**Believers in Babylon Series**

**“On Earth as it is in Heaven”**

**Daniel 4.1-37**

**Preaching Prelude**

Our current series is entitled “Believers in Babylon – living as exiles is a strange land.” As believers in Christ we must remember that this world is not our home. (Heb.13.14) We are foreigners and strangers living in exile. (IPt.1.1a, 2.11) In this series we are looking at the book of Daniel, as a divine manual that gives us insights on how to live as exiles in our own Babylon.

Set in the context of the Babylonian Captivity (597 B.C.) Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were taken, along with other Israelites, to serve as a select group in king Nebuchadnezzar’s golden kingdom of Babylon. Today we come to chapter four where we discover an interesting shift in the book of Daniel. In chapters 1, 2, and 3 the main focus has been on Daniel and his three friends. But the friends are only briefly mentioned in chapter two, and Daniel is not mentioned at all in chapter 3. However, there is one main character that is featured in all four chapters – Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.

In chapter one Nebuchadnezzar is the conquering king claiming territories and people in his conquest for world domination. In chapter two Nebuchadnezzar is haunted by a reoccurring dream that causes him to conclude that Daniel’s God is the revealer of mysteries. (2.47) In chapter three Nebuchadnezzar confesses that only the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can miraculously deliver those who trust Him. (3.28-29) Now, in chapter four, God humbles Nebuchadnezzar and the king makes a clear confession of faith in the Most High God.

Listen to Nebuchadnezzar’s words as the Lord calls us to worship:

**Call to Worship**

*I will lift my eyes to heaven, 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.* (adapted from Daniel 4.34)

Let us lift our eyes to heaven this morning as we give praise and honor to the Most High God who lives forever.

Let us worship God

**Reading of Scripture:**

*King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:**May you prosper greatly!* ***2****It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.****3****How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

***4****I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.****5****I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.****6****So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.****7****When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.****8****Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)*

***9****I said, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.****10****These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.****11****The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.****12****Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.*

***13****“In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven.****14****He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.****15****But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.**“‘Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth.****16****Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.*

***17****“‘The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.’* ***18****“This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”*

***19****Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.”**Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!****20****The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,****21****with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds—****22****Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.*

***23****“Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’*

***24****“This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:****25****You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.****26****The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.****27****Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”*

***28****All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.****29****Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,****30****he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* ***31****Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.****32****You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”* ***33****Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.*

***34****At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.**His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.* ***35****All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing.  
He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?”*

***36****At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.****37****Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

**Introduction:**

Chapter four of Daniel is a unique portion of Scripture. Chapter four is a letter that Nebuchadnezzar sent to the entire empire after he recovery from his insanity. Nebuchadnezzar probably dictated the letter to a scribe or possibly Daniel. The letter was to be sent *to the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth.* (4.1) After becoming insane, Nebuchadnezzar was probably taken to a place of seclusion, *driven away from people,* and had not been seen in public for a long time. Now the king wanted the people to know what happened and that he was back. (4.32a)

The period of time of Nebuchadnezzar’s absence is described by the phrase *“seven times.”* This phrase is either is describing seven years or merely a long period of time. (4.25b) It is interesting that there is a notable absence of any record of acts or decrees by king Nebuchadnezzar during a seven year period from 582 to 575 BC. (Gleason L. Archer, Vol 7 Expositor’s Bible Commentary) I personally believe that this phrase *“seven times”* describes a perfect period of time ordained by God to humble Nebuchadnezzar and bring him to his spiritual senses. After all the number seven is God’s favorite number. But that’s just my personal opinion.

Although his condition was drastic and there was nothing that anyone could do to reverse it, Nebuchadnezzar was protected from harm during his absence. Remember, Daniel and his three friends had faithfully served as top officials of Babylon for decades and they had the authority to keep the kingdom running while Nebuchadnezzar was incapacitated. Also remember that Daniel knew the outcome of the dream and undoubtedly informed the other government officials that Nebuchadnezzar’s condition was not permanent and that he would return to reign. Even though God was humbling Nebuchadnezzar, God would control the government officials and any imposing kingdom from attacking Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon during his time of weakness. God is in control no matter how messed up things get!

*King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:**May you prosper greatly!**It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.* (4.1-2)

**The Story**

The people of Babylon must have wondered what happened to the king that would cause him to issue this type of greeting. Nebuchadnezzar was known for his harsh anger and controlling nature and now it’s all peace and prosperity. What’s up? And what’s the deal with all of this God talk. Nebuchadnezzar was a known polytheist, the belief in many gods. But now he is talking about *the Most High God.* He sounds like a monotheist, the belief in one God.

This reminds me of what happened at my ten-year high school reunion. I was fairly rebellious and worldly in high school. It was the 70’s. I had not kept close touch with my high school class after graduation – this is way before social media. So, at the banquet the Master of Ceremony says, “As we begin tonight I would like to ask Rev. Brian Kelso to come forward and offer an opening prayer.” The place broke out with hysterical laughter. “Brian Kelso a reverend? What a comedian! Brian Kelso is going to pray? That’s funny.” You see my high school class was unaware that after high school the Lord captured my heart, I graduated from Bible College, and was pastoring our first church. They didn’t know the story.

Nebuchadnezzar had been out of touch, out of sight for many years and he wanted the citizen of the empire to know the story. Nebuchadnezzar begins by telling them that several years ago he was home in his palace, content, and prosperous. (4.4) Nebuchadnezzar had built an empire, built a culture, built an educated international government, and built a city – Babylon.

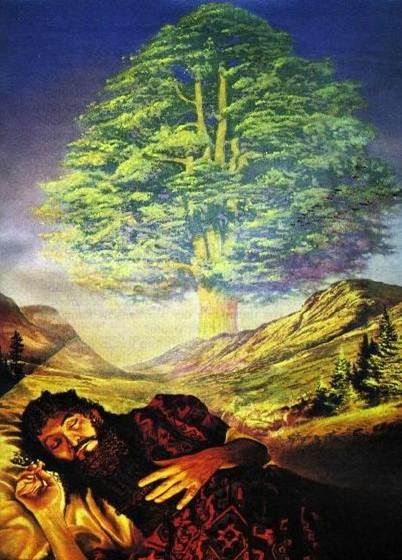
[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging_Gardens_of_Babylon)

The city of Babylon is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It is known for it’s magnificent buildings, flowing fountains and streams, and the beautiful “Hanging Gardens.” This word “prosperous” in verse four is actually translated “to be green” such as the flourishing growth of plants and trees. Nebuchadnezzar was in a good place. No more countries to conquer, no more government to organize, and no buildings to build. He was living in security, experiencing growth and prosperity, and surrounded by monuments to his wealth, power, and intellect.

But one night Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that terrified him.

*I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.* (4.5)

Unlike the reoccurring dream of chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar only had this dream once but *the images and visions terrified* him*.* Once again he calls in his “wisdom professionals,” but once again they cannot interpret his dream. Once again Nebuchadnezzar quickly calls for Daniel and once again here comes Daniel to the rescue. In the letter Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel by his Babylonian name so the population will know who is talking about. Daniel finally arrives and Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel the details of his terrifying dream.

[](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/239746380139241539/)

*These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.**The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.**In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven.* (4.10-13)

[](https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/bible-stories-lessons/10/nebuchadnezzar-dream-tree/)

*He called in a loud voice: “Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.”* (4.14) The animals flee and the birds scatter, only the stump of the tree and it’s roots remain and the stump is bound with iron and bronze.

Then the holy messenger says, *Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth*. *Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him*. *The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone He wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.* (4.15-17)

Nebuchadnezzar knows that Daniel can interpret the dream and begs him to do so. At first Daniel is resistant but the king insists. I want to pause the story to point out Daniel’s concern and calling. Daniel was terrified of what the dream meant. He saw it in living color. The first thing he said to the king was, *“My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries*!” (4.19) Wow! You talk about seeking the welfare of the city. (Jer.29.7) Remember this was the king who destroyed Daniel’s homeland, devastated his city, deported his people, and defiled his temple. Daniel could have thought, “You deserve what’s about to happen to you.” But he didn’t. This is “loving your enemies” in real time. This is “praying for those who persecute you” in real life. This type of Christ-centered attitude is key to living as exiles in a strange land.

Then Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar, “You are the tree.” Daniel has the prophetic courage to tell Nebuchadnezzar the truth about what was going to happen to him. The great Old Testament commentator C.F. Keil wrote, “As Daniel at once understood the interpretation of the dream he was for a moment so astonished that he could not speak for terror at the thoughts, which moved his soul. The amazement seized him because he wished well to the king, and yet he must now announce to him a weighty judgment from God.” Daniel must speak the truth in love and so must we as we live as exiles. (Eph.4.15)

I want you to see Daniel’s concern and calling. For Daniel concern and calling are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand Daniel had genuine concern for Nebuchadnezzar’s well being but on the other hand he was called to be the Lord’s prophet to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel could not allow his concern to hinder his calling and he could not allow his calling to hinder his concern. Brothers and sisters, our genuine concern for the welfare others cannot overshadow our responsibility to tell them the truth about God’s Word. And our responsibility to be the Lord’s mouthpiece cannot overshadow our genuine concern for people’s welfare. We must seek the Lord to be wise as serpents but harmless as doves as we live as exiles in a strange land. We must seek the Lord to have genuine concern for others while we speak the truth of God’s Word in love.

Now back to the story. *“This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.”*(4.24-26)

Nebuchadnezzar had ruled the world for decades. Through the ministry of Daniel and his three friends, God had revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar on several occasions. In chapter two Nebuchadnezzar confesses that Daniel’s God is the God of gods but he insists that there is still other gods. (2.47) In chapter three Nebuchadnezzar commends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for their faith in their God but only issues a decree allows them to worship their God with religious freedom. (3.28-29) But Nebuchadnezzar never humbles himself to worship the Most High God alone.

But now God is getting serious with Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had heard the holy messenger say the purpose behind the dream was that the *living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth.* (4.17) And Daniel explains what was going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar until he acknowledges that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and the Most High God in Heaven rules not Nebuchadnezzar. (4.24-25)

It is important for us to pause and consider what this means to us. It comes down to what the Bible says about being a true believer. The question is, “Can a person be a Christian, a believer in Christ, without making a clear profession of faith in Christ?” Is a person who has been exposed to the Word of God, witnessed the work of God but has never made a clear profession of faith – Is that person a believer? Is that person a Christian? I ask the question because Nebuchadnezzar had been exposed to God’s Word. He had witnessed the work of God. But it is clear that God wants more from Nebuchadnezzar than his belief that the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is just one god among many gods. The Lord wants more from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar that the Most High God is just the revealer of mysteries and deliverer of the faithful.

The Bible says, “*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe with you heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”* (Rom.10.9) Jesus said, *“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”* (Mt.10.32) Of course, words without a heart change are only words. A person can honor the Lord with their lips while their heart is far away from Him. (Mt.15.8) A mere profession of faith, without a corresponding change of heart, has no power to save. It is clear that God places importance on the act of making a clear profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And it seems that God was drawing Nebuchadnezzar to the point of making a clear profession of faith in God alone.

So after explaining the dream and stating its purpose Daniel concludes by calling Nebuchadnezzar to repent. *Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”* (4.27)

Daniel is not promising the king forgiveness on the ground of good works. Daniel knows that God is speaking to Nebuchadnezzar and this wasn’t the first time. (2.28, 45) Daniel was comfortable to let the Holy Spirit do the work. But like a good Prophet, Daniel exhorts the king to break away from his sins. To repent of his pride and arrogance and acknowledge that the Most High God is the ruler of heaven and earth. (4.24-25) Daniel challenges Nebuchadnezzar to show the world that God has brought him to his senses by bearing fruits of righteousness and showing mercy to the oppressed. If you do this, Daniel says, “Your Majesty, your prosperity will continue.”

And the king says, “Hmmm – that is very interesting! Let me think about that! And he did for a whole year. But one day twelve months later as Nebuchadnezzar was glazing out upon his beautiful city of Babylon from the porch of his royal palace and reflecting on all of his power and the glory of his majesty, a voice came from heaven saying, *“This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”* (4.31-32)

*Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.* (4.33)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_4)

The exiler is exiled! He becomes a scary psychiatric mess. He doesn’t bathe, takes no shelter, and roots around in the dirt eating grass. His hair is matted. His nails grow exceeding long. He is creepy to look at. And he stays in this condition for a period of “seven times.” Then at the end of that period of time Nebuchadnezzar writes, *I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.**His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation* (4.34)

*At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.**Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.* (4.36-37)

Wow! What a story! Now lets look at the symbolism behind the story.

**The Symbolism**

Both secular history and Scripture records that Nebuchadnezzar was a real person. This is not some made up story – it really happened. The Bible tells us that *these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction.* (ICor.10.11) I want to highlight two aspects of the story that I believe will benefit our lives.

First, I want us to consider the symbolism of Babylon. The Bible uses Babylon as a symbol for the fallen world, the world in rebellion against God. It is introduced to us in Genesis as “Babel”, the city were mankind decided to make a name for them selves in defiance to the Word of God. (Gen.11.2-4) In Nebuchadnezzar’s day Babylon becomes the empire that destroys Jerusalem, burns the temple to the ground, and takes the people of God into exile. (Dan.1.1-2) In the New Testament the Apostle Peter figuratively refers to Babylon as this current world that wages war against our souls as Christians sit as aliens and strangers in this world. (IPt.1.1a, 2.11, 5.13) And in the book of Revelation, Babylon is seen as the Great Harlot that promotes immortality and sensuality in this world. (Rev.17-18) Basically, Babylon is woven throughout the pages of Scripture as the kingdom that is in rebellion against God.

I want you to see that Babylon is where Nebuchadnezzar drew all of his sense of significance and identity. Nebuchadnezzar quotes himself saying, *“Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* (4.30) This is the lure of Babylon. The kingdom of this world symbolized in Babylon seduces, entices, and deceives us to think that our significance, our identity, and our achievements are based on our ability to manipulate and manage life on our terms. The national anthem of Babylon is “I did it my way.” But the call of God to Nebuchadnezzar is the same for us today, “Come out before it’s too late.” (Rev.18.4-5) Don’t allow your significance, your identity, and your life to be wrapped in your accomplishments. Come to your spiritual senses and praise the Most High for what He has allowed you to accomplishment, for the gifts He has given you, and honor and glorify Him in word and deed. (4.34)

The second symbol I want us to consider is Nebuchadnezzar himself. As I mention, history proves that Nebuchadnezzar was a historical figure. But in many ways he symbolizes each one of us by his resistance to humble himself before God. Pride is one of the seven deadly sins. Many others sins can be trace back to pride as the source. But the biggest and most dangerous form of pride is seen in a person’s resistance to humble them selves before God. The Bible tells us that *God is opposed to the proud.* Why?Because prides steals glory from God. When we are prideful about our talents or abilities, our looks or possessions, we stealing the glory from the One who gives us every good and perfect gift. (Js.1.17) The only thing we should ever brag about is the Lord. *Let him that boast, boast in the Lord.* (Cor.1.31) *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* (IPt.5.5) God knows our struggle with “letting go and letting God.” God knows we often fool ourselves to think we can do things better – we can make things better. So what does He do? He gives us the grace to overcome our pride. *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*(IPt.5.6-7)

**The Salvation of God**

Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity returned once he raised his eyes to heaven and acknowledged God’s sovereign rule over everything in heaven and on earth. Our sanity is directly linked to our acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty. Not recognizing God’s sovereignty will drive us insane.

There has been a longtime debate as to whether Nebuchadnezzar was actually saved in a spiritual sense through this experience. For me, it is hard to think that an unbeliever could write as Nebuchadnezzar has in this chapter. Just look at the opening lines of his letter. *It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.* (4.2) Just look at the closing lines of his letter. *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.* (4.37)

I believe that God humbled Nebuchadnezzar to the point that he recognized God was not just a revealer of mysteries and a miraculous deliverer but that God was the Most High. I believe that God worked in Nebuchadnezzar’s heart so that he acknowledged the Most High God as the only God, the King of heaven and earth. I think that Nebuchadnezzar was no longer content to believe that God just ruled the heavens but he came to believe that God ruled heaven and earth, and God’s will was to be done on earth as it is in heaven. I believe that Nebuchadnezzar came to the place where he recognized that the same God who sovereignly controls heaven and earth is the same God that humbles those who walk in pride. I think if Nebuchadnezzar was here today he would tell us, “Eventually, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, so why not do it today before its too late.” (Phil.2.10-11)

**Transition to the Supper**