

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

◆**Intro:** There once was an all powerful emperor who owned everything. He had chefs, and barbers, servants..... even a singing guy. He was proud, arrogant and amazed with himself. He was vain. He was cocky. He built great parks for himself at the expense of the poor villagers. Then all of a sudden he was turned into an animal. His name was...? Kuzco, from the Emperors New Groove.



◆But it could have been Nebuchadnezzar! Even Disney seems to have heard of the biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar; a powerful, vain king who gets turned into an animal of sorts to learn his lesson. And just what is that lesson that Daniel wants us to know by sharing in his account a personal letter from Nebuchadnezzar himself?

◆**1. Background:** Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest of ancient kings. And Babylon, about 50 miles south of modern Bagdad and built up along both sides of the Euphrates River, was a prize to behold. It was surrounded by 11 miles of wall over 300' high (+35' below ground), 25' thick, and incorporating an inner wall 21 feet wide (said to be allow a 4 horse chariot to turn around) Outside the outer wall was a moat, fed by the Euphrates, ranging in width from 60 to 250 feet.



◆Within the city Nebuchadnezzar's magnificent palace occupied an area of about 50 acres. Buildings were constructed of kiln-

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

dried bricks with intricate designs, some of which can still be seen today. Along with this were over 50 temples, as well as numerous shrines and other buildings, and the famous **Hanging Gardens**, a sort of manmade mountain of greenery hanging over terraces, one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient



World. It covered the space of 2 football fields and rose over 80' high. So one can see that in terms of worldly value, Neb had accomplished a lot. His rule extended to Egypt and Greece from what is today Iraq. Greek historian "Herodotus," wrote in 450 B.C. that "Babylon surpasses in splendor any city in the known world." And this is where his eyes were (v30).

◆**1.** Let's take our first application pause: God is actively controlling even the most powerful of rulers, authorities and powers. There is no power or ability you have that you have not been given by heaven. You heard me right.

◆Daniel 4:17 "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

◆[Note "lowliest of men".]

◆Daniel 4:32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

◆ Daniel 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

◆ These verses reveal the reason behind this episode. People are not set in authority because they are so special. God sets people in authority and God takes them out according to his plans. In Romans 13 Paul tells us to respect and pray for authorities because they are placed there by God. In addition, you are not where you are, or have the skill you have because of anything about you! God gives one this ability and another that. We are not producers of our lives, we are receivers. We must be aware that our very humanity (intelligence, sanity, not acting like we were raised by wolves) is in the sovereign hand of God. God's plan is the only lasting plan (v34). As we learn from Neb, it can all disappear on a moment, a flash. You can go from the tippy-top full of engineering prowess, to the bottomy-bottom with no more intelligence than a cow. You can go from Huisman Trophy nominee to paraplegic with one simple fall. Everything you have is pure gift from the your Maker at every moment of your existence. This was Neb's first lesson. Are you asking God about the direction of your life?

◆ We all lean in Neb's direction. We want to make a name for ourselves. We think being remembered is of some kind of eternal value. Hello, mostly no one ever thinks about

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

Nebuchadnezzar, great as he was! Even if they do, it doesn't do anything for him! He's dead and gone! In 100 year (less?) no one will be thinking about you. Still most humans live for their own name. Most of us are upset when not recognized, or jealous when we aren't known or appreciated, as though life is about status. God's word says different.

◆ *Psalms 62:7-10 (NIV 1984) My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath. Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

◆ That's what God was showing Israel, and Neb. Israel was exiled in Babylon because they forgot that life was about obeying God, and walking with the Maker, doing the next right thing. Neb was also exiled from his palace for the same reason. Let me ask you: why do you do what you do? What are you hoping for? Basic to experiencing the graces of God in your life is a desire to let him live on the throne in your heart, and to obey his commands.

◆ **2.** Here's another thing: God is giving Neb a chance to get it right! Wow! He tells him ahead of time that he's going down.

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

That he'll hit rock bottom. God even gives Neb a chance (v27) *before* he gives him another chance the hard way.

◆ Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

◆ Did you notice God's compassion for this foolish pagan king? You can see it reflected in Daniel's compassion. Daniel shares with the king a better option! Repentance. Listen, often when things go wrong, or downhill, God is getting our attention and giving us a chance to repent & change. Negative things are not free of God's sovereign hand! Some folks think that Satan is the authority over the bad things that happen, and God just can't stop him every time. This is not true. God is the Sovereign. That means even adversity is filtered into our lives through his fingers and according to his allowance. So then, one thing we ought to wonder about in adversity is "What are you wanting to do in me, with this, God?"

◆ We can tell Neb had an inkling this was the hand of Daniel's God, because he doesn't seek Daniel out first but returns to his worthless magi. They were of no help in his earlier dream and he was ready to kill them all back then. And even now he's fully aware that Daniel will be of help.

◆ v8,9 the spirit of the holy gods is in you...no mystery is too great for you.

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

◆ But Neb doesn't exactly want to know what God says. The "cosmic tree" (v10) was a familiar symbol of great authority, so Neb probably knows it's about him. And it isn't exactly a pleasant scenario (the tree gets cut down). So he's avoiding God! Maybe he felt some internal guilt. God had shown up several times in astonishing ways (the statue-dream interpretation; the furnace misfire). But Neb was still not following Daniel's God. Maybe he kind of expected bad news from Daniel and wanted to get a more amenable answer from his old pagan magi.

◆ And isn't this true of all of us. Where are you avoiding God? We don't necessarily want to know what God says about our sexuality, or our friends, or what we do with our money -cuz then we might have to evaluate and change it. That's why people stop worshiping God when they've chosen to disobey one or more of his commands. Going to worship just reminds them they're doing the wrong thing. Avoiding God is easier. But you cannot out run the long arm of the Lord! And there is a better choice: confession & repentance. Confession is simply agreeing that God's law is better than the choice you made, and repentance is simply deciding to turn around. Here's the promise of God: when you repent, he will forgive you, because of Christ's payment already made. That's right. You may have to live with consequences, or God may overrule even some consequences, (v27 points this out: *it may be that...*) but your soul will be returned to right standing

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

with your Maker, and that friends is the basis of all peace and satisfaction.

◆ *Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*

◆ Pray now...

◆ **3.** Why does God use difficulty to get our attention? I don't know about you, but I think I'd prefer blessing as the way to get my attention. Why difficulty? Because need causes us to seek a deeper humanity. Comfort and wealth keep us from examining our hearts. However, when disaster and discomfort strike, when hopes are dashed and relationships shredded, when the doctor gives you bad news...people tend to get more serious about spiritual things. (Be wary of wealth. Pay attention in need.)

◆ Sometimes God gives us pictures of coming disaster like a shot across the bow. We see the shipwreck of others' choices and ought consider our habits. Sometimes God gives you an outside glimpse of the depravity in your own heart as you catch yourself thinking something vile or repulsive. (Think of anything you wouldn't want your friends to be able to read in your mind.) Or you see someone else talking or being just like you might talk or

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

be, but when you see it in them, it's a turn off! God is getting your attention.

◆ Listen! Wealth and progress can easily breed spiritual lethargy, which is part of the trouble with American culture today. Don't be lethargic about your soul, as was Neb, and as was Israel. God may have to step in and mess up your comfort to wake you up. One could argue that this is what God is doing even now in our politics. Repent and renounce any sin and it's power will begin to break. One final observation from Neb's experience:

◆ 4. God's patience doesn't mean that he's overlooking our sin. It was a whole year later before God removed Nebuchadnezzar's rational abilities from his mind and allowed him to eat grass like an animal for a set period of time. (You don't want God to let this happen to you! I speak from experience myself: My mother got a "juicer" and once when we visited, had to juice up a concoction of vegetable matter that was supposed to make a new person out of me. Well it made a sick person out of me! Don't eat the grass!) No God is not overlooking sin. If that were the case Jesus his Son would not have had to come and die to pay for human sin. So don't let God's gentleness make you lax in addressing what you know in your life is not his way.

◆ *2 Peter 3:9 (NIV 1984) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

◆ **Conclusion:** So far in Daniel's book we've already seen repeatedly that God is sovereign. What we see in this chapter is that it demands a humble response on our part. It demands repentance, and renouncing. It requires raising your eyes to heaven (34). This episode was a message of hope to exiled Israel. Isaiah the prophet had predicted this exile from the promised land, but in that prophecy there was the "stump" image.

◆ Isaiah 6:13 But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

◆ That was in Neb's dream too; the stump of the tree that was left. Israel would know that if God could regrow pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, he could regrow exiled Israel. And he can regrow you and me too. Isaiah the prophet spoke of another stump, in King David's line

◆ *Isaiah 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit... 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.... 11 In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from... Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia...*

◆ That was a prophecy of Jesus the Messiah! That's what the Christian Church is for! Jesus: the one king whose reign would

EYES TO HEAVEN, DANIEL 4

Unshakable Faith #4

cause such peace that wolves and lambs would lie down together without destruction of any kind. The one king whose eyes were not on himself, but voluntarily left the palace of heaven to take on a lower form, ours, in order to be punished in our place. His humility brought forgiveness of sins, a good clue for each of us to chose his path as well.