



This Week's Reading:

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Happy Sunday!

You've made it to week two of Daniel! This week closes out the final narrative stories of the book, getting us ready for the strange half of Daniel to come next week.

Chapters 4-7 are among my favorite chapters in Daniel; these are stories that are not as well known, yet they are filled with rich theology and strong lessons

we can still learn from today. The heartbeat of the stories this week is the tale of two kings—Nebuchadnezzar, who you're familiar with by now, and then his son, Belshazzar. These two kings both have the same problem (pride), both are warned by God to change, yet they both respond in very different ways, which leads to two very different outcomes.

I talked about this in the daily Bible study video for Friday, but this half of Daniel (ch. 2-7) forms what's called a chiasm. The definition of chiasm is the "reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses, but no repetition of words." Think of it as a way to rhyme ideas through creating a pattern in the literary design of a book or passage. It looks something like this:

Idea A

Idea B

Idea C

Idea B

Idea A

This doesn't mean the two A's are exactly the same, but they mirror each other. And the whole design of this chiasm is meant to point you toward the center, C. Unlike in our modern writings, where the big idea is often found at the beginning, Hebrew literature likes to draw your focus to the main idea at the literal center of the chiasm, or passage. So, here's what the chiasm looks like in these first chapters:

A - The Image of Nebuchadnezzar (Statue)

B - The Fiery Furnace

C - Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Fall

D - Verse 4:37

C - Belshazzar's Pride and Fall

B - The Lion's Den

A - The Image of a Kingdom

See how these ideas parallel? It all drives to the key verse in Daniel 4:37, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

For people in exile, wondering if God could still love them and is still with them, these words would be like a balm for the soul. Even the foreign king Nebuchadnezzar is forced to admit that God is actually the one in control, that his works are right and ways are just. This would be like a beacon of hope for God's people and ought to be for us today as well.

Next week, we'll talk about the giant chiasm that makes up the entire book of Daniel, ch. 8-11, which has an equally powerful message. If you want a sneak peek or just want to learn more about this kind of structure, don't miss this [podcast from BEMA](#).

Make sure you check out the daily videos if you haven't already! You can find them on the website, app, and on HPUMC's Instagram. We hope you're enjoying the Book of Daniel as much as we are!

Happy Reading!



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About the Reading

[Monday | Daniel 4:1-27](#)

This might be one of my favorite chapters in Daniel. It takes place much later in Daniel's life; he's become well known to the king as an interpreter of dreams and is a well-respected member of Nebuchadnezzar's court. But the central character of this chapter is not Daniel, it's king Nebuchadnezzar.

Just like earlier, Nebuchadnezzar wakes up from a dream that troubles him and seeks someone who can provide an interpretation. He goes first to his court of diviners, but they are unable to tell him anything. In comes Daniel!

Nebuchadnezzar describes to Daniel what he saw in his dream. In the scene, he sees a tree in the midst of the earth that stretches toward the heavens, with abundant fruit and shade for all the animals around.

Does this picture sound familiar to you at all? You should be thinking Genesis 1-3!

In Genesis 2, God describes this beautiful garden, filled with fruit trees. And there are two trees in the midst of that garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This second tree represents the choice for humans to either allow God to define what is good and not good for them or take that knowledge for themselves (and if you know where the story goes, you know which is the better option).

Nebuchadnezzar essentially pictures himself like this Tree of Life, giving nourishment, safety, and comfort to all around him. But, we know that he also suffers from pride; he rules with an authority that doesn't look after others, but rather does what is right in his own eyes. Nebuchadnezzar is in it for himself—he eats frequently from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—and focuses on himself, not God. He is prideful; rather than trusting God to define what is right for him and his kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar builds it up as his own symbol of power, a way to make his own name great. Genesis 1-2 paints a picture of a world where humans, created in God's image, are meant to partner with God in order to rule over the earth and subdue it. Nebuchadnezzar is no partner to God, but is instead all about himself.

And the second half of his dream is a warning about what happens when humans go too far down this path...

Before we get there though, there's one more design pattern I want to point out. The tree in his vision is said to "stretch toward the heavens." Can you think of another story in Genesis where there was a mighty structure that "stretched toward the heavens" and was a product of human pride? How about the tower of Babel in Genesis 11?

Rather than multiplying and filling the earth, the people in Gen. 11 gather and seek to build a tower stretching toward heaven. These people are concerned

with making a name for themselves, rather than making God's name known. Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar suffers from the same affliction. And like those who wanted to build the tower, God will ultimately make Nebuchadnezzar's efforts futile, humbling him and putting him back on the correct path.

Now to the second half of the dream... Nebuchadnezzar says a voice from heaven comes down and commands that the tree be chopped down, leaving just the stump and roots behind. And let the one who was the tree now live with the beasts and have a mind like a beast's mind until seven periods of time pass over him.

As we learn a few verses later when Daniel interprets the dream for him, the tree is a symbol for King Nebuchadnezzar himself. And this second half of the dream serves as a warning – there is coming a day when all Nebuchadnezzar prides himself on will be stripped away and brought low, so only the roots remain. Why is this happening?

So that he "may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."

This key phrase is repeated four times from ch. 4-5 (4:17, 4:25, 4:32, and 5:2). It acts as the drumbeat that holds this section of the book together—it's the core theme! Nebuchadnezzar thinks he is the one in charge, but he's only king because God wills him to be king. God is ultimately the one who rules over the kingdom of men. God can give that power to whomever he wants, and He can take it away just as easily.

This is the choice set before Nebuchadnezzar—continue on in your prideful ways and you will be brought low. Or you can turn to God and be restored. What do you think he will do?

Questions:

- What would you say are some possible symptoms of pride? How can you recognize when pride starts to creep into your rhythm or patterns of thinking?
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- What do you make of the warning to Nebuchadnezzar about what's going to happen to him should he continue in his prideful ways? Have you ever felt like God was warning you about something in the future? How did you respond?
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Tuesday | Daniel 4:28-37

It's decision time. Nebuchadnezzar knows what the future holds for him if he continues down the same path. So, what does he do?

Twelve months later, we find that not much has changed. Nebuchadnezzar is enjoying a walk on the rooftop of his royal palace, looking out over his mighty kingdom with pride.

*"Is not this great Babylon, which **I have built** by **my mighty power** as a royal residence and for **the glory of my majesty**?"*

I mean, this just drips of pride, right? It's all about him. He's built it, by his own power, and for his own glory. The motivation of his heart is clear!

And before he even finished talking, a voice calls from heaven.

*"O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, **until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.**"*

Everything God warned Nebuchadnezzar about in the last passage is now going to come to fruition. He's going to be driven from his kingdom, forced to live in the wilderness like a wild animal and eat grass. There's a really important principle here that Tim Mackie with the Bible Project explains in their video on Daniel. He says, when human kingdoms rebel against God "and make themselves and their power into a God, they become less than human, like violent beasts who will face God's justice."

Doesn't this make sense? When we give in to our base desires, when we choose to define what is good and not good for ourselves, instead of following God's definition for what's right, we become no better than beasts. We chase pleasure and power, and if that pleasure or power hurts other people, then so be it.

So where is the hope for Nebuchadnezzar and for us?

Remember in the vision of Daniel 4:15 that God says while the tree is to be chopped down, the stump and its roots will be left in the earth. This foreshadows the potential for restoration and regrowth.

At the end of his seven periods (seven is a symbolic number of completion), Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to heaven, and instantly his reason is restored to him. He blesses and praises God. What has he come to realize?

*"For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven..."*

Sound familiar?

"The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar realizes that he is not the ultimate ruler. All his power and authority, his great kingdom, actually belongs to God. God is the one who puts kings in place and can remove them just as easily. Kingdoms of the earth will pass away, and have throughout history, but God's kingdom is forever.

And with this, Nebuchadnezzar is fully restored to his throne, with all majesty and splendor. He says even *more* greatness is thrust upon him. Notice, all he does is lift his eyes to heaven and God restores his reason. He acknowledges God, and God restores him. *Then* the praises come flowing, leading to the famous line that marks the center of the chiasm forming the first half of the book:

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Questions:

- Why do you think God comes down so hard on Nebuchadnezzar's pride?
- The repeated line throughout this story is "The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." What does this mean to you? What does this tell you about who God is?
- In the end, Nebuchadnezzar is restored and becomes even greater than before. What does this reveal about how God works? Is there a lesson in here for us in terms of how we live and who we live for?

[Wednesday | Daniel 5:1-31](#)

Now we turn to Nebuchadnezzar's son. We're not told anything else about Nebuchadnezzar's rule, only that he must have finished his life because now his son is in charge.

There are a whole bunch of historical inaccuracies in this part of the story. Belshazzar was actually the son of Nabonidus, Nebuchadnezzar's successor by coup not lineage, and he was never officially king. He only ruled as a regent while his father, Nabonidus spent ten years "disposed" (probably what ch. 4 is based on). Nabonidus was the last official Babylonian king.

Does that bother you? It shouldn't. It's clear the author is making some intentional choices to make the story easier to understand and to make a few theological points more clear. Hebrew authors weren't as concerned as we are about history—Daniel isn't a history book, it's a narrative. Its main purpose is not to convey historical facts, but to make theological points.

In the story, Belshazzar, who has "tasted the wine," AKA is likely under the influence, commands that the sacred vessels from the Jerusalem Temple be

brought so that the king and his court could drink from them. This is tantamount to sacrilege, and he likely knew exactly what he was doing. It would have been humiliating for God's people. The vessels once used to worship God are now being used to fuel the drunken desires of a foreign king.

To make matters worse, while drinking from these vessels, they praise the false gods of Babylon, gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. They praise pieces of creation rather than the creator. Pride and rebellion, it would seem, run in the family. And the consequences are swift.

A figure appears and draws something on the wall. The king is obviously unnerved, and just like his 'father', he calls to his diviners and astrologers to try and figure out what the writing means.

But surprise, surprise, only Daniel is able to make sense of the writings, not of his own accord, but because of his relationship with God. Daniel even tells the king to keep all the rewards he offered, he wants none of it.

What he does offer, in the interpretation, is a warning to the king. He reminds him about his father's history; about how he killed whoever he wanted and brought fear to people of all kinds. That is, until the day he was brought low and driven into the wilderness, **"until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will."**

Now Daniel offers Belshazzar a choice. He tells him his heart is not humbled, but has instead rebelled against the Lord of heaven. And finally, he reveals the meaning of the words inscribed on the wall.

"Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Surprisingly, Belshazzar follows through with the promised rewards for Daniel. But it doesn't matter. That same night Belshazzar is killed, Babylon itself is conquered.

While the night began with one kingdom humiliating and reveling in the defeat of another, it ends with that same kingdom itself being defeated.

Questions:

- What similarities and differences do you note between the story of these two kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar?
 - Why do you think Belshazzar refuses to follow his father's example and be humbled before God? Are there times when we too are guilty of thinking we know better and living as if God isn't a part of our lives?
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Thursday | Daniel 6:1-28

Now we come to a famous story you've likely heard dozens of times before. If you have kids, chances are you've even read them books about it or come home with drawings of Daniel and a lion from Sunday School. But the reality of this story is much darker and probably not meant for kids.

King Darius, the new ruler who has taken control of Babylon is busy setting up his court. In no time at all, Daniel begins to make an impression and rise within the ranks, causing jealousy with the other leaders. This reminds me of Exodus—the people grow so large and prosperous that it frightens Pharaoh. Like Pharaoh, these jealous leaders hatch a plan to get Daniel out of the way.

Their plan is to prey upon the pride of Darius, telling him to make a decree that whoever makes a petition to anyone but him should be thrown into the lion's den. And the king listens, which tells you a little bit about what kind of leader he is.

Daniel hears about the new edict, but instead of cowering in fear, Daniel goes to his house and appears before the windows that opened toward Jerusalem. He gets down on his knees and prays to God, giving thanks to God, just as he always did.

Later, Israelites were marked by a consistent pattern of prayer three times each day. It's unclear if this was already a practice in Daniel's time, or if this story begins to lead to that practice. My guess is the former.

The jealous leaders realize their plan has worked, and they catch Daniel in prayer to God, not Darius. So they rush to the king and share the news. The king is distressed at the news, he likes Daniel after all. But he's also true to his word and orders Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den, but not before uttering a prophetic line,

"May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!"

The den is sealed with the king's signet ring so that no one would dare open it. Daniel is now face-to-face with several hungry lions!

The king meanwhile, spends the night in frets over Daniel's fate. To the point where, in the morning, as the sun peeks over the horizon, Darius rushes to find out what has become of Daniel.

He cries out "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

And to his great shock and relief, Daniel's voice answers from the lion's den!

"O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."

Daniel doesn't even have a scratch on him. Why? We're told it's because Daniel trusted in God.

The king then turns on those who accused Daniel and does something horrific. He throws them into the lion's den, along with their children and wives (they seem to conveniently leave this part out in the children's books). This is an ancient form of justice, where not just the bad guy is dealt with, but their whole family is wiped out.

Now the king makes a new decree.

"Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion

shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

From the lips of another foreign king comes a powerful statement. And it mirrors the theme we've been hearing about so far in Daniel. God is the one who endures forever. Where the kingdoms of men come and go, God's kingdom is eternal.

Questions:

- Despite knowing what it might cost him, Daniel perseveres in praying to God. Are there aspects of your faith where God might be calling you to persevere in the midst of challenge or opposition?
- What would it look like to trust God even when it feels like you're about to be thrown into the lion's den, to believe that God can and desires to rescue you?

Friday | Daniel 7:1-28

We've seen plenty of dreams in Daniel thus far, but this next one comes from Daniel himself, and it's another key to understanding how the whole book works together.

Daniel's vision is of four beasts coming up out of the sea, each different from the other. Each of the beasts is described using symbolism and mythology from the Canaanite culture. Each beast represents a different kingdom. Scholars would argue that they correspond to Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. But just like with the other Image in chapter 2, don't get sucked into trying to figure that out—it's not the main point of the story. There are three beasts, and then a super-mega beast greater than all the others.

Thrones are laid out, and the Ancient of Days (God) takes a seat. Look at how God is described—clothes white as snow, hair like wool, a throne of fiery

flames. Does this language ring a bell? It's nearly identical to what's used in Revelation to describe the son of man, Jesus.

"And in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire." (Rev. 1:13-14)

As Daniel watches, "the books were opened," words the author of Rev. will later use in [Rev. 20:12](#), which speaks about the final judgment (watch the [Day of the Lord video from the Bible Project](#)).

As the Ancient of Days takes his seat, the super-beast is killed and burned with fire. The rest of the beasts have their power stripped away from them.

And here comes the most important part.

Out of the clouds of heaven, Daniel sees one coming "like a son of man" who is presented before the Ancient of Days. To this son of man is given ultimate power, glory, and a kingdom filled with people of all nations and languages. This kingdom will not pass away, it will never be destroyed. This is a messianic promise, and it points us forward to the coming of Jesus, which would have happened not long after this book was written.

The dream also points to the suffering of God's people.

"As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom."

Much has been made about these beasts and what they mean for the end of time, or the apocalypse. While that discussion is complex and wildly diverse, don't get so lost in those weeds that you miss the ultimate message—there are going to be kingdoms that come and go on this earth, kingdoms that are violent and wage war against God's people. But at the end of the day, none of them will prevail against God's kingdom. No matter how bad it gets for God's people, God will eventually come to set all things right and bring justice to those who bring harm upon His people.

Think about what this message would have meant to another generation of God's people, who were reading Daniel after having found their way back to Israel but were now living once again under foreign rule, this time by the Romans. The Romans were a harsh governing body and could be merciless and violent. The people would have wondered whether there was ever hope to get out from under the thumb of these kingdoms. Daniel reminds them that there is hope.

Ironically, while Jesus never refers to himself as the 'messiah,' he does frequently refer to himself by one phrase in particular—the "son of man." Without question, by doing so, Jesus is recalling this story and this messianic prophecy—he is the one who will come to set all things right, to defeat the kingdoms of the world and usher in the everlasting kingdom to come.

Questions:

- What stands out to you about Daniel's vision? What do you think God is trying to communicate to God's people through this vision?
- Why do you think people tend to mine visions like these for hints about when we might expect the end of the world?
- When you look around the world today, do you see more kingdoms modeled after the kingdoms of the beasts or like God's kingdom? Why do you think that is?

Dig Deeper

Resources:

- [Daniel - Son of Man](#) | Podcast from BEMA
- [Day of the Lord](#) | Video from The Bible Project

Discussion Questions:

1. What would you say are some possible symptoms of pride? How can you recognize when pride starts to creep into your rhythm or patterns of thinking?
 2. The repeated line throughout this story is “The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” What does this mean to you? What does this tell you about who God is?
 3. What would it look like to trust God even when it feels like you’re about to be thrown into the lion’s den, to believe that God can and desires to rescue you?
 4. When you look around the world today, do you see more kingdoms modeled after the kingdoms of the beasts or like God’s kingdom? Why do you think that is?
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