

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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God's Kingdom Rules Over The Kingdoms of Men

by Dan Trygg

"It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation. ⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵ I had a dream, and it frightened me; while in my bed, the images and visions in my mind alarmed me. ⁶ So I issued a decree to bring all the wise men of Babylon to me in order that they might make the dream's interpretation known to me. ⁷ When the diviner-priests, mediums, Chaldeans, and astrologers came in, I told them the dream, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. ⁸ Finally Daniel, named Belteshazzar after the name of my god -- and the spirit of the Holy God is in him -- came before me. I told him the dream... ²⁸ ...All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, ³⁰ the king exclaimed, 'Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built by my vast power to be a royal residence and to display my majestic glory?' ³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared that the kingdom has departed from you. ³² You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals, and you will feed on grass like cattle for seven periods of time, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men, and He gives it to anyone He wants.' ...³⁴ But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and 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. ³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does what He wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can hold back His hand or question Him."

Daniel 4:2-8,28-32,34,35

We have been looking at the passages in the OT that talk about the Kingdom of God. This was such a fundamental part of the NT message, beginning with John the Baptist' preaching, and carried onward in Jesus' teaching. Why was it so important? What concepts were encapsulated by that word picture? We saw that *the foundational passage for understanding the Kingdom of God was rooted in the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai*. God presented Himself as a benevolent King, who was seeking a covenant relationship with those who would freely choose to enter an agreement with Him. If they would exclusively devote themselves to Him as their God and King, and keep His commandments, He would set them apart to be a special people, a dedicated society, people who would be uniquely His, and through whom He could present Himself to the nations of the world. **They were to be a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people uniquely devoted to and cared for by God.** If they kept His written stipulations for living, and followed the direction of His voice and leading, He would protect them, provide for them, prosper them and make them a blessing to people around the world. Unfortunately, they did *not* keep their part of the arrangement, and they experienced difficulties, famine, poverty, defeat and oppression by their enemies. Instead of being examples of wisdom and representing God well, they became foolish and brought mockery and ridicule on themselves and, by association, Yahweh, because of their failures and demise.

Last time, we saw how **God chose to reveal Himself in a direct and powerful way to a young pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon**. As the crown prince, at 29 years old, he and his allies, crushed the Assyrian-Egyptian coalition at the Battle of Carchemish, and swept down through Palestine. Though Nebuchadnezzar was stopped at the border of Egypt, on his way back home, **the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, offered his surrender to him, and Nebuchadnezzar took a number of captives as hostages. Among these hostages were Daniel and his friends.**

Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, died in August, so he hurried back to Babylon to take his place as the new king. **In the second year of his reign (604 B.C.), the king had a significant, vivid dream, which troubled him greatly.** In our last study, we saw how he insisted that the wise men tell him *what he dreamt*, so that he could be assured that they were capable of *interpreting his dream*. When they could not do that, he ordered the execution of all the wise men. Daniel managed to secure some time in which to seek God, and **Yahweh revealed not only the dream, but also the interpretation to Daniel in a vision in the night.** This propelled the young Jewish captive to the highest position as ruler over the province of Babylon, and as overseer of all the wise men.

By the fourth chapter of Daniel approximately 30 years had passed. Nebuchadnezzar had been a successful and popular king. **He had given great attention to building projects**, most notably to the building and beautifying of his great capital city, Babylon. **Part of his motivation for this was to establish a permanent memorial, glorifying himself.** In his travels, he had seen how other great kings had built monuments to themselves, only to have successors or enemies eventually deface them, and remove any reference to those who had originally established them. **He was determined to be the greatest king who ever lived, and to be sure that his name would never be forgotten.** One strategy he used to guarantee his aspirations was to have an inscription stamped into the many, many

building blocks he had his workers form and bake. This inscription read: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, ...the eldest son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am builder”. **It is estimated that over 15 million bricks were fashioned and baked for his many building projects, and virtually all of them bear this inscription.** On an outer wall of Babylon is another inscription that indicates his mindfulness of this issue: “I built a strong wall that cannot be shaken, with bitumen and baked bricks...I laid its foundation on the breast of the netherworld, and I built its top as high as a mountain... The fortifications of... Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever.” The ruins of this city alone cover over 2,000 acres (over 3 square miles). It is the largest archaeological site in the Middle East. He built a bridge over the Euphrates, and built and repaired temples, huge walls, lavish and ornate gates, boulevards, gardens and parks, and, of course, the “hanging gardens of Babylon”, considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. He also had building projects going on in many other places, as well.

All of this gives context to what is recorded for us in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar was “at ease and flourishing in my palace” when he had another dream. Like the dream he had 30 years before, **this one troubled and alarmed him.** He sent for the wise men of Babylon to come and give the interpretation of his dream. This time, he told them the dream, but they could not interpret it. Finally, **Daniel was called in to assist.**

In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he saw a great and tall tree, with widespread branches. It was healthy and produced much fruit. The birds and beasts of the earth came to it for shelter, and to eat of its abundant fruit. Then he saw as a “watcher”, an angelic being, called out to cut down the tree, cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. All the birds and beasts fled away. The angel commanded to leave the stump, with its roots in the ground, with a band of metal around it. “Let him be drenched with dew from the sky, and eat of the plants with the animals. Let his mind be changed from that of a man to that of animal for seven periods of time. ... **This is so the living will know that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men. He gives it to anyone He wants and sets even the lowliest of men over it**” (4:15-17).

Daniel interpreted the dream: “O king, that tree is *you*. For you have become great and strong: your greatness has grown and even reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the ends of the earth. ... and **this is the sentence of the Most High that has been passed against my lord the king:** ²⁵ You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals. You will feed on grass like cattle and be drenched with dew from the sky for seven periods of time, **until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men, and He gives it to anyone He wants**” (4:24,25). Daniel went on to encourage the king to humble himself, turn away from his sins, and care for the needy. Possibly that would grant him a continuation of his prosperity. ...**A year went by,** and Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace, admiring the great and glorious city and buildings he had commissioned, “The king exclaimed, ‘Is this not Babylon the Great that *I* have built by *my* vast power to be a royal residence and to display *my* majestic glory?’” (vs. 30). (*Note the egotism!*) While those very words were still in his mouth, **a voice from heaven pronounced sentence against him, and these things came to pass.** His kingdom was taken away from him, he was driven away from people to live with the animals, and he ate grass and plants with the cattle, for seven periods of time (years?). His hair grew long like feathers, and his fingernails and toenails like bird’s claws.

At the end of that period of time prescribed, Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven, and his sanity returned to him. He praised the Most High God, and honored and glorified Him who lives forever, because His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and **His Kingdom is from generation to generation. All the people on the earth are like nothing to Him. No one can hold back His hand, or challenge what He does.** He went on to write: “At that time my sanity returned to me, and my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, I was reestablished over my kingdom, and even more greatness came to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of heaven, because all His works are true and His ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride” (4:36).

In the previous vision, some 30 years before, Nebuchadnezzar came to realize that God would establish a Kingdom that would start small, but would displace all other kingdoms. It will fill the earth, and last forever. He came to realize that **God was a revealer of mysteries, and greater than other gods.** Now, in chapter 4, **Nebuchadnezzar writes this account as a letter to all his people, glorifying and praising God as “the Most High”.** It seems clear that he has a new appreciation for this “King of heaven”. He has been humbled, and clearly acknowledges that God was “just” in doing so. He also recognizes, and wrote this open letter to declare, that **the Most High is the One who is the true ruler over the kingdoms and nations of men. He gives leadership and authority to whoever He pleases,** even to “the lowliest of men” (4:17). **There is no ground for any person to boast,** because God is the One who gives us the power and opportunity to accomplish whatever we manage to do. Without His permission and help, no one could accomplish anything. Not only is He King of Heaven, but He is also the King of the kings of the earth. And, as Nebuchadnezzar found out, **this God is able to humble those who walk in pride.**