

THE GREAT TREE

Daniel 4

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction

The great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was acquainted with many gods, including Daniel's God. But with his acquaintance with all these gods, Nebuchadnezzar was still, in essence, worshipping himself and living in sin. He was a very proud man, so God confronted him with his selfishness and sinfulness. He warned him of impending judgment, gave him an opportunity to repent, and when he refused, God sent the judgment. Only then did the proud king submit himself to God's power and authority and testify of it before the world.

Aim of the Lesson

Expose the immorality and penalty of pride and lead the students to submit to God's power and authority over their lives so that they will warn other of it.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

DISTURBING DREAM ABOUT A GREAT TREE

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Declaration of Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-3)

Nebuchadnezzar knew that the knowledge and wisdom of Daniel's God surpassed that of his gods when Daniel revealed everything that he needed to know about his dream of the great image. He was able to tell "secrets" to Daniel and interpret dreams that no other wise man could discover from their gods. He called Daniel's God, "A God of gods and a Lord of kings" (2:47). He also knew that God had great power when He changed his command and delivered the three Hebrew men from being incinerated in the fiery furnace. He knew of no other God like that (3:28, 29). But all of Nebuchadnezzar's knowledge of the true God was only secondary. He had not yet experienced the power of God in his physical life. He believed in God as a viable alternative, but not as a personal reality. Nebuchadnezzar was still going his own way, living his own life and setting his own goals. Then God intervened and revealed Himself in such a dramatic and personal way to the king so that he wanted to tell others of the miraculous working of God in his own life (4:2). He wanted to tell them so that they, too, might know of His power ("mighty signs and wonders") and sovereignty ("everlasting kingdom and dominion") in all generations (4:3).

We need to experience God's power and sovereignty in our lives or else we simply know about God through the words and experiences of others. God's power and sovereignty will become real when we totally surrender ourselves to God as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). When we personally know God, we will want to tell others what He did in our lives.

II. Dream of Nebuchadnezzar (4:4-18)

Nebuchadnezzar was blessed by God, even though he had no personal knowledge of the true God. He prospered both personally and politically so that he was "at rest" (no threats to his kingdom or to his life) and he was "flourishing" (4:4). Suddenly an unsettling situation erupted in his life. He had a dream which deeply troubled and frightened him (4:5). He sought the advice of his wise men, but they were without the wisdom that God gives to His people (4:6). He soon discovered that they could not help him.

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar turned to Daniel for help in revealing the meaning of his dream. It was about a great tree that reached to heaven. It personified a man. Notice the pronouns are masculine. He produced an abundance of fruit to feed all people, made shade for the animals and lodging for the birds. Then a holy observer (an angel) came and cried with a loud voice for the tree to be cut down, but the stump of his roots was to be left in the earth and protected with a band (or fence) of iron and bronze. He would be with the beasts of the field and his heart would be changed from a man's to a beast's. This would continue for 7 years so the living may know that the most High rules as He wishes in the kingdom of men. He had observed in Daniel's life a spirituality which he perhaps could not adequately explain, but which he did recognize as genuine, powerful and trustworthy (4:8, 18) So he depended on Daniel to interpret the dream for him.

Many today seem to prosper and enjoy life without God (cf. Psalm 73). But when God finally confronts them through some troubling experience, they discover that they have virtually nowhere to turn. The counselors of this world are just as lost as the counselees who come to them. The counselors do not want to deal with sin in the lives of the counselees, because they have not dealt with sin in their own lives. In Nebuchadnezzar's life, pride was his problem. He needed to confess his pride and turn from it before he could come to God and find true peace.

When we have troubles and need help, we must go to someone who will confront the problem that we have (many times caused by some sin) and direct us to God's Word for a true answer. We must not turn to someone who will "tickle our ears" (2 Tim 4:3, 4). On the other hand, when someone near us is troubled, can they see the Spirit's work in our lives so that will come to us for help? People that are deeply distressed will not be satisfied with nebulous, issue-skirting solutions. They are looking for someone they can trust to give them true answers with love and concern like Daniel did for Nebuchadnezzar.

III. Disclosure to Nebuchadnezzar (4:19-27)

Daniel faithfully proclaimed the message of God to Nebuchadnezzar without omitting any part of it, even though he was greatly troubled in his heart over the weighty implications of God's message to the king (4:19). Through the interpretation of the dream, Daniel confronted the king with his sin of pride. Nebuchadnezzar was like the tree in his dream that had grown to an immense size by the favor of God (4:20-22). But Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the source and purpose of his greatness; he claimed that he had built Babylon by his own might and for his majesty. Thus, God determined to judge him. God would remove His hand of blessing from Nebuchadnezzar and then the king would discover exactly what it is like to be without God's grace (4:23-25). Nebuchadnezzar would retain his kingdom, but lose his sanity until he was ready to acknowledge God as the source of all that he had and was, and relinquish his self-esteem for God's glory (4:26). Daniel then invited the king to repent of his pride by addressing the needs of the poor (4:27).

We are called to be a faithful messenger for God to lost sinners. However, the judgment of God on sinners should trouble our soul. We need to present the whole counsel of God with tears in our eyes. Cause them to think what it would be like if God were to remove His hand of goodness from them. They would have nothing. They need to be thankful for all that He has done for them. Encourage lost sinners to repent of their sin and pride so they are thankful and live wholly for God!

IV. Debasement of Nebuchadnezzar (4:28-37)

Nebuchadnezzar may have taken Daniel's counsel somewhat seriously for one year, but he did not have a sincere change of heart. Then pride raised its ugly head once again and he took credit for all that he had in his kingdom instead of giving God the credit for it (4:28-30). This was a grievous sin against God, so God judged him without further delay. God was longsuffering with Nebuchadnezzar, waiting for one year for him to seriously repent of his pride. Then God's holiness judged him justly and brought him to his knees in the fields to eat grass with the cattle for seven years (4:31-33). Finally, Nebuchadnezzar was willing to submit to God's authority, relinquish his pride, and give honor to Him before all people by sending this letter to all people in his kingdom (4:34, 35; cf 4:1-3). Nebuchadnezzar had a sincere change of heart. As a result, God's love was shown to Nebuchadnezzar. God kept His Word, restored his mind and gave him authority to rule over his kingdom once more. Furthermore, his actions indicate that he became a true believer in God through his sickness and received eternal life.

We must deal with sin in our lives when it is made known to us. No one knows the day or the hour when our time on earth will end. The time to repent is now; otherwise our time to repent will run out. People should repent and submit themselves to God willingly before His judgment falls on them. But if judgment has already fallen on them, they can still repent, submit to God and escape eternal judgment in hell. Submission to God is not a punishment, but a means to many blessings now and even more in the future.

PUT DOWN PRIDE AND PRAISE THE LORD.

Note to the teacher: Ask your students questions from the Student's Lesson and appoint different ones to read the Scriptures where the answers can be found. After a right answer is found, share other truths you have gleaned from your study of the Bible, from the Study Notes and from the Teacher's Plan. Make applications to the students' lives where they fit (some are found in the Teacher's Plan). This approach will keep the interest of your students.