

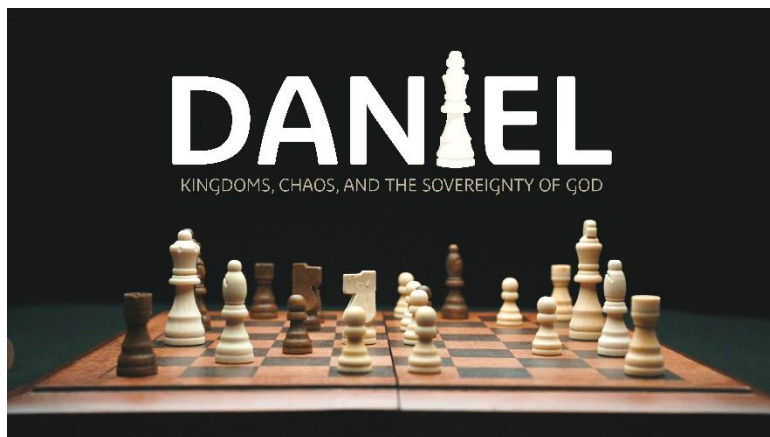


# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

**When God Speaks,  
Will You Listen?**

**DANIEL:  
Kingdoms, Chaos and the  
Sovereignty of God**

**Daniel 4  
Tim Badal | February 4, 2024**



We're going to be in Daniel 4 this morning. For those who haven't been with us, a few weeks ago we started a series out of the book of Daniel, which was written about 600 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. It's written by a man who lived in the midst of great chaos. As a young boy or teenager, Daniel was taken captive, removed from his land, his family, and his religion to a very different place. Babylon was about 700 miles from his home. There he learned what it means to follow God when you're in the minority. He learned what it means to trust God when the world is in chaos. He found ways to honor the unbelievers around him even when things were most difficult. As we continue through this book, we will see how God still has a plan for His people and a plan for the future.

Last week we came to a moment in history when three men stood strong for God and for their convictions, even though they were surrounded by temptations to give up and give in. The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3 is amazing, as we see how God met His people in the fiery furnace, not only saving them from death, but also turning the entire kingdom to Himself.

But now as we turn the page, we have a white space between the end of chapter three and chapter four. In that space there's a lot we need to understand before we move forward to the next written words. Even though that space is millimeters in width, there's volumes contained in it.

First, Daniel wrote chapters one through three in Hebrew, to the Hebrew people who were captives in that land. He was telling them the stories of God's faithfulness to the captives during those years. But in chapter four, and for several chapters following it, he switches to Aramaic, which was the language of the Babylonians and most of the known world. In essence he's saying the message in the first three chapters is most important to the Jewish audience, but now in the next several chapters, he wants all the known world to hear these stories. This tells us that what is contained in these chapters is important both for the Christ follower and also for the person who may be listening today who may not know anything about what God is doing and what He requires of His creation.

Second, the white space between these two chapters represents about 20-25 years of time that has elapsed. Otherwise we might wonder why Nebuchadnezzar does an about face, assuming it happens the next afternoon. Nebuchadnezzar, as an older man, is now decades beyond the story in chapter three. He has forgotten his words of affirmation and allegiance, as well as his worship of the God of heaven.

We will also find in chapter four one of the strangest occurrences in history. As we'll see, King Nebuchadnezzar is brought low by the hand of God, becoming like an animal. He will act, think, eat and drink like an animal.

Finally, I believe the most important thing in this chapter is the word God has for us as well. He wants to speak to us.

When I was growing up, there was an ad for a brokerage firm called EF Hutton. How many of you remember that? All right, we have an old congregation here. Those ads had a slogan that was intended to build trust in their advice. It went like this: "When EF Hutton speaks, people listen." In other words, when there was a stock tip that EF Hutton gave, everyone would stop what they were doing and incline their ears toward whoever was speaking. They believed what was being said was of great importance.

Daniel chapter four is a moment when God speaks. Now of course God speaks throughout the Bible, but this time He speaks in such a unique way that it would be wise for all of us to turn off every distraction and incline our ears to listen. My prayer is that we would incline our ears, getting rid of whatever wax is interfering, so we can hear clearly what God is saying.

Let me first give you the overarching story in Daniel 4. King Nebuchadnezzar is at the height of his rule. Life couldn't be better. One day he is reclining in his palace, enjoying all he says he has created. He begins to fall asleep. And just as he had in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that scares him. The dream goes like this. There was a tree that grew rapidly. It was strong and its height went to the Kingdom of heaven. It was so big and grand that all the world could see it. It provided sustenance for the whole world. The people ate from its fruit and the animals lived in its shade. It was the source of great good in the world. But in its finest moment, an angel arrived and announced that the tree needed to be chopped down.

At first, the angel cut off its limbs. Then it cut down the trunk, leaving only a stump. After this a voice announced that the tree was actually a person. We begin to see personal pronouns used. This freaked out Nebuchadnezzar even more. He heard it say that he would become like the beasts of the field and his body would be wet with the dew. This would last for seven periods of time and his kingdom would be stolen from him. So Nebuchadnezzar went to his magicians and enchanters for the interpretation, but again as in Daniel 2, they were unable to help him. He then turned to the one man he knew could interpret the dream when no one else could, that is Belteshazzar (aka Daniel). Daniel told him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, you're the tree and you're about to be chopped down. God is saying to you that you must turn from your evil ways and back to Him, giving Him homage. If you do that, maybe He will give you mercy."

A year later, King Nebuchadnezzar began speaking of his own greatness and goodness. While the words were still in his mouth, calamity came upon him. God took his mind from him and he began to think he was an animal. The very things the dream described became true, and for seven years he lost his kingdom and wandered around like an animal in the fields, until the day came when he turned his attention back to God.

This dream and this story can be applied in a number of different ways.

- First, it could be applied globally. In other words, King Nebuchadnezzar is a picture of the human race. God is saying from the heavens, "Human beings, stop building your own kingdom. Stop thinking these things belong to you and turn back to me before it's too late."
- This could be applied to our nation. We could say that Nebuchadnezzar is an example of our haughtiness as a country. We think we're the greatest and the strongest nation, yet we're building a kingdom to our own glory. Will God say to us as He did to Nebuchadnezzar, "Repent before judgment comes"?
- Or could it be said of us as a church that we have the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar? We might be thinking we're building God's Kingdom, but we're really building a kingdom for ourselves. Could this be a scheme of vanity that your elders and pastors have crafted that has nothing to do with God and everything to do with them? Could it be that we're reading our own press, seeing the growth in our campuses and the renown we're getting in the community, thinking, "Look at what we've created"? Is God saying to us, "Village Bible Church, before it's too late, change your ways"? If we were to apply Daniel 4 in this way, it could serve the same purpose as Jesus' words to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

What I want to do this morning, however, is to apply the lessons of this chapter to ourselves, putting ourselves in Nebuchadnezzar's shoes as individuals. As our preaching team has been discussing, our inclination is to put ourselves in Daniel's shoes, in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's shoes. We're the righteous ones. But has it ever dawned on us that we might also be in Nebuchadnezzar's shoes? Might the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar be living in us as well? You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. I'm saved. I have given my allegiance to Jesus Christ." Well, we've seen Nebuchadnezzar do something like that on two different occasions. The first time was after Daniel interpreted his dream in chapter two. The second time was after he saw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be rescued from the fiery furnace. That time he even saw the fourth man in the fire and he responded by worshiping God. But now 20 or more years have passed, the old Nebuchadnezzar is alive and well and we have lessons to learn from his next experience.

## We boast about what we are building.

I want to highlight a couple things. First, this chapter is all about kingdoms—Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and God's Kingdom. These kingdoms are in conflict with one another. Seven times in our text we'll see the word "kingdom" used. Five times we'll see the word "authority," and three times we'll see the word "dominion." These are all words that refer to power and the building of kingdoms which raises the question are you competing with God's Kingdom by trying to build your own kingdom? Or is the kingdom you're building in concert with His, or said another way, are you all about His Kingdom?

Let's look at verse four: *"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace."* Here's a man who has it all. He's accomplished all he ever imagined could be done. He loves what he sees. Moving ahead to verse 30 we read, *"And the king answered and said, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?'"*

Let me ask, does that reflect your life? As you sit in your prosperity and renown, does it occur to you at times—whether in word or thought—"Look at what I've accomplished. Look at what people say about me. Look at all the amazing things I've done, the awards I've won, the promotions I've received, the contracts I've gotten customers to sign. Look at how great I am." Notice how often Nebuchadnezzar speaks about himself.

You might ask, "How do I know if I'm building my own kingdom?" Well, what do you talk about? King Nebuchadnezzar only talks about what he is doing. Some of the things we build are not altogether bad. When God speaks about Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, He says that kingdom has done much that is good. The animals find their shade there. The people of the earth find their sustenance there. He has not built an altogether evil thing.

Some of us are building what we believe to be good empires. We look at our balance sheet and ask, "Is this adding to my kingdom? Where am I regarding my finances, my career? Where is my family?"

For some of us, our kingdoms are our jobs. They're about what we do. We go into our kingdom Monday through Friday, working to build our business, building our portfolio. Some of us are building an empire of financial wealth. You're on the phone. You're looking at your 401k and stocks, thinking, "If I continue to go this way, look at how much I'll be worth in the future."

For others of us, it's about our family. This can be more true perhaps for some of you women. The kids and their achievements become our trophies. We can't wait to communicate on social media: "Look at what my kids have done, which then reflects the kind of parent I am." These can be the trophies of a parent's empire.

It never dawns on us to remember the words of God, that *"the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will"* (verse 25). When we go to work, we forget that we wouldn't have this job, or the ability to do the things this job requires, if God didn't give it to us. We would never be able to create wealth if wasn't for God. We wouldn't have the athletic or academic prowess apart from Him.

Recently a man who is about my age suffered a debilitating stroke. In talking with him and with those around him, I found out the stroke came because a little clot—one that would require a microscope to see—had gotten lodged in a blood vessel near his brain. In a moment he went from having all his life put together to being like an infant. That tiny clot can take down a great human being. Do we understand how finite and frail we really are?

The Bible says the tongue boasts great things. Nebuchadnezzar boasts great things. Could the same be said of us? Do we boast far too much about ourselves and not about God? This is a cautionary tale for us to cease and desist the kingdom building we're doing for our name and fame. That type of kingdom building brings one thing: the judgment of God.

Why? Because God says, "I'm the only One Who has a Kingdom. I'm the only One Who has an Empire. I am the Only One because I created this world out of nothing by the power of My word. I'm the One Who sustains it. So little man, puny woman, who are you to think you're all you say you are? I'll have no one else in competition with Me." Still, He gives us time to change our ways. Nebuchadnezzar was like a petulant child who thinks they know more than their parents. Mom and Dad say to that child, "I will not allow you to speak this way. You have no idea how little you really are."

## It's good to be brought down to size.

When we boast about the kingdom we're building, we need to realize it's good when God brings us down to size. That's the second lesson we learn this morning. What Nebuchadnezzar is going to experience is altogether a good thing. There are amazing things about God's judgment. There are truths about God's judgment for us to see in his life.

Twelve months before the judgment came, God's warning was given. All that God said would transpire did in fact happen, but it was months later. As God told him in the dream, "I'm going to chop you down, Nebuchadnezzar." A year later, God took an ax, stepped up to tree Nebuchadnezzar and swung that celestial ax. With each hit, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom came crashing down. What important truths can we learn from this?

### God always warns about judgment before it comes.

What Nebuchadnezzar is being told in the dream is, "Change. Repent. Stop building your kingdom. Cease and desist." God does this throughout the Bible.

Did you know that it took 120 years for Noah to build his ark? The Bible says that during those 120 years, Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He declared to the world, both in word—"Repent, the flood is coming"—and in picture—"There's the boat. It's almost built." For 120 years, he warned the inhabitants of the world, "Change, because judgment is on its way."

By His grace to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, God told them, "My judgment is on its way." Through plague after plague, they hardened their hearts and said, "No, my empire is more important than listening to the voice of God—even if I've seen the hand of God with my own eyes." So preview upon preview, judgment upon judgment, came to Egypt.

What about the people of Jericho? For seven days the Israelites went around that walled city, each day offering an opportunity for the people to lay down their arms and turn to the living God, but they didn't. Then on that seventh day, seven times they had an opportunity. The graciousness of God was calling them to turn from their evil ways, to stop building their kingdom and start living in His. But the people of Jericho said no. Is it always a no? No.

In the book of Jonah, God gave the people of Nineveh 40 days, then upon hearing an eight-word sermon from Jonah, the reluctant prophet, the people of Nineveh turned to God, and God gave them grace. Had Nebuchadnezzar repented, the last part of this chapter would not have taken place. In fact, Daniel says at the end of verse 27, *"Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."* We see God's goodness in that after the judgment came, Nebuchadnezzar was finally brought back to a sound mind. We read in verse 36 that he said, *"The glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me."*

If you walk away from this service thinking God finds great joy or morbid pleasure in destroying people, the answer is: you don't know the love of God. However, the longsuffering and kindness of God has its limits. God says that one day His lovingkindness will come to an end, then there will be a day of judgment. Notice the speed with which that judgment comes.

### God's judgment comes speedily.

While Nebuchadnezzar is boasting about his accomplishments, all the judgment of God came upon him. He had had 12 months to change his ways, something like 365 days. By that point in time, you would think he would have taken the warning to heart. But instead he said in verse 30, *"Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"* It goes on to say that while he was still talking, a voice from heaven came down and said, "It's over. It's done." The Bible tells us there will be a day in the future when God will again say, "It's done." Then with the sound of a trumpet, there will be no more opportunities, no do-overs. The judgment of God will come.

When it comes, let us understand that when God does cut you down to size, when He cuts me down to size, because of our kingdom and empire building, it will be embarrassing. It will be painful. And it's usually public.

So what happened to Nebuchadnezzar?

<sup>31</sup> While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, <sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

It all happened immediately, just like that. It was public. It was painful. It was embarrassing. The king lost his mind and was driven from his kingdom. Do you think his subjects were really sad, thinking, “The king’s having a tough time”? No, people gloated over it. “The great King Nebuchadnezzar—look at him now! He looks like a beast. He eats like a beast. He acts like a beast.” They mocked him for seven periods of time.

I cannot tell you the holy terror you feel when you see this firsthand, when you see God’s judgment and His discipline of people. Not too long ago I was brought into a situation of a church that was having conflict. I was brought in to be a third-party mediator. The conflict revolved around accusations about the pastor having an inappropriate relationship. I spent hours and hours with the pastor, looking him in the eye. He said, “Pastor, these are lies.” He told me some of the darkest things about the people who were bringing the accusations against him. He seemed altogether trustworthy, saying all the right things. I would tell Amanda, “I don’t think he did it. There’s no evidence; these are terrible people who are bringing these charges against him.”

I would pray, “Lord, what do I do? I need a moment of Solomon wisdom here.” Then at a time no one could have humanly planned, that man’s empire came crashing down. His life collapsed, because God said, “It’s time. It’s over. I’m done.” That man lost parts of his marriage, the respect of his children, his pastorate, his church and all opportunity for further ministry. He lost his reputation in the community. He lost everything. I wondered if he would admit, “It’s not my kingdom; it’s God’s”?

When that moment happened, tears welled up in my eye, and shivers went down my spine. I started confessing things to God, because it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We need find solace in the fact that God gives us time. Maybe right now you’re living your best life, but God is saying, as He did in Luke 12, “Little do you know that today I will demand your life.” You think you can eat, drink and be merry, but God says, “Today I will take your life from you.”

### **God will bring you down in proportion to the level you raise yourself up.**

There are two more truths I want you to know. First, God will bring you down in proportion to the level you raise yourself up. Why did God make such a mockery of King Nebuchadnezzar? Because Nebuchadnezzar had made a mockery of God. God doesn’t mess around, friends. Maybe you’re not to the level of Nebuchadnezzar. Praise God. Maybe His discipline and judgment on you might be a little more gentle, a little less public and painful. But Nebuchadnezzar became an animal.

You might be thinking, “Come on. This is where I can’t buy the Old Testament. This doesn’t happen.” Josephus, the ancient historian, believed it happened and wrote about it. He said this event when King Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal was real history. Still you might be thinking, “We’re 2,600 years from that. We know so much more about things.”

Let me read you something from the National Library of Medicine. There’s something called Lycanthropy. It’s “the unusual belief or delusion in which a patient thinks he or she has been transformed into an animal.” This is modern medicine. You’re like, “Does anybody really believe that?” If you do a search on Google, you’ll see pictures of this. You think it’s crazy and it is. It’s a delusion, that you, created in the image of God, would lower yourself to such a depraved mind, to think that you’re an animal, to make yourself look and act like an animal.

We talk about the spirit of Babylon in our culture today. What is one of the things we’re hearing that our young people are dabbling in? It seems we’re great at taking ancient sins and making them sound really good. They’re called furies, people who are acting like animals. We laugh and we think it’s funny. But is this not the judgment of God? Is this not God giving us over to our sins and appetites? He’s saying, “You who are My creation, if you want to be brute animals in your sexuality, sensuality and pursuits, then I’ll give your mind over to that, so you can devalue yourself in that way.” We have to be careful, because we’re living in this world today.

### **God’s judgment is not done when we say so, but when God says so.**

Finally, this passage refers to seven seasons of time, which some interpret to mean seven years, but we don’t know for sure. Most Bible scholars believe these seven periods refer to the completeness of time, meaning God’s judgment was completed. He had determined this period of time for Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment to last. There’s grace in that. Of course, King

Nebuchadnezzar probably wished it would have ended much sooner. He probably wanted it to last only a week, or even only a day. But God determined how long it needed to be.

I don't want to sound brazen, but there is a time coming, my friends, when God's judgment will be perfected for all eternity. He will say, "My grace and mercy have reached their end." Revelation tells us that great and small will stand before His throne. God will say to them, "Depart from Me." It won't be for one season of time, or two, or seven, but for all eternity. His judgment and wrath against sin will go on and on and on. So in Daniel 4, while God's judgment lasted for seven seasons of time, it did come to an end.

Maybe you're in a season of judgment right now; a season of His discipline. You can know He loves you because He's given you the opportunity to cease and desist your ways. If you repent before His judgment comes, while you're on earth, that judgment will reach its fullness and you will be made like His Son.

After these seven seasons of time, it says at the end of Daniel 4:

<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,  
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;  
<sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing.

This is Nebuchadnezzar talking. He's saying, "I am nothing; God is everything."

And he does according to his will among the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
and none can stay his hand  
or say to him, "What have you done?"

<sup>36</sup> At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.

How is he going to respond this time around?

<sup>37</sup> 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.

Although it seems backwards to us, scholars believe that verses one through three are an addendum put at the front of the chapter, where Nebuchadnezzar declares to *"all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!"* Instead of being tyrannical, he is being benevolent.

<sup>2</sup> It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

The last recorded words of Nebuchadnezzar are words of worship and praise. Is he saved? We don't know. I'm more worried about my own salvation than other people's salvation. But man, what a way to finish.

## Bringing God glory is the only way to live.

This brings us to our final lesson. When we boast about the kingdom we are building for ourselves, it's good for God to bring us down to size. The important truth to walk away with is that bringing God glory is the only way we can live. So as you look at your little kingdoms, as I look at my little kingdom, is it about us, or is it about God? Am I more like the early Nebuchadnezzar, or am I like the Nebuchadnezzar he became? Am I giving God the glory due to Him? Am I acknowledging that without Him, I can't do anything. There are so many things that are out of my control and are in the hands of God.

Even doing the thing I'm doing right now is all because of Him. So for me to think, "Wow, look how great you are, Tim; all these people are listening to you." Little do I know that all God has to do is say it and I'm gone. Or worse, He touches my life and my mind is taken from me. I could quickly become the craziest, wildest person, brought to mockery and shame.

So let's stop building our kingdoms and remember the true Kingdom. As the worship team comes forward for our time of communion, we've heard from one biblical king. But there was another King 600 years later Who come—that was King Jesus. He

can do whatever He wants because He's the King of the universe. He's almighty, all-knowing and all-powerful. But He didn't exalt Himself. We read in Philippians 2 that He became nothing. He humbled Himself, even to the point of death on a cross.

We have a choice: will we live for our kingdom or will we submit to His Kingdom. King Jesus says, "When you submit to Me, I'll save you. When you submit to Me, I'll cover your sins. When you submit to My lordship in your life and let me rule over your kingdom, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. I'll protect and lead you." Jesus did this by being obedient to the Father and going to the cross. The Father said, "Because of that obedience, the name of Jesus is above every other name, and at His name every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord."

We'll either do that in this life, or we'll do it in the life to come. If we do it in this life, we'll receive grace, mercy and salvation. But if we do it in the life to come, we'll receive condemnation, judgment and an eternity separated from God.

So this morning, if you have bowed the knee to King Jesus, trusted Him for the forgiveness of your sins and have said with your mouth and your life, "I follow King Jesus. I don't do it perfectly, so I ask for forgiveness when I fall, but I want to follow King Jesus," then I welcome you to this Communion Table.

The Bible says that before we partake of these elements, we should examine our hearts. So let's do that. Let's ask ourselves, "What am I building today? Is it about me, or is it about Christ?" Could it be that we need to bring judgment into our own lives so God doesn't have to do that? If we do this willingly, then He will forgive us. Then we will respond by bringing praise and glory to Him.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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