

Kings and Prophets 16-10-13a

This is Thursday, the 13th of October, 2016. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets tonight in Daniel chapter four. Daniel chapter four.

This will be Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. I'm sure he had many other dreams, but the ones recorded in the word of God, this is the second of two. And so we'll be picking up in Daniel chapter four.

Let's take a moment as we begin our study of God's word to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We ask that your Holy Spirit will illuminate this portion of your word for us and minister it to each heart so that each of us finds pertinence and application, strength and encouragement to navigate the circumstances that you have assigned us so that our lives will reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray these things in his name, amen. We saw last time this giant image and the fate of the three friends of Daniel who refused to bow down before it. I'm sure there were many opportunities in their lives as princes in the kingdom to make choices about when to tolerate, when to be flexible, when to attend functions that weren't particularly spiritually edifying.

There was a lot of mention of gods and divinity and so on in the Babylonian government, but this particular edict and this particular function with the playing of the music and the bowing down before this giant image was something that they could not in good conscience do. And this, of course, is something that we constantly face. When do we flex? When do we tolerate? When are we not to make an issue of things? And when is it time to stand up even at the risk of loss of some kind and reflect our testimony for God? And there's no cut and dried answer, especially in this age.

This is where our time in the word of God, our cultivating relationship with God through the Holy Spirit is our illumination. It is our guide. It helps us know when, and we prayerfully and faithfully try to be salt and light in our generation.

At the same time, not majoring in minors or creating false issues that actually distract and detract from the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of God. Our good works should cause men who see them to glorify our Father who is in heaven. We are to endeavor to not have our good be spoken of as evil, but it is a challenge.

And this is why we have prayer. This is why we have regular Bible study. And this is why we have the presence and power of God's spirit.

And God's spirit is going to occur again tonight as we pick up in Daniel chapter four. Nebuchadnezzar the king sends out this proclamation to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth. Peace be multiplied to you.

Kind of sounds like the beginning of one of Paul's epistles, doesn't it? Grace and peace. Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the most high God has worked for me.

How great are his signs and how mighty his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house and flourishing in my palace.

I saw a dream which made me afraid and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore, I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in and I told them the dream, but they did not make known to me its interpretation.

But at last, Daniel came before me. His name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my God. In him is the spirit of the holy God.

And I told the dream before him saying, Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy God is in you and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen and its interpretation. These were the visions of my head while on my bed. I was looking and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great.

The tree grew and became strong. Its height reached to the heavens and it could be seen to the ends of all of the earth. Again, this earth here is probably land.

I don't know that Nebuchadnezzar thought of the earth as flat or as a sphere, but often when you see earth, this is both in Hebrew and Aramaic, and it means to the very far reaches of the land. Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it.

The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches and all flesh was fed from it. I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed and there was a watcher, a holy one. Coming down from heaven, he cried aloud and said thus, chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.

Let the beasts get out from under it and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze. In the tender grass of the field, let it be wet with the view of heaven and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth.

Let his heart be changed from that of a man. Let him be given the heart of a beast and let seven times passed over him. This decision is by the decree of the watchers and the sentence by the word of the holy ones in order that the living may know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men gives it to whomever he will and sets over it the lowest of men.

This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make it known to me, the interpretation, but you are able for the spirit of the holy God is in you. Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time and his thoughts troubled him.

So the king spoke and said, Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you. Belteshazzar answered and said, my Lord, may the dream concern those who hate you and its interpretation concern your enemies. Of course it doesn't.

This is sort of a wish. He's saying, I wish that I could tell you that this applies to someone else. But the tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens, which could be seen by all the earth, whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which the fruit fall, under which the beasts of the field dwell, in whose branches the birds of heaven have their home, it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong.

Your greatness has grown, reaches to the heavens, your dominion to the end of the earth. And as much as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze and the tender grass of the field, let it be wet with the dew of heaven and let him graze with the beasts of the field till seven times pass over him. This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most high, which has come upon my Lord, the king.

They shall drive you from them, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven and seven times shall pass over you until you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of man and gives it to whomever he chooses. And as much as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you after you come to know that heaven rules.

Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you. Break off your sins by being righteous and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the 12 months, he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. King spoke saying, is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty? While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven, King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken, the kingdom has departed from you and they shall drive you from men and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field or shall make you eat grass like oxen and seven times shall pass over you until you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he chooses.

That very hour, the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from men, ate grass like oxen, body wet with the dew of heaven, his hair grown like eagle's feathers and his nails like bird's claws. At the end of the time, I and Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to

heaven.

My understanding returned to me and I blessed the most high, praised and honored him who lives forever. For his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing.

He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, what have you done? At the same time, my reason returned to me and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me.

I was restored to my kingdom. Excellent majesty was added to me. Now I and Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, all of whose works are true and his way is justice.

Those who walk in pride, he is able to put down. That's a long chapter. I wanted to read the whole thing because it is so important to have the image of this dream firmly fixed in our minds.

Now, first of all, let's start with this proclamation. And depending on which text you look at, this is actually the end of chapter three in the Hebrew, these first three verses of chapter four. Nebuchadnezzar the king to all people's nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you.

I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the most high God has worked for me. 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.

Now, who says this? This is Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan king, the head of gold. Who is supposed to be communicating this message in the earth? Who are the people that God has ordained and chosen and designated to show forth his signs and wonders and extol and magnify his name and his kingdom? Who's supposed to be doing that? Not Nebuchadnezzar, the people who instead of doing that did the opposite have been judged and are now captives of King Nebuchadnezzar. So right off the bat, we scratch our heads and say, this seems like a complete odd reversal.

Can you think of another case where pagan godless people did something that Israel herself was supposed to be doing as a nation? Like maybe the Book of Jonah. When Jonah goes to Nineveh and he says, judgment is coming, what did the people of Nineveh do? They repented in sackcloth and ashes. They grieved, they made visible response.

They turned and abandoned their wicked ways at the single word of a single prophet who gave them 40 days notice. And we know that the Book of Jonah is a message not for the original people to whom Jonah prophesied, who is it really for? It is to Israel and eventually to us, right? The same thing here. There is no record of Nebuchadnezzar's madness and restoration in the

Babylonian annals.

They would sweep that under the rug. It's kind of like the madness of King George or whatever, where it's not something that is celebrated unless you wanna make a movie. They wouldn't put this on monuments and so on because they're interested in extolling Marduk and Bel and their gods.

Nebuchadnezzar ascribes his fate and restoration to the God of Israel, the God of the captives. And this isn't a good spin. This isn't good propaganda, but it is in the Bible because this is really for Israel.

So first off, the signs and wonders that he mentions here, what signs and wonders ought to be extolled? Keep your finger here and turn back to Deuteronomy 4. Last of the books of the law, Deuteronomy 4. And pick up at verse 34. There is a long warning against idolatry just previous to this. And you pick up in verse 32 here and you knew King James, I think you've got a paragraph beginning there, ask now concerning the days that are past which were before you since the day that God created man on the earth and ask from one end of heaven to the other whether any great thing like this has happened or anything like it has been heard.

Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire as you have heard and live? Did God ever try to go and take for himself a nation from the midst of another nation by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and by great terrors according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes. Those are the signs and wonders that ought to be visible, that ought to be advertised, that ought to be part of the identity and the testimony of the nation in Israel. Flip over a few pages to Deuteronomy chapter six, verse 22.

When your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you, you shall say to your son, we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and the Lord showed what? Signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household. Brought us out from there that he might bring us in to give us the land of which he swore our fathers. The Lord commanded to us to observe the statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always that he might preserve us alive as it is this day.

Turn over another page to Deuteronomy chapter seven, verse 19. You should not be afraid of nations greater, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. Shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid? That's what he'll do to all of them.

Don't be afraid, remember the signs and wonders, remember the mighty works by which he delivered you. Flip over to Deuteronomy chapter 26, verse eight. Deuteronomy 26, verse eight.

The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, with great

terrors and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. This is Israel's heritage.

There are dozens and dozens of such passages. You can go to Deuteronomy chapter 29, verse three. You can go to Deuteronomy chapter 34, verse 11.

But most recently before this captivity, just turn over to Jeremiah chapter 32. Isaiah, Jeremiah. Remember Jeremiah was the prophet immediately preceding.

He was in the days of Josiah. He was the weeping prophet pleading with Judah to return. Jeremiah chapter 32, verse 20.

Jeremiah 32, verse 20. Jeremiah reminded the people. Talking about the Lord of hosts, you are great in counsel and mighty in work for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men to give to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.

You have set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt to this day and in Israel and among men. And you have made yourself a name as it is this day. So who ought to be a testimony and a witness to these signs and wonders? It is these people.

And they lost sight of that. They lost sight of their identity in the Lord. And that's why this is now something Nebuchadnezzar is doing.

It's a rebuke. I often wonder why sometimes you have the History Channel and the Discovery Channel doing these documentaries and going back and rehearsing. I saw a little bit of one this past week where they were talking about the days of the apostles and rehearsing the career of the apostle Paul.

And I think, you know, here are secular people who don't really have a good understanding telling the story of Paul and largely sticking and treating as fact the account of Luke in Acts. And people in the church don't know the facts and the events in the life of the apostle Paul. Cannot tell you anything about his first, second or third missionary journey or the elements of his message to the various churches.

It's become lost to us. We are the people of God and secular people do a better job of telling the stories. They bring out movies in Hollywood and this becomes Bible knowledge.

You know, that awful thing they made about Noah. Now Christians are citing events that happened in the movie because they don't know their Bible and it's tragic. So our point of application is we want to be sure that our lives and our testimony reflect what God has done for us.

That's why we are here to reflect that light of God's glory. They weren't doing it and God is rebuking them with their pagan king captor reflecting God's glory and extolling his signs and wonders. Well, he goes on to in Daniel chapter four, verse four, he says, I was at rest in my

house, flourishing in my palace.

You remember the picture of the tree that we have beginning in verse 10 and 11, this great and strong tree, its height reaches to heaven. Its leaves are lovely and its fruit abundant. Well, this sort of foreshadows it.

He is prosperous and flourishing in his palace, but he sees this dream that disturbs him, this vision. Judah had been prosperous and flourishing in the days of Josiah when there was that vacuum we talked about that political military vacuum. And the prophets came and said, you need to pay attention.

You need to be disturbed. When Nebuchadnezzar sees this dream, he doesn't blow it off and say, look how powerful and flourishing and prosperous I am. This dream causes him to look for an interpretation.

When the prophets came time and again, God sent prophet after prophet to Judah. Why did they not seek out the meaning and the interpretation and try to act on it? And of course, Nebuchadnezzar is going to similarly not make application when Daniel explains this. He has 12 months to change his ways and to look out for the poor and to step away from his own pride, but he doesn't do it.

And of course, this enables him to further reflect the career of Israel. But this prosperity and peace in his house, and then he's troubled. So he issues a decree to bring in the wise men of Babylon.

Now, he is the earthly king and he issues a decree. We've got decree issuing from three different sources in this chapter. This is the first one, Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree.

Why didn't it just say he called the wise men? It doesn't say that, it says he issued a decree. This is a reflection of his might and his power and his absolute sojournity. And anybody in that captivity looks and says, there's no escaping the dominance.

Just like in the last chapter, who is going to deliver you from my hand? Nebuchadnezzar says to the three friends of Daniel. And it appears as though he is almighty and all powerful. So he issues this decree and it's a reminder of his total dominance.

And he says, make known the interpretation. So these magicians, astrologers, and once again, they fail. And you have to ask yourself, does he not remember some years earlier? And you might see a note, some study Bibles say, I've got a note in this particular study Bible.

I don't remember which one this is. This might be the NKJB study Bible. And it says something to the effect that a note on verse five this dream of Nebuchadnezzar occurred 30 years after the dream in chapter two.

I was trying to figure out how they arrived at that. And this is based on some additional text in

the Septuagint. The Septuagint has a notation that says that this occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year or something to that effect.

But those aren't in the Masoretic text. So this is some time later. We don't know exactly how long.

I'm not sure the Septuagint addition belongs there or not. Suffice it to say that Nebuchadnezzar has certainly forgotten his previous dream experience. And notice he doesn't withhold the dream as he did the first time and demand that the wise men tell him the dream and the interpretation.

So while he is troubled, he's not frantic like he was the last time. And I think this is because he's much more established. Remember, it was very near the beginning of his reign when he had the first dream about the head of gold and the shoulder and arms of silver and the belly and thighs of brass and the rest of that.

He'd only been king a year or two. Everything was new. He's much more disturbable, if you will.

Now he has evidently been king for some years. And so he's troubled, but he doesn't put their lives at risk. He doesn't say the only way I'll know for sure is if you tell me the dream.

And he also doesn't remember to call Daniel. And you get the idea that he has really sort of come into his own and this at ease in Zion, so to speak, is again, a reflection of Judah that had become complacent in their prosperity and in their wealth and in their control and had lost sight of God and lost sight of God's messengers. And this is reflected in Nebuchadnezzar.

We've seen this over and over again in scripture, haven't we, where King Herod in the days of John the Baptist is actually a reflection of Israel where he can't make up his mind. He won't release John, but he won't execute him either. And it isn't until he is forced by outside agents that he eventually kills John the Baptist.

And that is a harbinger and a foreshadowing of what the nation will do with Jesus himself a few years later. So Daniel came before me. In him is the spirit of holy God.

And of course, this is a retrospective. And this seems awfully theological, doesn't it? Talking about the spirit of God and extolling God and all that. And you wonder, could Nebuchadnezzar really have written this? And there's been a lot of speculation that maybe he didn't.

And the only concession I'll make in that regard is if you look in the book of Esther, we know that occasionally functionaries in the government would write on behalf of a king and in his name, but they could sort of take liberties. The style and the vocabulary of this section is very similar to the rest of the book of Daniel. So it's possible that Daniel wrote this and embellished it with a little bit of extra theological baggage, in the same way that in the book of Esther, you have both Haman and Mordecai writing in the name of the king, but they are the authors.

So if Nebuchadnezzar did not personally author this, it is likely that it was issued in his name. Nebuchadnezzar said, say whatever you want. I'm really grateful to be restored after my seven years of madness.

And so Daniel may have couched this as an inspired author of scripture and published it in the king's name, a ghost writer, if you will. In any case, in Daniel is the spirit of the Holy God. And so he tells this dream, I was looking to hold a tree in the midst of the earth.

Now, what do you know about trees in scripture? First of all, the first thing we find out is this is a tree in the midst of the earth or in the midst of the land and its height is great. What does this remind you of? If it can be seen from all the borders of the land, sort of harks back to the image that Nebuchadnezzar erected in the last chapter. Remember at the beginning of chapter three, it says Nebuchadnezzar made this image of gold and its height is 60 cubits.

It's very, very high. So it represents the glory of the king just as the image did, even though this is a tree and that was an image perhaps of his God, but the height means that it grows and becomes strong. Its height reaches to the heavens and it can be seen to the ends of all of the land.

Well, in scripture, a tree is often used to represent both a kingdom and its king. How do we know this? Well, you can think about some of the other places we have seen a tree and something tall. You remember back in Genesis chapter 11 when they erected the tower of Babel and its height reached to heaven and this was the one world government.

This was the great central unifying factor. God had said, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and everybody was staying in the plain of Shinar. And they said, we're gonna unify around this great, perhaps a ziggurat astrological thing.

And so God confuses the languages and disperses them from there. But this great height has the idea of human suzerainty, human power, a great kingdom, just like the great image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his first dream and the image that he creates in the last chapter. We see this elsewhere in scripture.

Remember Psalm 1, the one who doesn't stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful and his delight is in the law of the Lord. He's like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth his fruit in his season. Jesus compares the kingdom of God to the mustard seed that once it is planted, even though it's a small seed, it grows until the birds of the air roost in its branches.

Matthew 13, 32, and what is that a picture of? Jesus says, it's the kingdom. And of course that kingdom has a King, that's King capital K in the kingdom of God. But the birds of the air and the beasts that benefit from it and feed from it and are blessed by it come into its shade for convenience and for a roosting place and so on, that they are scattered out from it.

I saw in the visions verse 13, and while on my bed, there was a watcher, a holy one coming

down from heaven. So here is this kingdom and there are others who are not native to it, but who benefit from it. And you think about Israel, even in captivity, are beneficiaries of the Babylonian prosperity.

They have its protection, they are fed and kept alive in every Ezekiel and the others by the river Kabar. They don't have independence, but they have security and they have safety and they are held there. And it's a reminder that God leaves us in this world, even though we are not of it.

And we often get our sustenance through a secular job and through unbelieving employers and unbelieving clients and so on. God will use the things of this world to sustain us and to bless us. And then there may come a time when we are moved out from under before those things are taken away.

So this, you can think back even here in the book of Daniel to Daniel chapter two, verse 38, when the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, you, O king, are a king of kings. The God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. And wherever the children and men dwell or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, he has given them into your hand and has made you ruler over them all.

You are this head of gold. So once again, we see the kingdom and those who are sheltered by it, who benefit from it, but who are not actually a part of it. So you can see how Daniel connects even to the interpretation that God revealed to him of the last dream.

But then there is a watcher and a holy one. He cried aloud and said, chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it and the birds from its branches.

So notice they are going to be, the tree doesn't fall on them. The branches don't crush them or break the eggs of the birds or anything like that. The beasts and the birds are separated from the tree as it is chopped down.

And the watcher's decree is, let them get away, then destroy the tree, but leave the stump and roots in the earth bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven. And then it switches and says, and let him graze with the beasts.

And you have a weird shift of the metaphor here from a tree to a beast, that you chop down the tree and instead of being a tree with stability and roots, it becomes a wandering, grazing beast. What does that mean? Well, we'll take a look at that after the break, but from what we have seen so far, think about this. All of this with Nebuchadnezzar isn't a message strictly for Nebuchadnezzar, although he's formally the recipient of the dream and its interpretation.

Who is it really for? It's for the people of God. What is the message for the people of God? Israel in the first blush and us by extension and by application. We're in a different time.

We're not the nation, but this is written for our instruction. So what does it mean? Well, let me

just give you a key and we'll return to this at the end. What is the overarching theme here? What is the theme of this entire chapter? Well, you see it, first of all, in the beginning of this chapter, his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

His dominion is from generation to generation. That's verse three. The watcher says in verse 17, that this sentence is going to prevail so that the living may know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men gives it to whomever he will and sets over it even the lowest of men.

That's verse 17. We see that reiterated again in verse 25. They'll drive you from men, make you eat grass, what you have to do with heaven until when? Until you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men and the most high gives authority, gives rulership and power to whomever he chooses.

And see it again in verse 26. Your kingdom will be assured to you after you come to know that heaven rules. Look down at verse 32.

They shall drive you from men, you'll dwell with the beasts until you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he chooses. How does the section conclude here? Nebuchadnezzar says, I bless the most high God in verse 34 for his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom is from generation to generation. He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.

How many times does this have to be repeated before we realize this is the point of the chapter? God rules. What would be the idea once Judah goes into captivity? Remember in Jeremiah, they were saying, well, it's Josiah's fault. He took us away from the idols and the idolatrous gods of the Canaanites that we were trying to worship got mad and that's why we were destroyed.

The God of Israel is useless. He's helpless. Look at us.

We were destroyed and taken over. Our temple was knocked down and we've been hauled off to Babylon. The God of Israel is nothing.

God says, look, you're not going to get straightened up until you recognize that even in judgment, I am still God, even in times of distress. What about the faithful who are carried off along with those who are being judged? Is God really in control? Does he really have a grasp? Is he aware? Does he know? How many times in this chapter is it repeated? These things are going to prevail until you recognize and affirm and acknowledge and trust that God is the God who has dominion. And even when it looks like the world is prevailing, even when it looks like circumstances have gone awry and astray, God is in his heaven.

God is in control. All of these things are by his decree. Nebuchadnezzar can make a decree to his wise men to interpret the dream.

His decree fails. The wise men don't interpret it. It's the spirit of God that interprets it.

God's decrees hold. God's decrees prevail. And that's what we are to learn.

Let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we'll finish the second half of this chapter.