

## Looking Up

### *Daniel 4*

Series: Unshakable | A Study in the Book of Daniel

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This past Monday evening, I had the privilege to speak in Branson, Missouri at a marriage conference with a couple hundred pastors and their wives. I always enjoy investing in pastors in this way. I have a message that I usually give that is based off the word, “Remember”, and I walk them through certain events that I want to jog their memory on.

You know, there is great power in “remembering”. We are commanded throughout scripture to remember.

- The rainbow that God puts in the sky after the Flood was to call to the people’s attention remembrance of his deliverance and the fact that he would not judge the world via a flood ever again.
- I think of Joshua and the “stones of remembrance” he set up after leading Israel to cross over the Red Sea.
- The various festivals and religious ceremonies that were initiated with God’s chosen people were all meant to cause them to remember a certain aspect of his character or his work in their life.

Time and time again, there was an emphasis on “remembering”. The Lord’s Supper that we just took – if you grew up in a smaller church like me, we had a table right in front to the pulpit with the words: “do this in remembrance of me”.

There is great power in remembering and I challenge these couples to remember certain events like when they first met...and when their greatest trial was that they walked through together. I also challenge them to remember when they were saved.

I think there is great power in recalling when the Lord called you to himself...what were the circumstances surrounding your salvation.

Remembering produces thanksgiving and fuels worship and strengthens our faith.

In today’s passage of scripture, we are given some insight by Nebuchadnezzar himself into his own transformation, and I would say salvation. Chapter four of the book of Daniel is Nebo’s personal testimony. It’s him recalling...remembering how he came to submit, surrender, and ultimately become (at least I believe this) a follower of Israel’s God.

Now, THIS is something to think about! What have we learned about Nebo up this point in scripture? He’s a madman, right?! A loose cannon! Just listen to previous weeks messages!

He's an idolator...He's power-hungry...the world revolves around him. You don't upset him. You ONLY tell him what he wants to hear OR you could wind up just from him sleeping on the wrong side of the bed being "torn limb from limb" or being put into a fiery furnace.

He's the most powerful man on the planet at the time and expects to be treated and worshipped as such.

Yet, he starts chapter four off bragging on whom he refers to multiple times in this passage of scripture as "The Most High God".

I'm calling the message today: **Looking Up**

**Daniel 4:1-3 – "King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! <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."**

It is clear something has happened in Nebo's life. Here he is proclaiming the wonders of the "Most High God", and he is proclaiming these wonders to the whole earth.

Now, ALL of Nebo's life...at least what we've read up to this point has been about the proclamation of Nebo. It hasn't really been about how great "the Most High" is, it's been about how great Nebo has been.

He's the one that receives the praise in (2:4, 3:9) "O King live forever"...he's the one that builds an image – probably of himself and forces people to bow down to it when commanded.

And yet now he is NOT requesting praise for himself, but heaping praise on Israel's God – what has happened to cause this? How is he all of the sudden "looking up" and giving witness to the one, true God?

Were going to find out but before we do, let me just throw this out there as a little bit of a teaching point along the way – I want to highlight it right here: There is no one too far away from God that he can't save them!

? – Are you hearing me? There is NO ONE too far way from God, that he can't pursue, chase down, and save.

This should give us hope today! Is there someone you know in your life – a family member, friend, or co-worker and you are thinking, "that person will NEVER get saved!"

In the words of ESPN's Lee Corso, "not so fast, my friend." God can save anyone!

**Illus. Hollie Taylor story**

What caused this change in Nebo? Well, let's look at the passage. If you remember from a few weeks ago, we mentioned this idea of God knowing how to get our attention. With Nebo, it seemed to occur through dreams.

Now, this episode we're highlighting and talking about today –(what I see is a profession of his faith) happened toward the end of Nebo's reign and probably some 25+ years AFTER the fiery furnace scene.

This puts Daniel as a middle-aged man, and Nebo probably somewhere in his 70's. And he shares with us what was going on in his life as God continued to try to get his attention.

**Daniel 4:4 – “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace.”**

Everything is going well! Nebo's got everything he wants. It's interesting...this word “prospering” here – some of your Bibles translate it as the word “growing”. It's used elsewhere in scripture to describe healthy trees...you'll see why this is interesting in just a moment.

**Daniel 4:5 – “I saw a dream that made me afraid. As I lay in bed the fancies and the visions of my head alarmed me.”**

This is the second time (that we are aware of) that Nebo has a dream that disturbs him. We saw and discussed the first dream in Daniel 2. Well, it seems that he's sending another dream and like the first one, this dream has alarmed him.

So, he does what he did previously! He (v. 6) calls all his enchanters and magicians and wisemen and astrologers in and he shares with them the dream. He wants them to interpret it, but look at the last part of (v. 7b)

**Daniel 4:7b – “...and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation.”**

So, what does he do? He summons the only real dream-chaser into his chambers that he knows. Look at (v. 8).

**Daniel 4:8-12 – “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 (interesting that he's been around Daniel long enough to know there is something different about him – I could stay here and preach this all day long! Do people who have been around you for any length of time, could they say, there's a different kind of spirit in that guy! Even a pagan king could recognize there was something different ABOUT Daniel because there was something/one different IN Daniel) —and I told him the dream, saying, <sup>9</sup> “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. <sup>10</sup> 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. (the first dream was a large image, now he sees a large tree) <sup>11</sup> The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. <sup>12</sup> 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.”**

And the dream continues...but it takes a bit of a turn and we get a glimpse at what alarmed the king.

**Daniel 4:13 – “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. (the translation is literally “one who is awake” – most see this “messenger” as an angel that is doing the bidding of the Lord) <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. (pretty sure this is seven periods of time represents seven years – don’t know that for certain, it could be that seven being the number of completeness in the Bible, this just means it’s going to be this way for a finite, whole period of time) <sup>17</sup> 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.’”**

Now, if you write in your Bibles, and I encourage you to...circle (v. 17, 25, 32) – they all say the same thing and if you are looking for a MAJOR point in this message, this is it!

We’ll talk about WHAT’S going down in this dream...and WHO this dream is about. But first let’s talk about the WHY behind this dream.

WHY is this dream occurring...WHY is it taking place? The answer is in the second part of (v. 17)

**Daniel 4:17b – “...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 4:25b – “...till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”**

**Daniel 4:32b – “...until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”**

This dream is taking place because God has a message he wants to communicate! And that message is that the “Most High” (Babylon had a lot of gods, but they were not the “Most High” God – this title is reserved for the one and only, in Hebrew it’s be “El Elyon” – this is Daniel’s God) and this God – he rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Hey...this is true is the late 500's early 600's BC and it's true in 2024. The "Most High" rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

**Illus. Presidential debate** – We're in an election season right now – anyone aware of that? Part of the reason, we're doing this Daniel series is because I wanted to prepare us for this election cycle, and I don't know of another book in the Bible that is as applicable this time of the year than the book of Daniel - how do you live when you are in Babylon?

I did an entire message two years ago called, *Our Place in Politics*. You can get my notes online. I talked about the part we play as Christians in the political process. I talked about:

- how we should pray...
- how we should participate – be registered to vote and vote...this is a privilege we have as citizens living in a democracy...
- how we should advocate and speak up for biblical values and be a positive influence in our culture (salt and light)...

So, we do our part, and then do you know what we do? We pillow our head the night of the election knowing that the "Most High" is sovereign and in control – that he rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

And WHOEVER is elected is not going to change the way I pray, participate and advocate and influence because that's our role regardless of who God allows to rule the kingdom of man.

**Illus. Working on a message** – Now, I'm working on a message for the second weekend in October on discernment and where like Daniel and his friends are we to draw the line...what issues are those that we say, "we're not going to bow down". When should we do this? I wanted to do it last week, but time did not allow, so I think I'm going to come back in a couple of weeks and do it then.

The point of this passage though and THE message that God wants to communicate to king Nebo and all of us who would read this account is (v. 17, 25, 32).

So, the king wants Daniel to interpret this dream of this "prosperous" tree being cut down. WHAT does it mean? We see the "why" behind the dream, what's it all about.

Well, the meaning is evidently so weighty that it takes Daniel aback.

**Daniel 4:19a** – "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..."

Very interesting this exchange here. Daniel has been serving the King now for 30+ years give or take. He was an evil king and loose cannon, but he gave Daniel charge over the entire province

of Babylon and from everything we know, Daniel served him faithfully...there seems to be an infinity for the king...you almost sense from the way that Daniel talks and treats him that he loves him AND vice versa!

I think that's just amazing! I love that God has given Daniel a heart for someone so far away from the Lord.

There is no sense of bitterness in Daniel (toward God or Nebo) – talk about spiritual maturity! Look at how Daniel responds to this dream. He gets no joy in sharing with Nebo WHAT this dream means.

**Daniel 4:19b-22 – “...Belshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!” 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, <sup>21</sup> 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— <sup>22</sup> 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.”**

And then he interprets the dream! Want to know WHO it's about? “You are that big tree, Nebo...and you're about to be cut down, and this message...it's from the (v. 24) Most High!

**Daniel 4:24-26 – “this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.”**

So, the tree (Nebo) will be cut down, but the stump will remain...it's not going anywhere – its “bound with iron and bronze” – (v. 15). His kingdom and influence will come back, but NOT before a lesson is learned!

Now, this next verse...(v. 27) – talk about speaking truth to power. Daniel while doing it in a respectful way shares a hard truth with the most powerful man in the world.

I can't imagine how difficult speaking these words were for Daniel. Again, it seems they had an infinity for one another but you don't threaten a madman. Nebo loves his kingdom more than anything and you typically don't want to share bad news with someone who is known to fly off the handle.

Daniel doesn't hold back! He gives him the entire interpretation and then says these words:

**Daniel 4:27 – “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.”**

Daniel steps up in a HUGE way here. He tells the king to...in a word: REPENT! We'll work out what this word means here at the conclusion of the message today, but in short: it's a u-turn!

You are going one way...you're doing one thing...and you turn – you repent and go the opposite direction. You stop doing what you were doing (break off your sins) and start doing what you weren't doing (showing mercy to the oppressed). This is repentance!

Notice in this message of repentance though...again, I see the heart Daniel has for Nebo. “Let this counsel be acceptable to you, O king...repent! Break off your sins!”

Now, Daniel has a responsibility to share with the king this message the “Most High” wants to communicate to him – BUT Daniel can't make the king do something he doesn't want to do. He can't force repentance on Nebo – he can plead for it, but he can't force it.

Kind of like me up here preaching today. I can plead for repentance, but ultimately it's a choice YOU have to make!

For Nebo...up to this point, he has been wishy washy when God has proved himself or tried to get his attention.

- When Daniel rightly interprets the king's dream in chapter two, Nebo rightly acknowledges that Daniel's God was different (2:46-47)...but he doesn't repent!
- When God delivers Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, he gives the decree that no one should speak anything against their God (3:29)...but he doesn't repent!

Nebo still after all these years hasn't surrendered to the Lord personally. He still not bowing the knee. He still thinks the world revolves around him...and yet God is still pursuing him and coming after him!

That's something to think about isn't it?! God's pursuit of those who are far from him...God is so patient with us! He's so merciful. He's so gracious! We turn our back on God, reject his offer to life, and yet he still comes after us! What GRACE!

? – Anyone grateful God didn't write them off when he was pursuing us, but we were choosing to be hardheaded and remain in our sin?

What about Nebo? Will this dream finally get his attention? Let's see:

**Daniel 4:28-30 – “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,<sup>30</sup> 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?”**

Uh-oh...I don't think Nebo got it. I don't know what was going through his head. Maybe he tried to be repentant in the beginning, but then nothing happened, right? No judgment...no tree being cut down, so maybe he just went back to his old ways thinking God's patience with him meant that God was overlooking his sin.

We do this don't we? We get away with sin (for a little bit at least – sometimes years don't see/feel the immediate consequences and sometimes we think God is overlooking it...forgot about it...we mistake his patience as almost his permission that what we did was okay.

Or maybe, Nebo went back and thought, “Who does Daniel think he is? Who does Daniel's God think he is?”

Could have been that mindset because what we see in (v. 30) is NOTHING but pride. “Look at what I've done! Look at what I've built!” I mean this is a “Me-Monster” if I've ever seen it! And look at what the scripture says!

As he is looking in the mirror admiring himself...as he's looking around the city – and Babylon was pretty amazing!

It was known for its hanging gardens – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Its city wall was said to be so thick that multiple chariots could race around it. It was impressive and here, Nebo is taking FULL credit for it...just look at those personal pronouns in (v. 30)!

This is the root sin here in Nebo's life. Pride! Pride is the root sin of all sins. It's been referred to as spiritual cancer – that's what pride is. Someone living in pride is living in direct opposition to God!

**Illus. Football – Heisman** – pride is God repellent. (James 4:6 – he opposes the proud). He can't stand it and he will deal with! IN Nebo's life and in our life.

Nebo needed to be reminded that he's NOT God! THIS is why God is cutting him down!  
PRIDE.

- We see in Nebo an elevated, self-importance in his life.
- We see entitlements and demands that he makes.

Nebo is a picture of Babylon itself! A lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry (worship me), unbridled hedonism (it's all about me, me, me). Nebo is so focused on himself that he's forgotten WHAT the dream was all about (v. 17 and v. 25)!

So, God reminds him once more...delivers on his word and teaches Nebo a lesson he will NEVER forget!



**Daniel 4:31-33 – “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.”**

Now, I don't pretend to know what all goes on in this moment. I do know that God is sovereign...he does as he pleases, and it seems in this moment he simply takes Nebo's sanity from him.

**Illus. Fear of the Lord** – this ought to provoke a holy fear of the Lord. That the “Most High” in a millisecond can change your life. It is by his grace alone, we are taking in air, keeping our sanity, that our entire world isn't falling apart right now.

Nebo in a moment becomes more like an animal than he does a human.

**Illus. Beauty and the Beast** – sermons preached by this title

A lot of the commentaries on this passage speak of a psychological/mental condition known as boanthropy or what has been called “ox-man” disease.

The official psychological diagnosis is called “Clinical lycanthropy” and it's defined as a “rare psychiatric syndrome that involves a delusion that the affected person can transform into, has transformed into, or is, a non-human animal.”

DO NOT go down this Google/YouTube trail! Trust me on this! People think they are turning into cows, wolves, dogs, horses! It's crazy!

Is this what has happened to Nebo? Perhaps. What I do want you to notice is this judgment came immediately (v. 33).

This is typically how the judgment of God works...it's slow, but it's fast! God was patient for twelve months, but when judgment fell, it came in a hurry...this is why the words of Paul in Gal. 6 need to be heeded today:

**Gal. 6:7 – “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”**

This is the law of the harvest: we reap WHAT we sow, MORE than we sow, and AFTER we sow...and if we sow to the flesh, we will eventually reap corruption and death (Gal. 6:8). Don't think just because you are getting away with something that you are getting away with something!

Solomon warned in: **Prov. 29:1 – “He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.”**

This is what happened with Nebo...God warned him and warned him, but Nebo just stiffened his neck (this is what pride is! It's stiffening our neck toward God. I've got this...I'll do this my way!) and God finally broke him.

Here's the deal about brokenness though. When God breaks us – it's ALWAYS for our good – ALWAYS!

**A.W. Tozer – “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply.”**

If C.S. Lewis was describing this event in Nebo's life, he'd probably call it a “severe mercy”. God is working in Nebo's life for his good!

Don't ever forget that God's brokenness is really God's blessedness. If God didn't break Nebo specifically of his pride, Nebo would have never called on his name. And yet because God DID break him, look at what happens.

**Daniel 4:34a-37 – “At the end of the days (we're thinking seven years – but really, more importantly it's when God's complete time of judgment had run it's course) I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven...”**

Underline, asterisk, highlight this phrase here – “lifted my eyes to heaven. THIS is our application...our closing challenge if you will! Repentance is looking up – it's the title of the message today.

This is the antidote to pride...Nebo was no longer looking at himself and looking at everything around him that fed his ego, he was looking up.

- **Repentance is a change of mind** (talk through) – how do you do this? Look Up!
- **Repentance is a change of heart** (talk through)– how do you do this? Look Up!
- **Repentance is a change of will** (talk through)– how do you do this? Look Up!

If you don't choose to look up on your own, God will help you! And one of his best ways of making us look up is by putting us on our back!

As soon as Daniel repents and looks up, we see the results of this repentance! (exaltation of God and minimization of self!)

**Daniel 4:34b-37 – “...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, 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. <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.”**

God taught Nebo a hard lesson: It’s (v. 17, 25 & 32) – “that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

Translation: “The Most High is God, not anyone else.”

It’s a lesson for Nebo...and it’s a lesson for us too. Let’s keep looking up so that we are humble enough to fully recognize, live for, and surrender to the “Most High” God.

Will you pray with me?

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