

# Daniel 4: Royal Lycanthrope

## INTRODUCTION

Daniel 4 is an amazing account by a king that was pulled by God to acknowledge the power of the true God. It seems that this part of Daniel is a quotation of the very words of the King (Daniel 4:1). Daniel added this section to his own book in the place where it would best fit.

Most of the comments for this section can be seen by looking at the sermon in Appendix One. The brief notes here will merely highlight a few aspects of significance.

## THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

The disease of the king can be called *lycanthropy* from two Greek words *λυκος* [lykos], "wolf" and *ανθρωπος* [anthropos] "man". Though this technically refers to a person who thinks that he is a wolf, it is also used in a loose sense to refer to a person who thinks that he is any other kind of animal. It would be more technically correct to say that Nebuchadnezzar suffered from *boanthropy*. That name specifically refers to a person who thinks that he is a cow.

The king learned about his fate through a dream. This dream had simple details. But it seemed to carry an ominous meaning. A great big tree (10,11) provided food for animals (12) and birds. But then a Watcher came (13) and gave a drastic message: "Chop down the tree . . ." (14). Leave a stump (15). Change His heart (16). This seems to be a scary detail.

In Aramaic, the word *אֵילָן* ['ilan] (tree) is a masculine word. So the pronouns which follow can be understood as "it" (meaning the tree) or "he" meaning the king. In some places, the pronoun, "he" could refer to the king and the tree at the same time. But by the time we come to Daniel 4:16, it is clearly talking about the king. His heart would be changed to the heart of an animal.

The main point of the whole dream and of the real-life experience which followed it was that the king would know that God was in control (Daniel 4:17).

Daniel 4:27 highlights a very important aspect of this passage. This shows that it was a kind of conditional prophecy. Different actions could lead to a different outcome.

Notice the kind of progression in the way King Nebuchadnezzar views Daniel's God. First, he notes that in spite of all the advantages he gives to various wise men, Daniel and his three friends are blessed with greater wisdom and understanding (Dan

1:20). Then, after Daniel tells him his own dream and its meaning he declares that Daniel's God is "a God of gods and a Lord of kings . . ." (Dan 2:47). Later, after seeing the power of Daniel's God in delivering Daniel's three friends, the king blesses their God (Dan 3:28). He also makes a decree that no one should speak against their God (Dan 3:29). After his humbling experience of being a "wolf man" or "ox man" the king goes beyond this. He praised and honored Daniel's God with words that extend through several verses (Dan 4:34-37). He seems to be a believer by this time.

It is thrilling to see how God did not give up on Nebuchadnezzar. He had repeated opportunities. And he responded to these opportunities, though he kept falling away from the truth in between times. I have hope of seeing this monarch in the kingdom of heaven one day.

## SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

It seems that pride was Nebuchadnezzar's worst problem. He wanted to take all of the credit for his accomplishments. We would do well to learn from his example.

I am interested that God used such drastic means to arrest the attention of the proud monarch. This gives me an insight into how much God cared about Nebuchadnezzar. God is willing to do whatever it takes to save us. At times, this may mean removing something which is interfering with our following God's way.

Nebuchadnezzar could learn nothing during the seven years that he was insane. All of his learning came after that. It was intense and powerful. It was a MOMENT OF TRUTH or a moment of learning. I believe that this came as a direct result of Daniel praying for his friend the king.<sup>1</sup>

There is also another way to look at this. God can use anyone--even unwittingly. God set the king up. Then He took the king down. And then, He raised the king up again. Whatever the king may have had in mind for his personal goals, God was able to use this man for His purposes. And this gives us an example of a heathen king writing a chapter in the Bible. God shows us His power in amazing ways. This creates a kind of picture

---

<sup>1</sup>As a kind of contrast to this point, Angela Garza, in a class presentation on 6 January 2005, noted that God restored the mind of Nebuchadnezzar when he lifted his eyes up to heaven. Our cases may seem hopeless. But even in the most hopeless situations, we can begin the process of healing by looking to God for power.

which is repeated later in scripture. We see that in the last days, all will bow and confess the name of the Lord (cf. Philippians 2:10,11).<sup>2</sup>

What follows is food for thought personalizing Daniel 4.

Imagine being invited to eat with King Sejong.<sup>3</sup> What would you say? How would you act? Would you face him as you walked out of the room? Or would you turn your back on him, and walk forward, straight through the door? Would you drink before he did? Would you offer food to him or would he offer it to you? Would you bow when you met him? Would you call him by his name or would you use his title?

There are so many things which we must consider if we want to be polite. Politeness implies a controlled life. We control our words and actions. We even control our facial expressions.

Read Daniel 4:1-3 (Heb. 3:31-33)

These are amazing words from a pagan king. What could lead to such a declaration? What could make a powerful man give glory to the God of a foreigner? Notice the development of events which led him to this conclusion.

Once again, the king was faced with a dilemma (Daniel 4:4-8). He had another dream which he could not understand. And, once again, no one could explain his dream. He finally called for Daniel to come.

Read Daniel 4:8,9

This reminds me of his experience recorded in Daniel 2. At that time, he didn't tell the dream. He wanted the wise men to tell him the dream and to give him its meaning. This time, he told the dream, but they still couldn't explain its meaning. There are times when men feel very smart, but they cannot figure out what God is trying to say.

The king described his dream in the next 8 verses (Daniel 4:10-27, English). The dream was very simple in its details. But it seemed to carry an ominous meaning. A great big tree (10,11) provided food for animals (12) and birds. But then a Watcher came (13) and gave a drastic message: "Chop down the tree . . ." (14). Leave a stump (15). Change His heart (16). This was a scary detail.

Up until this time, it looked like the dream was about a tree. But it was also about a man. In the Hebrew language and in the Aramaic language, the word, "tree" is a masculine noun. And so the word, "he" could be a man, or it could be the tree. But at this

---

<sup>2</sup>Taken from a class presentation by Rob Beaton on 5 January 2006.

<sup>3</sup>A king in Korea in ancient times.

point, the dream was definitely about a man, not a tree. And this person would have his heart changed from a man's heart to an animal's heart. But what would be the purpose of all of this.

Read Daniel 4:17 (English)

The purpose was so that people might know that God rules over everything. God is in control. This is one thing that the king could understand from the dream. But now it was time to hear the explanation of the dream.

The king knew that only Daniel could explain the dream (Read Daniel 4:18). Daniel was so shocked by the dream and its meaning that he could not speak (4:19). When he finally did speak, Daniel used great tact in his choice of words. He tried to smooth out the very difficult message without destroying its meaning. The king had to prod him and encourage him to speak.

The explanation came in the next few verses (Daniel 4:20-26). "The tree that you saw . . . it is you, Oh king." (20a, 22a). In other words, "You are the one". This command is from God (24). You will know that God is in control (4:25). This means that you will have to live like an animal. You will no longer be able to think clearly. You will be driven out of your home and away from your position. But there is some good news in the end. You will get the kingdom back (26).

At this point, Daniel had some personal advice for the king.

Read Daniel 4:27

This is the key verse. The prediction was conditional. If the king would be willing to change, the outcome could be different. But what happened in the end?

Read Daniel 4:28

All of these predictions came true. The king was so proud of his own accomplishments, that he forgot all about the warning. At the end of 12 months, he was walking in his great palace. It really was a very beautiful place. He had spared no costs to make his city the greatest one in at least 1000 miles. His wife had come from a country with wooded hillsides. Babylon was a city in a great plain with few trees. And so, the king had hanging gardens designed. These were tall, elevated areas with trees and other plants. They were intended to make his wife feel more at home.

Read Daniel 4:30

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . .?"

One day, one of my university professors brought something special to class. He had one of the bricks from Babylon. This man was named Gerhard Hasel. He is the one

whose father you heard about when we talked about Daniel 2. Dr. Hasel had visited the area which used to be the great, ancient city of Babylon. He and his group discovered several of these bricks. As they were leaving Iraq, they had to show all of their findings to the government officials. The officials from the antiquities department chose any items which they wanted to keep. After that, they allowed these people to take the remaining artifacts out of Iraq.

Dr. Hasel was permitted to keep the one brick because it was broken. But he wasn't worried about it being broken. He was excited about the inscription on one side. In the inscription, King Nebuchadnezzar bragged about his accomplishments. He boasted about the greatness of certain Babylonian gods. He also boasted about this great city which he had rebuilt. He claimed credit for the greatness of Babylon.

Imagine having a city where all of the bricks had your name on them? No wonder he was ready to say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built. . .?" Would you ever say such a thing? I hope not. But, then again, I'm afraid that I have heard people saying things like this. In fact, I'm afraid that I have even said things like this myself.

"Look at this new machine that I invented." "Isn't it fascinating?" "Ah, you should see my son." "He is so good at spelling and grammar." "Wow, that was difficult, but now I can speak four languages." "There is no one who can bake a better cake than the one I just baked." "I knew it would happen." "I have been promoted to a higher position."

Too often, we boast about our accomplishments. We act as if we are responsible for all of our success. We are so great. We have so many wonderful ideas. We are so strong and healthy. "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built. . .?"

And then, suddenly, everything changed. A voice came from heaven reminding the king of the earlier prediction. He would be driven from his position and he would live like an animal. Only twelve months after the prediction, it all came true.

Read Daniel 4:31.

The words were still on the king's lips. "Is not this Babylon, that I have built. . .?" (4:30). The king had great pride. He was in control. But, suddenly, he had lost that control. He had lost his position. It was a moment of awful truth. The king became a royal lycanthrope. He suffered from a disease called lycanthropy. Lycanthropy comes from two Greek words. Lycos means wolf. Anthropos means man. A lycanthrope is a man who thinks that he is a wolf, or another kind of animal. In the king's case, the thought he was a cow.

Read Daniel 4:33.

He was a royal lycanthrope. Actually, we could say that his disease was boanthropy since he thought he was a cow. This is a kind of mental illness or insanity.

And so the one who had eaten cows now ate like a cow. The king could learn no lesson during the seven years. He had lost his sense of reason. The only learning happened just before and just after his time as a lycanthrope. This learning was rapid and intense. Sometimes it takes a long and horrible experience to bring us to a MOMENT OF TRUTH or a moment of learning. The king became "Mr. Stump". Like the stump of the tree in the dream, he was left out in the field, stripped of his power. God was willing to do whatever it might take to lead this king to serve Him.

In college, I had a teacher named Joe Englekemier. He taught us about a kind of prayer called "whatever it takes" prayer. In this kind of prayer, a person asks God to do whatever it takes to save someone. It is a very powerful kind of prayer. But it can come with some serious consequences. Perhaps Daniel had prayed such a prayer. At any rate, God was willing to do whatever it might take to reach the proud heart of the king.

When I was living in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA, I met a man named Phillip Szedlus. Yes, there really is a place named Kalamazoo. Phillip used to be a very active young man with an interest in speed. He had a fast motorcycle and he loved the wild freedom which it gave him. He was proud of his ability to drive it much faster than most people would dare to drive a car. He felt indestructible, he had no fear of consequences. Late one night, he was driving his motorcycle too fast when he came to a curve in the road. He went off the road and hit a ditch at a very high speed. He was thrown off the motorcycle and was badly injured. The ditch was beside a library. A woman inside the library came running out to see what had happened. She had heard the crash. When she saw Phillip, she called for help.

Phillip would never be the same again. He lost most of the use of his eyes and he could never drive again. But while he was recovering, someone introduced him to Jesus. He came to love Jesus as his personal friend. He no longer missed his wild freedom. He had found a different kind of freedom which comes from Jesus. And he talked to his friends about Jesus. Perhaps someone had been praying a "whatever it takes" prayer for Phillip. At any rate, God worked through a terrible accident to get his attention.

While I was in Kalamazoo I met another man named Uni Rolstone. Uni had been a very strong, tall man. He was proud of his great strength. He felt that he didn't need God. He could take care of himself. As we say in America, Uni got in with the wrong crowd. He began to use illegal drugs. His mother worried about him a lot and tried to persuade him to change his ways. But he only laughed at her pleas. He liked his life just the way it was. Mrs. Rolstone prayed for her son. She didn't know how God could get Uni's attention, but she kept praying for him. She prayed that God would do whatever it might take to win her son to Jesus. And then, things began to happen.

One day, Uni sold some illegal drugs to some people from Detroit. These were big, tough guys, but Uni was not afraid. He was big and strong too. After a few days, these guys came back to talk to Uni. They met him in a bad part of town. They complained to him that the drugs were not a very good quality. They demanded that he

give them back their money. But Uni refused to give it back. At that moment, one of the guys grabbed a golf club or something, and began to beat Uni.

They beat him and beat him until he was unconscious. When they thought he was dead, they left him and hurried away. Someone found Uni and called for help. Uni was taken to the hospital where he spent many days. But he didn't come out of his coma.

When his body had healed a lot, he was taken out of the hospital. But he was still in a coma, so they had to put him in a nursing home. A nursing home is a place where people stay when they need medical care, but they are not sick enough for a hospital. After a few weeks, the guys from Detroit found out that Uni was still alive and they discovered where he was. They came to the nursing home to "finish him off". That means that they were disappointed that he had lived. They had come back to kill him after all. They began to beat on him again. But the staff members of the nursing home heard the noise and chased these guys away.

And then, something strange happened. Uni came out of his coma. God worked through the first terrible beating to take Uni away from his proud life here he thought he didn't need God. And then the second beating caused him to come out of his coma. He could think again. He could understand what was going on.

At first, Uni was very disappointed. He used to be very strong. But now he was a paraplegic. He could never again use his legs. And he could barely talk. He had to strain and groan to work out one short sentence at a time. He was angry with God and angry with life. But since he couldn't do anything else, he had a lot of time for thinking. He began to realize that he still had a lot to be thankful about. He began to study the Bible. As he got to know more about Jesus, he realized that God had a plan for his life. He was eventually baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. It was tricky to baptize him since he couldn't walk. We had to put him in a chair, and then carefully lower the chair into the water.

Uni was so excited to be a part of the family of God. He was actually thankful that God had worked through those terrible experiences to change his life. He would never be the same again. Mrs. Rolstone told me that she was so thankful for what had happened in the end. She said that she would rather have a crippled son who loved Jesus than to have a strong son who lived his own way. She had prayed the "whatever it takes" prayer. Whatever it takes . . . This is a frightening prayer with a powerful answer.

I think that Daniel had prayed such a prayer for his friend--King Nebuchadnezzar. God often removes the things which hinder us: For the king this meant his own mental ability and his position. For Uni, it was his physical strength. For Phil, it was his wild freedom. What is hindering you? What keeps you from giving the control to God?

But then, suddenly, the king experienced the great reversal (Daniel 4:34-36). The king once again received:

- understanding (34) -1
- reason (36a) -2
- honor (36b) -3
- trust from his people (36c) -4
- and his kingdom (36d) -5

Notice the king's response (Read Daniel 4:37).

The king gave praise to God. He admitted that God is in control. Notice the progression: He could see the wisdom which God gives (Dan 1:19,20). He recognized God's superiority (Dan 2:47). And finally, He blessed God (Dan 3:28). He seems to have been converted as a result of these earlier experiences. But he seems to have fallen away at a later time. And yet, God did not give up on this king. He kept doing whatever it might take to save this king. In the end, the king witnessed to the power of God and to God's glory (Daniel 4:37).

**GOD IS IN CONTROL.** Who is in control of your life? Who gets the glory? What would it take to bring you to give God control of your life? God is willing to do whatever it takes to save you.