

NOVEMBER 27

Daniel 4

This chapter is one surprising, amazing chapter. Who says there is no love and grace in the Old Testament? We get to see God conclude His education of Nebuchadnezzar. Not only was this God's mercy to Neb, but in it, though it is still years away, God is paving the way for His people to return to Jerusalem by preparing the nations. That was also love and mercy for Israel. What we will read today was world news.

Vs. 1-3 So, to whom is this letter written? Since the reference to the peoples of the earth is general, it looks like Nebuchadnezzar is writing this to everyone. There were lots of nations outside of his control to the north, west, and east. It is very likely that there were trade and diplomatic relationships with some of these countries, like India, for example. Notice how the scope of the event and the communication of the event have increased in these past three chapters.

V. 3 We have the same question reading this that the original readers would have had, "What in the world happened to Neb?" And you and I would have another question, "Did he become a believer?"

Vs. 4-9 Nebuchadnezzar was having another bad dream and personal crisis, compliments of God. Notice that although Daniel doesn't show up right away, he was still the head of magicians and wise guys. Either Daniel wasn't on duty, or Neb didn't think he needed Daniel for this "run-of-the-mill" malfunction.

Vs. 8-9 We'll have to compare these words with Neb's final words.

Vs. 10-26 This is the dream and its interpretation and it is pretty straightforward. I just have three comments. First, the seven periods were seven years. Second, the goal of this discipline on Neb is clearly stated in v. 25. Third, it is interesting that God is taking this kind of care to mold and teach Nebuchadnezzar. This isn't to say that God didn't give other kings lots of lessons and signs to get their attention. The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel saw miracles like crazy from Elijah and Elisha. So what is the difference? Besides the fact that Neb was a Gentile, he responded positively to God.

V. 27 If Nebuchadnezzar had listened, he could have avoided this.

Vs. 28-33 God gave Neb time to repent, an entire year.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled for 43 years and, like Solomon, did a lot of building. Apparently he was finished. One of those things he built was a wonder of the world. Since he will be out of it for seven years, I'd suggest this happened sometime around the 30th year of his reign.

Notice that the words were not yet out of his mouth. Notice too that vs. 28-33 are now in the third person. This would have been Daniel's account of what happened. And remember, this is all written in Aramaic. All nations could and would have read this.

What an incredible way to humble the ultimate human ruler. One minute you're admiring your world wonder, and the next, you're out on the front lawn eating grass. Now, there are Bible expositors who have found a human ailment that looks like this condition, as if to prove it is possible that this happened to Neb. So what did God do? Make him crazy? I wonder if God simply pulled away the image of God. We all take the spiritual for granted, that we are made in the image of God. This isn't intelligence or IQ or awareness. It is something the animals don't have, regardless of how much intelligence they show. We are spiritual and have the characteristics of God. We are not God, but He has shared with us His own attributes of personality and understanding. The image of God is an incredible gift, and no one really thanks

Him for it. In fact, we use it to dishonor Him and claim He doesn't exist. That's ironic. Here is an example of what would happen if God ever took it away from us.

Vs. 34-37 This is Nebuchadnezzar's testimony and worship of Yahweh before the world. There is a lot to observe here, but most significant is v. 37. The *now* goes hand in hand with *praise and extol and honor*. These last three actions of worship are written in a way that suggests that Neb would continue to do this.

So then, what happened here? What would this have meant for the kingdom? Why didn't they appoint a new king? The fact that they waited for Neb to regain his "mind" meant that they believed Daniel. It is very possible that Daniel was in control of the government during this time. It was because of Daniel that when Neb's understanding returned, the government was peacefully handed back to him. Because of Daniel, they could have all had this date set on their iPhones. Maybe they had a countdown clock app.

Wouldn't this have become world news? Information flow was slower than today, but it flowed. Not only would this have been news in the empire, but everywhere that people knew of Nebuchadnezzar, there would have been interest. Imagine if this happened to the President of the United States and he grazed daily on the White House lawn. Barbara Walters would be out there feeding him a carrot on national TV. It would be the top story in the news every day. And this lasted for seven years.

Note, too, that Cyrus, the future king of Persia, was probably alive, but young, when this happened; and Darius the Mede was already officially serving his country. They would have known about this.

So the burning question around the world was what had caused this. Surely the word got out that it was Yahweh, if only as a rumor. Now, with this letter, the official word had been heard and Nebuchadnezzar was a worshiper of Yahweh, the God of the Jews, the King of heaven. And, for the remainder of Neb's reign, he would have given testimony to the greatness of God.

Can you see how God was preparing the nations for the return of the exiles to Israel? Can you see that Cyrus' decision to send Israel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple has a connection to the work God was doing as the people were in Babylon, being punished? Daniel is an amazing book, and in the next chapters, we'll see how God used Daniel personally.

It was a long education, but I think that as a result of this letter, Nebuchadnezzar received an "A+" as his final grade from God.

2 Peter 1

It is thought that this letter was written close to Peter's death in Rome. Peter apparently lived his final ten years in Rome, though *never* as the pope. The focus of this letter is not only encouragement for those who were facing suffering, but the churches were encountering more and more false teaching. Someone has said that one recognizes the miracle of the apostolic age in noticing how quickly error came into the church once the apostles were gone. Actually, we've seen error being countered in all of the letters of Paul. Even in Acts 20, Paul warned the elders in Ephesus that ravenous wolves would come from within that church, not sparing the flock. The next thing you know, after the history recorded in Acts, Paul sent Timothy (in 1 Tim.) to Ephesus. He was to stop false teaching and to rebuild the church. Apparently something happened to the church in Ephesus. This letter from Peter is also written around that same time.

V. 1 Notice the *faith of equal standing*. It seems that this might have been said to counter some teachers who were saying there were different levels of perception or of belonging to God.

Vs. 3-4 These are two packed verses. Simply put, we are born again by *His divine power*. Notice that *granted* is used twice and each time the word refers to something else. The first has to do with God's divine power granting us life in Christ, as seen in knowing Him. The second has to do

with the knowledge of Christ granting us the benefits of belonging to Him, or as Paul said in Philippians 3, *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. Do you see how these things build on one another?

Vs. 5-9 Faith should automatically launch us into a process of growth, change and understanding. Being a child of God should change our lives and our conduct. Apparently there were teachers saying that the spirit of man was good; therefore, whatever you did now, in the body, didn't count, so you could do anything. Peter is saying that conduct is important because it reveals your knowledge of Jesus and your understanding of what He has done. A person who knows Christ becomes like Him and becomes engaged in His mission as a fruit-bearing vine.

Vs. 10-11 Being diligent to confirm our calling and election is based on our gratitude to the Lord and our understanding of what He has done for us and for all of mankind. Knowing Him and knowing what is happening on this earth, how could we treat this lightly? This entrance into heaven is as someone who has worked hard in the harvest and honored God on earth, as opposed to someone who lived a life of hiding, gratifying their desires and dishonoring Christ. To put it another way, it is the difference between the *gold, silver, precious stones, and wood, hay, straw*. The Lord welcomes these people differently.

Vs. 12-15 This is Peter, the proven disciple and shepherd, making disciples right up to the end of his life.

Vs. 16-21 Peter is asking them to submit, to commit themselves to the Word and to the apostles' teaching. Peter begins with the eyewitness account of the apostles. Peter was on the mountain with Jesus when Jesus was transfigured. He saw His future glory, as we'll see Jesus described in Revelation, and as He is in heaven right now.

V. 19 More sure than their testimony of the Transfiguration was the prophetic Word (the Scriptures) the apostles and prophets were now sharing with them. And even more sure than *the prophetic word* is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who was producing new Scripture by supernatural inspiration (through the apostles and prophets, Eph 3:5), and, according to John 14-16, the Spirit was teaching it to them. Remember, the Spirit's ministry is to reveal Christ.

The focus of all of this is the Lord Himself, and all of this goes back to v. 3 and the knowledge of Jesus. Notice that in Ephesians 4:14, Paul talks about the equipping ministry of the leaders as protecting the people against false teachers by bringing them to maturity in knowing Christ.

What Peter is saying here is exactly why we are in the Word. To make disciples, who are able to handle the Word and grow in the Word, we ourselves need to be in the Word, growing in our Lord and following Him. A disciple is not above his teacher. We need to know Christ fully so that the disciples we make will be like Him, not simply like us.

Psalm 119:97-112

And David will tell us how the Word protects and matures us.

Vs. 97-104 This reminds me of the comment of the Pharisees regarding Peter and John: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13) And Jesus was the Word made flesh. Again, the disciple is supposed to be like his teacher.

Since the Word is from God, anyone who loves the Word and abides in it will have access to wisdom and understanding that are eternal and far above human achievement.

Vs. 105-112 Verse 105 is a famous verse, but notice the context of affliction. Emotional distress is almost blinding. It is hard to think straight or concentrate. It is hard not to react instinctively with anger or despair so quickly that it defies the ability to control ourselves. This was hard work, but this is what saved David. This is what God wants us, as disciples, to learn also. It is the

Spirit, working through the Word that gives us control, leads us to safety and gives us an undivided heart in following Jesus.

V. 108 Notice too that David not only read God's Word, but he praised God, even in the storm.

V. 111 At this point David didn't have the promise of a continued throne, yet he considered his heritage and inheritance from God to be God's Word.

Proverbs 28:17-18

V. 17 That burden can be removed before God and before men, but that person has to be totally remade by God and be in submission to the Word.

V. 18 Amen.