Daniel 4:19-37 – Do You Want to Eat Grass?

Nebuchadnezzar had a second troubling dream. Again, his "wise men" could not interpret the dream. Daniel was then called upon to interpret the king's dream. Just as in the first dream, there was a large impressive object. Instead of an image, this time it was a tree. As in the first dream, there was heavenly intervention. In the first dream, the heavenly intervention caused the image to be smashed in pieces. In the second dream the heavenly intervention called for the tree to be chopped down. This is the last chapter in Daniel where Nebuchadnezzar was alive. At the time of the events in chapter 5, he was dead. Nebuchadnezzar's name appears about 32 times in NASB. God's message to Nebuchadnezzar was that God alone is the king and kingdom maker. All other kings and kingdoms will fall, but God is the eternal king and his kingdom will last forever.

Read Daniel 4:19-27.

In 4:5, the dream made Nebuchadnezzar afraid and the dream alarmed him. How did Daniel react to the dream? Even though the dream alarmed the king, what did he tell Daniel? After Daniel gathered himself, what did he say to the king? Obviously, the dream was not going to be good news for the king. (4:19)

In verses 20 and 21, Daniel repeated the details of the tree in the dream given to him by the king, except that he left out the part about all flesh being fed from the tree. Verse 22 contains the big reveal. Who was the tree? How was this person like the tree? (4:20-22)

Verse 23 started the bad news. ESV and NKJV have "a watcher, a holy one". NASB adds "angelic" in front of "watcher". NIV has "a holy one, a messenger". Where did this holy one come from? What did the holy one say to do to the tree? ESV, NKJV, NASB and NIV all have "it" at the beginning of the verse and then switch to "he" in the second half of the verse. Daniel already revealed that the tree was a person. (4:23)

In verse 24, Daniel declared "this is the interpretation". He was talking about the second half of the dream where the bad news was. In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree to kill all the wise men. See 2:13. In chapter 3, the king decreed that everyone was to fall down and worship the golden statue. Daniel declared that what the holy one said in this dream was a decree from the Most High. Who was on the receiving end of this decree? (4:24)

In verses 24-26, what was going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar? Was the language literal or figurative? (4:24-26)

What was Daniel's bold counsel to Nebuchadnezzar? We are not told how the king responded to Daniel's counsel. Maybe he did heed the advice for a while. (4:27)

Read Daniel 4:28-37.

In verse 28 we are told that everything happened to Nebuchadnezzar as God had said through Daniel. How long did it take for the dream to be fulfilled? (4:28-29)

From verses 29-30, what was the occasion that triggered the divine decree of Nebuchadnezzar's lesson in humility? (4:29-30)

In verses 31-32, how did Nebuchadnezzar know that he had crossed the line? (4:31-32)

In verse 33, the dream was fulfilled. I will steal a line from Dale Ralph Davis, about what God did to the king. "God turns him out to pasture". What happened to the king was mentioned in 15–16 when the king told the dream, in 23 when Daniel repeated the dream, in 25 when Daniel interpreted the dream, in 32 when the voice from heaven repeated the message of the dream, and in 33 when the dream was fulfilled. What new details were added in verse 33? If you were an exile in Babylon, would this bring a smile to your face? (4:33)

What did Nebuchadnezzar need to do in order to be restored? The end of verse 34 may sound familiar. It is similar to verse 3. In verses 34-35, what did Nebuchadnezzar come to understand? (4:34-35)

In verse 36, what happened to the king after his lesson in humility was complete? In verse 37, what had the king learned? (4:36-37)

Sometimes when I get too full of myself, I think about this chapter and ask myself, "do you want to eat grass?" No, I don't want to eat grass, but sometimes God has to put me out to pasture for a time.