he's going to become a beast. But if he repents, if he honors God, like really, really, really honors God, like actually honors God with all of his heart, the way that God wants him to reign, if he truly puts his desires and comforts of his life aside and gives his hands and feet to God, then God will continue to use him.

You ever notice that Adam and Eve were in the garden and they were expelled out to the fields where the animals were? That's what happens. That's what happens when you step out of the vocation of an image-bearing human being. You become an animal. That's the narrative through the Bible, repeated over and over and over again.

If you're not, if you're not the human being that God created, then you're nothing more than the beast of the field that will live at the expense of other beasts that will be self-seeking.

The King's Judgment

So what does the king do after Daniel gives him this interpretation? Three guesses.

This is verse 28. All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of 12 months, he was walking on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon. And the king answered and said, Is not this great Babylon? Let me rephrase it. Is this not Babylon the Great? Connecting. Which I have built with 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. You will no longer rule 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.

Driven. Who else was driven into the field to live as a beast?

There's a lot left in the book of Daniel. The book climaxes in [Daniel 7](#) where the Son of Man is highlighted, this pinnacle vision of this messianic character who is given all power and authority over heaven and earth and God's reigning kingdom. But what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon? God raised him up. God made him a tree to do what? Take care of the animals. His job was to rule, to give food, to give resources, to flourish.

What images are coming to mind here? What other scenario was man given the opportunity to rule over the animals and to subdue the earth and flourish throughout creation? This is a reference back to the garden. The vocation given to Adam and Eve. God's image bearers doing God's will, making God's kingdom known. Putting self-seeking desires, self-appointed goals, self-exalting pride aside so that God could shine for all of the world to see. Image bearer sent out to go to all the world to be fruitful and multiply. Duplicate the image bearers.

In the garden, man was called to rule over the world as God's emissaries. Literally, that's what [Genesis 1](#), 26 through 31 says. It says that we were made originally with our vocation by God to co-rule creation with him, bearing his authority, his reign over earth. We were made to rule over the beasts.

Beasts or Image Bearers

What does Nebuchadnezzar literally become? A beast.

A beast is someone who's not ruling, but someone who is ruled by something else. A beast is someone who is not even a human being anymore. It's at least not how God made them to be. A beast seeks only their own desires, only their virtue, only their goals. A beast only desires to be self-seeking. A beast desires to get ahead at the expense of others, devouring others. A beast looks at the suffering of the world and runs away from it because they're scared of it. A beast is not a human being.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar, the story of Nebuchadrezzar. It's about you and it's about me. It's about how Nebuchadnezzar knew God, worshiped God, praised God, and yet harbored pride in self-righteousness and self-service pursuits. This is my kingdom. I will rule it apart from God. That's the sin of Adam and Eve. We will take of the fruit in determining what is good and evil. We will rule this world apart from God. We will rule this world how we want to rule it. We don't need God. We don't need his reign, his wisdom, nor his authority to do so.

How Many of Us Have Been a Nebuchadnezzar?

How many of us have been a Nebuchadnezzar? Usually I have to try to look to politics or some applicable area of our Western world to try to draw empathy for a villain in the Bible. Nebuchadnezzar is about us. It's about us not giving up our self-seeking yearning to rule our lives and the world around us under the authority of God.

Maybe we're a Nebuchadnezzar right now. Maybe one of you—maybe you are a Nebuchadnezzar. Maybe I'm a Nebuchadnezzar right now. We love God. We know God. We worship God. We praise God. We sacrifice to God. But our acknowledgement of God stops when we want to determine what is good and evil for our life, when we want to rule our way.

If I was to say right now that you were a king, a ruler in this world, how would others describe your reign? Would they say that you're a wise ruler? Would they say that your rule emits wisdom like no other? Would they say, wow, their rule shouts peace and joy and mercy and grace from above? Or would they say that you live as a beast and you rule the same, seeking your own will, willing to devour, eat others for your benefit? Never willing to sacrifice for anyone else. Never willing to give to something other than yourself for the betterment of others. That's what beasts do.

If someone would say that about you, then you are Babylon the Great. It's not some underground government waiting to put computer chips in your hands. It's the person in the mirror. The beastly empire that rises up in John's vision, it is made up of people like that.

Are you a beast? Are you an animal? Are you being ruled by something else? Or are you living out the vocation to be the rulers of the earth as God's image bearer? Everything you do is either one or it is the other. Everything.

Well, how do we know what a true image bearer looks like? What examples do we have? I mean, we face decisions every single day, and sometimes it's a mixed bag.

The Image Bearer and the Answer

Sometimes we're like, yeah, I'm an image bearer right now. And you turn, you get in the car, and you drive on the 77. And I'm a beast, like it's just a landslide.

How do we know what a true image bearer looks like? What examples do we have? That's a great question. Another reason why the New Testament is so incredibly important with so much weight is because it shows us what an image bearer actually looks like in the person of Jesus, in the person of Yeshua.

Yeshua was the perfected image of God. That's what Paul says in [Colossians 1.15](#) and [2 Corinthians 4.4](#).

What does Yeshua say about himself? This is key. If you have seen me, you've seen the one that sent me. When he spoke to his followers, he wasn't intending for that to be something that was just about him. Remember in [John 10](#), he says a little prayer to God and he says, God, like we are one, but my prayer is that all of them would be one with you like I'm one with you, that they would reflect the true pure image of your kingdom as I do, that they would follow me and be connected with you as one with you.

Called to Rule as Priests

We were not called to be beasts. We were called to rule as priests, ambassadors of God's kingdom, a royal priesthood.

Worship team, you guys can come up so we can conclude. So I don't know where you're at. You could be high in the heavens right now. Branches spread out. Or you could be laying on the ground covered in dew, eating like a beast.

But you don't have to stay that way. What does it take? It takes repentance. It takes repentance. It takes a humble heart. It takes the willingness to remove your pride and self-seeking pursuits and say no more. It is saying that I know God has more for me in this life. It is saying that I

want to look more like my king. It is saying, Yeshua, mold me into what you would want me to be.

You were called to be God's image to the world, to subdue the earth in the name of God's kingdom with God's might, power, authority, showing forth his grace, peace, forgiveness, and self-sacrificial love. That's an attribute of an image bearer. Not to just stand by, make offerings, sing praises, and then stand on your balcony and proclaim how much you love your heart more than God's.

Hope in God's Kingdom

So I don't know where you're at today. Maybe you're somewhere in between. I would bet that's probably a lot of us. But there is hope, and that's the message of the Bible, and that's the message that Daniel tells us, the book of Daniel. It tells us that if we can put our faith into God, he can give us the strength to be and live out the image-bearing human being that we were created to be, even if we find ourselves in the midst of Babylon. We can still have that status if we're following God with everything and not allowing Babylon to change us.

So please stand. We'll go ahead and conclude services with worship. If you need prayer today, we have a prayer team that will be off to the sides. It's a great opportunity. I'm very thankful that we have this for myself and our fellowship. Don't take it for granted. These are people that will lift you up, will pray with you, will encourage you, and will stand with you and petition alongside you to go before the Father today.

Alvina Malkinu, our Father, our King, Father, we thank you for this opportunity to come before you, this opportunity of the power of your word. Allow it to consume us, Father, and allow us to have the joy of your spirit within us that we would be molded as we follow step by step the footsteps of our King Yeshua. We thank you, Father. In the name of Yeshua we pray. Amen.

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