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NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM OF THE GREAT TREE CUT DOWN

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL
NUMBER 11
DANIEL 4:1-18

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In our study of the doctrine of heathenism, we have seen that it is God's desire that all men be saved. Based on the essence of God, we know that God is always fair and couldn't be unfair even if he wanted to and he doesn't want to. We have also studied the doctrine of unlimited atonement, which teaches us that Christ died for the whole human race.

1 John 2:2 "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." "Whosoever" is a word God used to show that he desires that every member of the human race be saved. So when a member of the human race is not saved then it is not God's fault but rather the fault of the unbeliever. This goes back to human volition. We have studied from the book of Jeremiah and from John 7 the principle, that regardless of geographical location or any linguistic barrier which ever existed, or regardless of any other factor of isolation, when anyone reaches the point of God-consciousness and goes on positive volition, then God assumes the responsibility of getting the gospel message to that individual. This position is made clear in the Greek of Romans 1:18-24.

At the point of God-consciousness, every man faces a great issue. If at that point one goes on positive volition, God will provide information whereby he may be saved. Now if a man goes negative, then God does not have any further responsibility toward him.

In the case of the Pharaoh of Egypt, we have an illustration of this truth. We read that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then later on we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh placed himself outside their reach of God's grace and made it impossible for God to save him.

Now the Chaldeans were people of great ability. They originated from five clans living in the south of Babylon. They came out of those swamps and conquered a vast empire. You recall that Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees. Ur was a city far advanced and we have discovered that they had developed a system of air conditioning. But they were moon worshippers and were a heathen people. But there was a man in Ur named Abram, and he went on positive volition and Christ presented the gospel to him and he became a believer. Now remember that God-consciousness does not mean that one is a Christian, or that one had heard the content of the gospel. God-consciousness is one thing and gospel hearing is another thing. God-consciousness means that one becomes conscious of God in his mind, and if at that point he goes on positive volition, God will get the message of salvation to him. We know this from the hifile stem of the word in Genesis 15. We read, "Abraham had believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Abram heard the gospel and responded with positive volition. He desired saving information, and when it came to him, he believed. He believed before he ever left Ur of the Chaldees.

Now there are three systems of perception--

1. Rationalism--and this is a meritorious system.
2. Empiricism--and this is a meritorious system.
3. Faith--and this is a non-meritorious system.

Now this is the same thing that happened to a man named Nebuchadnezzar many hundreds of years after Abram. He went on God-consciousness and at that moment, he went also on positive volition. But in between his being conscious of God and his hearing of the gospel, Nebuchadnezzar had many serious problems. Jeremiah witnessed to him. Daniel witnessed to him. The three men he threw into the fiery furnace witnessed to him. So the witness given him was a team effort.

Now after the fiery furnace experience, Nebuchadnezzar passed a new law that all in his kingdom were to worship the God of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego. The alternative was that the one who disobeyed would be drawn and quartered and his house would be made a public lavatory. Now this was wrong, to make people worship any certain deity in any certain way. The state has no right to try to make any person worship in any certain way. Here in this chapter Nebuchadnezzar changed his tune. He here appealed to the constituents of his empire in a salvation tract, and he told them how he was saved. Here he urged them to believe by volition instead of by force. Positive volition is at the background of his message. So now we begin the salvation tract.

1. The author--This is none other than Nebuchadnezzar, the king.
2. The recipients--All peoples, nations, and languages. So the appeal is racial, geographical, and by languages. In the Tower of Babel as related in Genesis 11, God attacked the first united nations organization. He scattered the people among nations and races and languages. One of the divine institutions is NATIONS. But today internationalism seems to be in the minds and plans of many people.
3. Peace--and it means Hello! It also means "blessing." Blessings be multiplied. He wrote this tract after he was saved. Later we will backtrack and pick this up. Nebuchadnezzar understood the principle of the plan of God. He understood the grace of God. He came to know the plan of God. Nebuchadnezzar is in heaven today and many others in that empire who were won to Christ. Nebuchadnezzar began his great career conquering people but he spent the latter part of his life evangelizing people. "Peace be multiplied" shows that he was acclimated to grace and it shows that salvation doesn't depend on who and what we are but rather on who and what Christ is. Now Nebuchadnezzar will here present this matter of grace because in his own life he came to the end of all human effort. But so many people have the idea that in some way they have to help God in salvation. The world needs to hear about Christ and how his salvation is entirely by grace. It is his great work and not our work that brings salvation. Our theme is not "Once I was horrible, but now I'm great." It is grace and his work all the way. In some ways, we have missed the boat all the way. It is not how great we are, but how great he is. God didn't save us just because we are such nice people he couldn't live without us. Who do we think we are anyway? We need to remember that every member of the human race has an old sin nature. There is an area of weakness that produces sin and an area of strength that produces human good. So we need to remember we can't save ourselves by anything we do. Under spirituality it is the work of the Spirit and not

our work. If people get pious and say "God willing" and "Amen" all the time, then they never will understand grace. Nebuchadnezzar started out with a great empire, with the world at his feet, and a golden statue 90 feet tall as a status symbol. Yet he was a very miserable man. The three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace had nothing yet they had fantastic happiness. Now what made the difference? Doctrine in their minds made all the difference. So here in this passage we are seeing retrospectively the story of his conversion.

DANIEL 4:2 "I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me." Now we get the purpose of this salvation tract. We read, "I thought." It is what you think that counts. We are dealing here with the Chaldean language. "Signs" is a word describing all the information he had received in dreams thus far. Wonders had to do with the interpretation of the dreams as far as the impact of the gospel information was concerned. So Nebuchadnezzar is saying here that he thinks it is about time that he realized what God hath wrought, and that's grace. In grace God does the work and God does the doing, and man receives the results. In all these things Christ will get the credit. In salvation, both in time and in eternity, he did it all and therefore, he will get all the credit. So many Christians say, "Look what I've done." But God does not come over to our side just because we impress him with what we have done. No one can bribe God with ten percent or with certain good deeds. No one can make a trade out with God. The harder you work, the deeper you go in debt. Romans 4:4. So God loves us on the basis of his character and not on the basis of our achievement.

Illustration. I once read of some students who took an exam and they all got 100. One of the boys who had worked very hard knew that one of the other boys didn't work hard at all and he also knew the boy turned in a very inferior paper. So the bright boy spoke to the teacher about it and asked the teacher why they all got the same grade? The teacher told him this--"Look, what you write on the exam is your business, but the grade I give is my business." Now that's grace!

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "The high God hath wrought toward me" and he meant this was the doing of God and nothing stupid like his own golden statue. I can tell you one thing about this tract he wrote. We won't have to read this tract to decide whether we want to put it in the track rack or not. It's o.k. just as it stands. So here we see God dealing with Nebuchadnezzar not on the basis of what he deserved but on the basis of what he needed. Now quite often we are so different. Often our attitude toward others depends on their attitude toward us. So often we live on this basis--If you will say something nice about me, then I'll say something nice about you. But with God, we find his dealing is always the same.

Illustration. Quite often a girl looks quite different with her hair rolled up and no makeup on, than the way she looked in her beautiful wedding dress. I am sure some men have looked at their new bride in this "off" moment and have wondered if this could be the same beautiful thing he saw coming down that aisle. But if a man has stability and real love for his new wife, these insignificant things make no difference at all. If he truly loves her, he loves her on the basis of his stable character and not on the basis of the way she happens to look at

the moment. Love is a mental attitude that is based on mental attitude stability. (I don't know if Nebuchadnezzar is listening to this explanation of his tract but if he is, I suppose he would say, "I wrote the tract much faster than it is taking you to explain it.")

DANIEL 4:3 "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." Nebuchadnezzar is here contrasting his present mental state over against the ideas he once had when he erected the golden image. He was so egotistical he thought he could perpetuate his kingdom all the way into eternity. But once his idea of an earthly eternal kingdom was shattered, he came to realize that Jesus Christ was the one who would have the eternal kingdom. This everlasting kingdom is much greater than the kingdom of Babylon which he ruled. The word "his dominion" refers to Bible doctrine. Earthly kingdoms rise and fall but God's eternal kingdom moves right on to its fulfillment. Bible doctrine is the same in every generation. So here Nebuchadnezzar gives a fantastic interpretation to the tract--God has an eternal kingdom and I am a part of it. Doctrine is always the same, and goes from generation to generation for it is perfect truth.

Back in Chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden statue and tried to make everyone bow down to it. But here he has changed his tune. Here we go into his second dream. We remember his first dream which dealt with the panorama of empires. This second dream deals with the divine circumstances which will lead him to the cross and show him how he can be saved.

DANIEL 4:4 "I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace:" This is an illustration of how prosperity and success can actually bring a false sense of security. "I was at rest" is an idiom to describe an era of great prosperity and success. He had conquered most of the world. He had conquered the Medes and the Egyptians had been defeated and he had built a great empire. He had been successful in administration and as a result he was "now at rest." He had built a fabulous palace and the hanging gardens were beautiful and one of the wonders of the world. The word "flourishing" really means to grow green and it is a term for extreme prosperity.

DANIEL 4:5 "I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." Now this is what was going to happen next. He was successful but afraid. This is the insecurity of human prosperity. He was "the head of gold" yet he was terribly frightened. The dream and its revelation frightened and troubled him. Fear plus worry equals misery. Take those two mental attitude sins and put them together and you have misery. And people are still like this today. You can be at the top of the heap and still be miserable. He had dreamed about a tree and the tree is Nebuchadnezzar, but he didn't know this yet.

DANIEL 4:6-7 "Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof."

Here is a picture of the helpless state department. Now the dream is the Word of God and his state department didn't know anything about doctrine.

The magicians were the writers.

The astrologers were the ones who read the future by the stars.

The Chaldeans were the priestly class.

The soothsayers were the determiners, those who make domestic policy. But all of them put together were helpless for they couldn't interpret the dream.

DANIEL 4:8 "But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying," Nebuchadnezzar had Daniel brought in last. He had exhausted every human means before he resorted to Daniel. All human resources were done and in desperation he turned to Daniel. Now this is a principle of life--"But at the last Daniel." This is to demonstrate to Nebuchadnezzar the futility of human means. And notice, Daniel didn't push himself. He waited. Remember, David did this in Saul's palace. He left and returned to taking care of the sheep and waited for the time to come when God would exalt him.

JOSHUA 1:5 "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." This is the principle. When God is ready to exalt you, he can do it. Moses was the great leader for forty years and Joshua stood in the background. I am sure during those long forty years many times weak and lesser men would have tried to take over in the place of Moses. No doubt someone said to Joshua, "Joshua, you are a much better man than Moses. You are the real leader in this camp. Why don't you lead a rebellion and take things into your own hands?" But Joshua waited until the Lord exalted him. Joshua 3:7 "Then" the Lord said unto Joshua, "This day will I begin to magnify thee." The Lord didn't begin to magnify Joshua until Moses was dead. As long as Moses was alive there was one final authority, namely, Moses. Then when he died, God began to magnify Joshua. Please notice that Joshua was not pushy. He could wait on the Lord. But many of us are not willing to wait on the Lord. So here in our story in Daniel 4:8, we see that Daniel waited until he was called in. Now Nebuchadnezzar was writing this tract after he was saved, so he used Daniel's Jewish name. And he said of Daniel, "In whom is the spirit of the Holy God" and the word for God is "Elohim." This is a reference here to the Holy Spirit. At this point Daniel revealed the dream to Nebuchadnezzar.

DANIEL 4:9 "O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof." Now Nebuchadnezzar reverts to the Chaldean name for Daniel because this was an event that transpired before he was saved. Several years had gone by since he had contacted Daniel. But Daniel had been faithful, had not tried to push himself, and just waited until he was sent for.

Let us get this principle of doctrine here, that believers must be faithful in any task to which God has assigned them. If you are a housewife, then do that common everyday task as unto the Lord. Every Christian

should do his work as unto the Lord. We must all face the problem of boredom and monotony. Life is composed of little things and we must do each little task as unto the Lord. Now this is what Daniel has been doing since Chapter 2. He had received no recognition or promotion, yet he was faithful.

Back in Chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar didn't tell his men the dream, but in this instance he told them the dream but still they couldn't give him the interpretation.

Here in this verse he gave Daniel a great compliment. He said, "I know that no problem troubles you." The real meaning is "No problem overpowers you." So he here recognizes that Daniel had inner happiness.

Here in verses 10-18 we will see what we call "The tree dream."

DANIEL 4:10 "Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great." The tree actually refers to Nebuchadnezzar. He is a strong tall tree.

DANIEL 4:11 "The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earths." This verse refers to the vast power of Nebuchadnezzar and the extent of his kingdom. Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 3, Page 212 says, "Event had already shown that Nebuchadnezzar a vigorous and brilliant commander and was physically as well as mentally a very strong man, fully worthy of succeeding his father. He was to become the greatest man of his time in the Near East as a soldier and statesman and architect." So here is the great tree.

DANIEL 4:12 "The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it." This tells us that the empire of Nebuchadnezzar had grown to fantastic proportions and had great prosperity. "In it was food for all." His system of economics was amazing.

DANIEL 4:13 "I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;" "A watcher" introduces for us a new subject. There are angels who make surveys on earth and report to God and these are called "watchers." This is an event in the life of Nebuchadnezzar that required the action of the angelic court.

DANIEL 4:14 "He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:" They were to cut down the tree and the tree was Nebuchadnezzar.

DANIEL 4:15 "Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth:" "Nevertheless leave the stump" simply means that though the tree is to be cut down, his life is to be spared. He was on positive volition, but he had fantastic pride, and after God has dealt with his pride, he will give him the gospel and he

will be saved. For a time pride destroyed the operation of his positive volition and this is the reason for cutting down the tree. Nebuchadnezzar will have to be mentally ill for seven years and after this humiliating experience, he will come back and be saved. Nebuchadnezzar will actually become an animal for seven years and will be humbled.

DANIEL 4:16 "Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him." From this verse we know that Nebuchadnezzar had a mental illness.

DANIEL 4:17 "This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." "Watchers" are also mentioned in 1 Kings 22:19, 1:6 and Zechariah 1:10. The angelic court demanded this action that Nebuchadnezzar may come to know that God is the ruler of the universe.

DANIEL 4:18 "This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee. Here Nebuchadnezzar recognized the superiority of Daniel. Daniel had understood the dream as Nebuchadnezzar had related it to him. This is why Daniel was completely and totally shocked. Daniel realized the extent of God's punishment on Nebuchadnezzar.