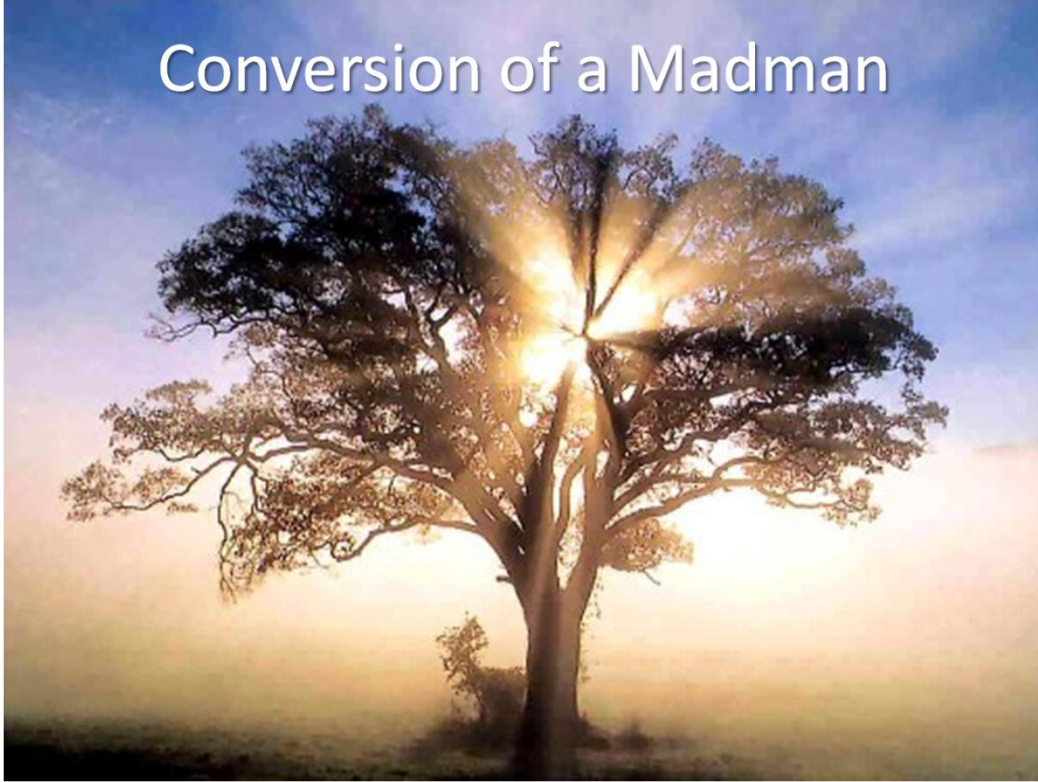


Conversion of a Madman



Daniel 4:1-37

1 King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! 2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

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. 6 So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. 8 At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream, saying, 9 “O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw and their interpretation. 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.

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. **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. **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. **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.' **18** This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

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! **20** The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, **21** whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— **22** it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. **23** And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven periods of time pass over him,' **24** this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, **25** that 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. **26** And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules. **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."

28 All this 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?" **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.

34 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;³⁵
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
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?”*

36 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. 37 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.

Iranian president Ahmadinejad has referred to Israel as a “cancerous tumor”¹ whom he wants to “wipe off the map.”² There has been some debate as to whether this was an accurate translation or not, but he has made enough other threats so as to leave little doubt about his intentions. For example, about two weeks ago, he reemphasized his determination to destroy Israel in a speech during Ramadan. “Anyone who loves freedom and justice must strive for the annihilation of the Zionist regime in order to pave the way for world justice and freedom.”³

Ahmadinejad could rightly be classified as a megalomaniac. Here is a good definition of the term. “Megalomania is a psycho-pathological condition characterized by delusional fantasies of power, relevance, or omnipotence. 'Megalomania is characterized by an inflated sense of self-esteem and overestimation by persons of their powers and beliefs’.”⁴ Such people have delusions of grandeur, extreme narcissism and a superiority complex. In short, such people are dangerous and potentially deadly.

I raise the topic of the Iranian president not only because it is a hot and important topic in the news, but also to introduce another megalomaniac leader in the Middle East—Nebuchadnezzar. The events of chapter two alone could establish this fact. The notion of requiring his magicians to tell him the contents of his own dream on penalty of death is sufficient evidence. But in case you are not convinced, look at this chart of threats and punishments.

Ch	Transgression	Punishment
1	I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age?	So you would endanger my head with the king.”
2	if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation,	you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.
3	whoever does not fall down and worship	shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.
3	Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego	shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.

If you needed any more evidence, in chapter four, while walking along the roof of his palace

Nebuchadnezzar boasted, “*Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?*” This brazen statement matches perfectly with what archeologists have discovered in the ruins of Babylon. Many bricks have been found with the following inscription: “The fortifications of...Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever.”⁵

Nebuchadnezzar was a madman and a megalomaniac. But the wonder of this story is that God was able to break through this seemingly impermeable shell of pride. Among other things, this story reminds us that no heart, no matter how hard, is beyond the reach of God’s saving grace. I am convinced that the king was genuinely saved in this story. In fact, this is why the chapter was written. Chapter four of Daniel is the king’s personal testimony.

We all love hearing the testimony of someone who got saved. We will hear a brief version of these at the baptism service next week. No two testimonies are quite the same, but they all have a similar pattern to them. For example, I was a fairly regular church attender growing up and basically stayed out of trouble—at least most of the “big sins,” but I was just as lost as the crack addict down the street. But the problem was that I thought I was a Christian. I had just enough Jesus to think I was alright. My best friend and his family shared the gospel with me, I was radically saved on a Sunday morning in August of 1980 and I have been steadily growing in my faith ever since. This is the basic three-part pattern of all testimonies.

1. What my life was like before I got saved.
2. How I got saved.
3. How my life has been different since I got saved.

This is also the basic pattern we see with Nebuchadnezzar. We know what his life was like before he got saved. He was a tyrannical, megalomaniac bent on conquest of the world. The first three chapters make this quite clear. Hopefully you are convinced that he was a madman now I want you to see his genuine conversion so we can all witness the conversion of a madman. Next Sunday we’ll talk more about how he got saved but this morning I want you to see his changed life as evidence that he was genuinely converted.⁶

To put this story in context, Nebuchadnezzar is probably at least sixty years old and near the end of his reign. This is a good guess owing to the fact that in verse four he said he was “prospering in his palace.” Evidently, his kingdom was very strong and firmly established which would tend to indicate many years had passed since the beginning of chapter one. This means Daniel might have been around 50 years old by this point.

The first thing that leads me to believe he was genuinely converted is the people to whom he wrote. *King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth:* I think it is significant that the letter was sent “to all **peoples, nations, and languages.**” This phrase is used seven times in the book of Revelation. This phrase is used seven times in the book of Revelation and represents the final result of the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. In the last day, no one on earth will be excluded from hearing the good news. We have a promise that there will be people from every nation, people and language gathered around the throne worshipping in heaven.

But what does this have to do with Nebuchadnezzar? Wasn't this just a convenient way of addressing a large, diverse group of people? Let me tell you why I don't think this was the case. When Nebuchadnezzar used this phrase—peoples, nations and languages—it was the very first time it was used in all of Scripture. The second time it was ever used is three chapters later in Daniel 7:14, when Daniel records a vision.

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all **peoples, nations, and languages** should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

This phrase in Daniel chapter seven was used in the exact same manner that John used it in the book of Revelation—to describe the global reach of God's kingdom and that all people everywhere should serve him. The next time this phrase is seen in Scripture is in the book of Revelation. *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every **tribe and language and people and nation** (Rev. 5:9)*

I believe that Nebuchadnezzar was so humbled by the events in this story and was so completely enamored with the Lord and his power that he was convinced that the whole world should know about the great God of Israel. The fourth chapter of Daniel is essentially an Old Testament evangelistic epistle. The king was radically humbled and changed by the Lord and he wanted literally, the entire known world to know about it.

The second reason I think he was converted is the fact that he was willing to share the details of his story. Think about how vulnerable this would have made him to his enemies. They could have seen the king as very weak. Many of the surrounding peoples no doubt would have caught wind that the king was living in the open field among the cattle and now when they read it from the king's own hand, it would have confirmed their suspicions—the king was truly insane. Not only did he roam around in the field for seven years, but now he was writing them a letter renouncing his pantheon of gods in favor of this foreign God from the conquered land of Israel. This is not the kind of news and information you share when you are surrounded on every side by enemies. My point is that he was so excited about his new found faith that he didn't care who knew about it.

The third reason I think his conversion was real is because he addressed his readers with the phrase "Peace be multiplied to you." What kind of a powerful ruler like Nebuchadnezzar would send a greeting of peace to all the surrounding people, to his enemies? Once again, the king's letter reads more like one Paul's letters to the New Testament churches than anything else.

The fourth piece of evidence comes in verse two. *It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.* We can pull several points from the sentence. First, the king wanted to do this. It was his desire to share his testimony. Second, it shows the purpose of the letter. He wanted them to know all of the gory and embarrassing details because he wanted the people to know this God, the Most High God.

The fifth piece of evidence is the most convincing—when we read of the king’s praise of the Most High God in verse three. *How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

As you can see from the chart below, King Nebuchadnezzar was quoting directly from Psalm 145.

Daniel 4	Psalm 145
2—to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me	12—to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
3—His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.	13—Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

How did the king know about this Psalm? We can only imagine that Daniel had taught it to him. It is evidence that the king was growing in his new faith, that he was learning about this God from his own revealed word. Furthermore, the king again quoted from Psalm 145 at the end of his letter and he added two more Old Testament quotes from Isaiah and Job.

*for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
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?”*

Daniel 4:35	Old Testament
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,	All the nations...are accounted by him as less than nothing (Isa. 45:17) ⁷
he does according to his will among the host of heaven	Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth (Psalm 135:6)
none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”	who can turn him back? Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’ (Job 9:12)

I think two things are clear—Nebuchadnezzar was a madman and he was genuinely converted by God. Just like the apostle Paul, this letter detailed the author, the people to whom he was writing, the purpose for his writing, a welcome of peace and a brief declaration of praise to God. In this chapter we have witnessed the power of a changed life.

We have also been reminded that God is a missionary God. He is fulfilling his promise to Abraham 4000 years ago. *And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* (Genesis

12:2-3). The Lord blessed the pagan Nebuchadnezzar through the Jewish man Daniel. The Lord blessed the Jews so that they could bless the world with the gospel.

Finally we understand that no heart is too hard for the Lord to break through. If you did not know this story in Daniel four but only secular history regarding Nebuchadnezzar, you never would have guessed that he could be genuinely converted. He would have been the last person I would have picked but here we see the Lord literally snatching the king from his own fiery furnace and placing him in relationship with the Lord. Therefore, if there is a loved one that you have been praying for years to be saved, know that even though the heart of this person appears hard and impenetrable, nothing is too difficult for the sovereign arm of God's grace.

Rich Maurer
August 19, 2012

¹ "The Zionist regime is like a malignant cancerous cell, and even one or two cells are enough to infect the whole body," <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4204477,00.html>

² Although see this article where Israel's deputy Prime Minister stated that Iran never made this exact statement. <https://www.commondreams.org/headline/2012/04/18-2>

³ <http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=279864>

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megalomania>

⁵ J. P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1950), 228.

⁶ I disagree with Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer noted that this "is the only chapter in Scripture composed under the authority of a pagan." G. L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 58.

⁷ Just a few verses later Isaiah wrote, it is he...who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness (Isaiah 45:23) the context of which perfectly matches with Nebuchadnezzar's humbling.