

Daniel 4:1-37

The Madness of King Neb

Pride is the basis of all other sins.

Here's a quote from C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*:

"...the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind..... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began."

Haman - who we will study on Purim - serves as a great object lesson on "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (**Proverbs 16:18**).

Religion people are especially susceptible to pride. The Pharisees "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt." (**Luke 18:9-14**)

This week we'll see how King Nebuchadnezzar had to experience a harsh lesson in order to turn away from pride and look to heaven instead.

After Daniel's companions emerged from the fiery furnace unhurt, King Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree praising their God:

Daniel 3:29 - "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their house."

But like his previous recognitions of God, it was short lived, and he returned to his usual state of pride.

Chapter 4 describes a period of seven years when God caused the king of Babylon to fall into insanity, living like a wild beast, in order to humble him.

The chapter is in the form of decree from the king, after he returned to his senses, to his people explaining what had happened.

It begins with a preface that extolls God's dominion over the earth.

Daniel 4:1-3 - "Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation."

The Vision of a Great Tree

Nebuchadnezzar explains he had a "vision" or a dream that disturbed him. He called his court the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers to interpret the vision, but they were powerless to do so.

Daniel 4:10-17 -

"Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

"I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; he cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him.

"This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

Nebuchadnezzar then calls for Daniel to explain the dream, because "thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee."

Daniel 4:19 - "Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him...."

Daniel understood what it meant, and tells the king the interpretation was the kind that only his enemies would like.

The tree itself represented Nebuchadnezzar- as the human symbol of Babylon, which is pictured as encompassing the world and its peoples and languages.

Daniel 4:23-24 - "And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king:"

The Meaning

Daniel 4:25-26 - "That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule."

The purpose of this judgment was so Nebuchadnezzar would know that "the heavens do rule" - i.e. God is controlling events and not Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel counsels the king to "break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity."

i.e. if the king would humble himself through repentance - a repentance that would be displayed by concern for and mercy to his poor subjects, he might forestall or escape God's chastisement.

But Nebuchadnezzar continues for a year without changing his ways, and probably forgot all about this dream.

One day, while walking in his palace he muses on his own greatness.

Daniel 4:30-31 - "The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee."

This is much like King Herod, who after giving an oration, was hailed by the people as a god - a evaluation that he no doubt approved of and accepted.

- **Acts 12:23** - "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

There are several examples of this kind of pride throughout the scriptures. Earthly power and strength bestows a deceptive illusion on leaders, whether political or military. "Might makes right." And my destiny rests in my own hands. It all ends in self-deification.

The voice from heaven continued:

Daniel 4:32 - "And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

Fulfilled

Daniel 4:33 - "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws."

Nebuchadnezzar continues in his own voice:

Daniel 4:34 - "And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation."

After the seven years had passed, the king returns to his senses, shakes off his animal consciousness and realizes that God had brought this on him so he could see himself as God saw him - a brute beast given over to self-gratification and animal instincts under a thin veneer of civilization and reason.

Babylon represents the world system, and all humans in their natural state. Isaiah describes it like this:

- **Isaiah 1:6** - "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores."

Daniel 4:35 - "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

Again, Isaiah agrees:

- **Isaiah 40:15** - "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing."

If this is true, why do we devote so much energy and emotional debt to worrying about politics? We're told to pray for those in authority and to remember that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

Again - we see that instead of worrying or panicking, we need to "take it to the Lord in prayer."

- **Philippians 4:6-7** - "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

In a way, Nebuchadnezzar realizes that his lost years actually resulted in a net gain.

Daniel 4:36 - "At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me."

At least for this moment, Nebuchadnezzar turns his eyes to heaven, instead of looking at himself.

Daniel 4:37 - "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

Pride vs Humility

Just as pride is the root of all sin, humility is the root of virtue.

"Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue," according to John Chrysostom, a bishop of the early church.

It's the same message declared by the prophets:

- **Isaiah 57:15** - "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

An example of pride in a ruler of Judah is King Uzziah (**2 Chronicles 26**).

He became king of Judah at age sixteen, he set his heart to seek God and put himself under the spiritual mentorship of Zechariah. And "as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper" (**2 Chronicles 26:5**).

As a result, he acquired wealth and also became politically and militarily powerful. Then things changed.

"His fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction" (**2 Chronicles 26:15–16**).

The New Testament echoes these thoughts:

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment" (**Romans 12:3**)

"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (**Philippians 2:3–4**).

- **James 4:6** - "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Note: Did this really happen?

There is no record of Nebuchadnezzar living as an animal for seven years. But ancient regimes tended to erase or pass over embarrassing losses and defeats.

The early church historian Eusebius quotes the even more ancient 3rd-century B.C. Greek writer Abydenus, whose works have been lost. Abydenus, he said, records that Nebuchadnezzar was "possessed by some god" and that he had "immediately disappeared."

Consequently there is a seven-year gap between 582 B.C. and 575 B.C. in Babylonian records that usually extol Nebuchadnezzar's achievements and conquests. Those years are silent.

http://www.melammu-project.eu/database/gen_html/a0000702.html