

Daniel 4
God reigns!

Prayer for illumination:

Introduction:

Right now, Chinese Christians are facing the worst persecution they have faced since 1982. In the last few months hundreds of Churches have been shut down.

Authorities recently raided churches in the Henan province kicking down doors, tearing down crosses, and destroying church property. Afterwards church doors were locked permanently.

Those who resisted were beaten or hauled off to prison.

The pastors who refused to promote the communist party are thrown in Jail. Others are sent to communist re-education camps.

Who is behind this? Chinese president Xi Jinping (she jin ping) the most powerful leader in China since Mao.

I'm sure the Christians in China are discouraged and probably wondering if God is still in control.

This brings us to Daniel chapter 4.

The Jews to whom this book was written were prisoners in Babylon. After their capital city was sacked by King N. they were deported to Babylon to live under the rule of an evil tyrant.

They wondered if God was still in control. If God was still good.

Have you ever wondered this?

Maybe you wonder why Obama ran our country for eight years, or why Trump runs our country now, or why the recent supreme court confirmation hearings have been such a circus?

When we don't like the direction of our leaders, or the circumstances they put us in, we wonder if God still in control?

Daniel 4 answers this question. Through King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its fulfillment, we are reminded that **God rules the nations.**

This sermon has two sections...

In the first section we will seek to understand God's sovereign rule

In the second section we will seek to apply God's sovereign rule

First, understanding God's sovereign rule

To understand God's sovereign rule, we need to analyze the dream in chapter 4. The dream has four parts...

First, the dream's arrival! (4-18)

Daniel 4:4–5 (ESV) — 4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. **5** I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me....

King N has a dream... he is terrified. Unfortunately, no one can interpret the dream, so he summons Daniel to interpret the dream for him. Remember that Daniel interpreted his dream successfully in chapter 2.

Starting in verse 10 King N. explains his dream to Daniel.

Daniel 4:10–12 (ESV) — 10 The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. **11** The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. **12** Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

This giant tree was a symbol of great power and influence. The tree reached to the heavens, was visible from everywhere, was beautiful, and it provided food and shade for its vast inhabitants.

Daniel 4:13–14 (ESV) — 13 "I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. **14** He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches.'

The watcher is an angel from heaven. He proclaims that the tree must be chopped down. This is a picture of divine judgment.

Daniel 4:15 (ESV) — 15 But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.

With the stump left there is a possibility of future growth. The band of iron probably indicates protection for the stump. In the middle of verse 15 the image suddenly changes from a tree being cut down to a man being cut down. But not just cut down... it is worse, he will turn into a psychopath.

Daniel 4:16 (ESV) — 16 Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.

Seven periods of time could be seven years, or it may symbolize fullness. He would go crazy for a period of time.

What does all this mean? This brings us to the next part.

First, the dreams arrival...

Second, the dream's interpretation! (19-27)

In verse 18 King N. asks Daniel for an interpretation.

Daniel 4:19 (ESV) — 19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"

Why was Daniel afraid to give the king an interpretation? Because the king was known for violent outbursts of anger (2:12, 3:19-20). Think back to chapter 3 when he threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace.

In verses 20-27 Daniel musters enough courage to tell the king what the dream means. He says to King N. "The giant tree represents you. You have grown quickly and become very strong. You are very proud. Your kingdom is vast and broad. But a being from heaven will chop you down to size. In other words, oh king, you will be humbled. For a period of time you will lose your sanity and live with the wild animals.

This is exactly what happens... This brings us to the next phase of the dream.

The dream's arrival

The dream's interpretation

Third, the dream's fulfillment (28-33)

Daniel 4:28-30 (ESV) — 28 All this (Daniel's interpretation) came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. **29** At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, **30** 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?"

From his roof King N. could probably see...

The famous hanging Gardens of Babylon built for his wife (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world)

The massive temple he built for his god Marduk.

The 300 foot, seven level, Ziggurat tower (this was as tall as a 30-story building).

The 53 temples that he built or remodeled inside the city walls.

The gargantuan wall around his city that was large enough for chariots to turn around on (another of the seven wonders of the ancient world).

This was the largest and most magnificent city on the face of the earth.

No one had more wealth

No one had conquered more nations

No one was more famous

According to 4:1 King N considered himself the king of the whole earth.

He had arrived... and he knew it. From a human perspective he was the most important person on the face of the earth.

He was a combination of Bill gates, Donald Trump, and Kim Jong ill.

But not for long...

Daniel 4:31-33 (ESV) — 31 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, **32** 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." **33** 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.

King N. was fulfilling his own chilling nightmare.

He was being humbled.
He was being cut down.
He went crazy.
He ate grass like a cow.

He lives outside with the animal's day and night. Eventually he starts to look like an animal. He refuses to cut his hair, his finger nails, or his toe nails.

There has been much speculation on King N's predicament. Some think that he had "**lycanthropy**." A mental illness causing one to think that they are an animal, literally. Apparently, King George III of England (1738-1820) had the same disease.

This was all God's doing...

He has gone stark raving mad.

What does all this mean? This brings us to the fourth phase of the dream...

The dream's arrival

The dream's interpretation

The dream's fulfillment

Fourth, the dream's meaning.

What does the dream and its fulfillment mean? What does it teach us?

Fortunately, we don't have to guess. These events happened to prove that God rules over the kingdoms of men. How do I know? Because the text tells us this, not once, not twice, but three times.

Daniel 4:17 (ESV) – 17 The sentence (against King N) is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.'

Daniel 4:25 (ESV) – 25 ...(speaking to King N) you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Daniel 4:32 (ESV) – 32 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."

Not only is God's sovereignty over the nations proclaimed three times it is proclaimed by three different characters in the story (the watcher v. 17, Daniel v. 25-26, and the voice from heaven v. 32).

Plus, at the beginning of the chapter (4:1-3) and at the end of the chapter (4:34-37) King N. proclaims that God is in charge, in other words that God rules and reigns. Apparently, King N. learned his lesson.

God controls all things, he sovereignly rules and reigns, he decides who is lifted up, who rules, and who is brought low.

This is the point of the chapter?

But it is not enough to understand God's sovereign rule. We must also apply/ embrace God's sovereign rule. This brings us to the application.

Let me suggest **three applications....**

First, embracing God's sovereignty leads to trust.

When the original audience read this chapter, they were reminded that God was sovereign over their deportation.

In other words, God was the one who placed them in Babylon. And he placed them there for a reason.

The Babylonian king may seem powerful, but he is a pawn in God's sovereign hands.

If God is sovereign over human kings, it is no problem for God to get them back to the promised land. A little while later God raised up a pagan king who sent them back to the promised land.

Don't we have the same concerns? Are you concerned about the future of our country? Our politicians, our religious freedom, or our supreme court?

Daniel 4 reminds us that...

Barack Obama was not in control.

Donald trump is not in control.

The senate and house are not in control.

The senate committee investigating judge Cavanaugh is not in control.

The supreme court is not in control.

The president in China is not in control.

Your boss is not in control.

The Spokane city council is not in control.

The Spokane mayor is not in control.

God is in control of all things including the affairs of nations and your life.

One author writes,

"God can replace rulers at will. Nebuchadnezzar is long gone. Nero is long dead. Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao (Zedong), Kim Jong Il — they are all gone. But God is still here. And his kingdom has come with Jesus' coming and will come in perfection when Jesus comes again. This kingdom will replace all earthly kingdoms. Then the new earth will overflow with justice and peace. Then all will praise the King of kings and Lord of lords." (Greidanus, 144)

King N is God's tool, Trump is God's tool, your boss is God's tool. God uses these tools for the sanctification of his children.

Illustration:

James G, Caveman coffee, smashing phones, smashing syrup bottles, spying on employees, making employees cower in fear, making employees cry, etc....

I was not a hard worker... God used James to teach me how to work hard. I was so afraid of James that I worked like I had never worked before. This is what I needed.

God is in control of all things, including kings, kingdoms, and governments. He is working all things for your good and his glory. We can trust him!

This is true whether or not you like the new supreme court!

Embracing God's sovereignty leads to trust... but that is not all.

Embracing God's sovereignty leads to humility.

King N. thought he was in control? He had a very inflated view of his own worth, significance, and abilities. He was very proud.

Daniel 4:29–30 (ESV) — 29 At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, **30** 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?"

He thought that he was the reason for his success. He was filled with pride. He had an overinflated view of self. He was delusional.

Illustration:

In 2004 auditions were held all across the nation in front of three celebrity judges. Contestants were winnowed down, and the finalist were flown to Hollywood to take part in a nationally televised competition.

When the contestants got to Hollywood they were provided with vocal coaches and makeovers. Week after week contestants were eliminated.

The winner was promised \$50k and a recording contract with a record label.

No, this was not American idol or the voice. It was called *Superstar USA*. But its premise was the exact opposite of these other shows.

The three celebrity judges eliminated anyone who had talent. Their goal was to find the least talented person in America. They did this by praising outrageously bad performances.

Here's the catch... the contestants thought they were being chosen for their talent.

The final contestants performed before a live studio audience. The audience was deceived. They were told that the performers were terminally ill teens whose last wish was to perform before a live audience. So, after each horrid performance the compassionate audience gave a long standing-ovation.

The contestants thought they were amazing...

Jamie Foss was crowned the winner and given a \$50k check. Then the host let her in on the big secret. She was actually the least talented teen in America. She was devastated. The whole time she thought she was awesome. Fortunately, this ghastly show was canceled after one season.

Commenting on the show one writer said, "The premise of the show was that you could never go wrong banking on people's inflated capacity for self-delusion." (Pettersen, 50)

Make no mistake, most of us are delusional

When no one is watching or listening we think we are pretty awesome.

I built this business
I worked hard for this body
I achieved these degrees
I landed these sales
I raise these musicians
I home schooled these amazing kids!

This is pride... We are taking credit for something that God has sovereignly done.

It is far better to humble yourself under God's mighty before he humbles you. God loves his children too much to let them continue in their pride.

If we don't humble ourselves God will humble us, and this will be painful.

Everything King N. had, he had because God gave it to him. God is in control. Everything you have, all of your success, is God's doing...

But I worked really hard! Who gave you that ability? God!
But I'm really smart, I took risks, etc....

Pride is the great sin. Why? It keeps millions of people from becoming Christians.

We think we don't need God or his grace.

We need to daily confess that all of our success comes from his sovereign hand. All of it...

Jesus was the humblest person to ever live, so humble that he took your sins on his shoulders and paid for them on the cross...

Embracing God's sovereignty leads to trust
Embracing God's sovereignty leads to humility

Embracing God's sovereignty leads to hope.

Daniel 4:17 (ESV) – 17 The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.'

According to this text, the Most High (God) rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men...

Who exactly is he talking about?

There is no person as lowly or meek as Jesus Christ.

He was born in a manger
He lived in poverty
He died in obscurity
He died naked and alone.
He died as a condemned criminal.
He died on a cross
He died for the sins of other people. He died for your sins...

No one has ever humbled himself like Jesus...

As a result, God the Father gave him the highest place of honor.

Philippians 2:9–11 (ESV) — 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Because he stooped so low God the father gave him all authority in heaven and on earth to rule the nations.

Isn't this what we read in **Matthew 28:18**...

Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Because Jesus Christ took the lowest place, God the father gave him the highest place, the place of all authority.

Why does this give us hope?

The good who rules the nations is the god who died on the cross for your sins.
He is a good God.
He displayed his goodness and compassion by dying for you when you were his enemy.
There is no one as good as King Jesus.
He is the one who controls the nations.
He is the one who controls your life.

This brings incredible hope...

Your life may be hard right now. But know this, the one who suffered for you, also controls the nations and your life.

You can trust him this morning?

If you don't know King Jesus, you don't have the promise that he is ruling and reigning over all things for your good and his glory.

But that can change if you turn to him today.

God reigns over all things. You can trust him with the nations and your life. Lets pray...