

THE FALL AND RISE OF A ONCE PROUD MAN

4 Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all the peoples, nations, and [men of every] language who live in all the world: May you have an abundance of peace. ²It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. ³How great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying on my bed, the thoughts and visions [that passed through] my mind terrified me. ⁶So I gave the order that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me, so that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldean [astrologers], and the soothsayers came in and I told them the dream. But they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸Finally, Daniel came into my presence—he is called Belteshazzar, named after my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him—and I related the dream to him. I said, ⁹O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, [I ask you to] tell me [the meaning of] the visions I saw in my dream and the interpretation [of the dream]. ¹⁰These are the visions [that passed through] my mind [as I lay] upon my bed: I looked and there was a tree in the center of the earth; its height was enormous. ¹¹The tree grew and became strong, and its height reached unto heaven; and it could be seen from the ends of the whole earth. ¹²Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit was abundant, and it provided food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches. Every creature was fed from it. ¹³As I observed the visions [that passed through] my mind [as I lay] upon my bed I saw a watchman, a holy one, come down from heaven. ¹⁴He called out in a loud voice, Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and let the birds depart from its branches. ¹⁵Nevertheless, let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let it be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from [being that] of a man and let him be given the mind of a beast, and let seven [years] pass over him. ¹⁷This sentence is by the decree of the watchmen and this verdict is a command of the holy ones, so that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires and sets up over it the lowliest of men. ¹⁸This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. Now, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, since none of the wise men of my kingdom are able to make known to me the interpretation. But you are able, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

¹⁹Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was dumbfounded for a time and his thoughts terrified him. The king responded and said, Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or the interpretation terrify you. Belteshazzar replied, My lord, may the dream apply to those who hate you, and may its interpretation be for your adversaries. ²⁰The tree that you saw—which grew and became strong, whose height reached unto heaven, and that could be seen by all the earth; ²¹whose leaves were beautiful, and whose fruit was abundant, providing food for all, under which the beasts of the field lived and upon whose branches the birds of the heavens made their dwelling place—

²²it is you, O king. [It is you] who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches unto heaven, and your dominion extends to the end of the earth. ²³The king saw a watchman and a holy one coming down from heaven and saying, Chop down the tree and destroy it; nevertheless, leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let it be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the beasts of the field, until seven [years] pass over him. ²⁴This is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High that has been issued against my lord the king. ²⁵You shall be driven away from men and you shall live with the beasts of the field; you will be forced to eat grass like the cattle and will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven [years] shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires. ²⁶Since they commanded to leave the stump of the tree with its roots, your kingdom will be restored to you, after you have come to acknowledge that the heavens rule. ²⁷Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my counsel. Renounce your sins by doing what is right; and your iniquities, by showing mercy to the poor. [By so doing,] you may possibly continue in your honorable state.

²⁸All this happened to the king, Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹Twelve months later, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰The king said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty? ³¹While the word was [still] on the king's lips, there came a voice from heaven, [saying,] O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: The kingdom has been taken away from you. ³²Furthermore, you shall be driven away from men and you shall live with the beasts of the field; you shall be forced to eat grass like the cattle. Seven [years] shall pass over you, until you acknowledge that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires. ³³In that very hour what had been declared to Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from men and he ate grass like the cattle; and 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.

³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my sanity was restored to me. Then I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom continues from generation to generation. ³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can push away his hand, or demand of him, What are you doing? ³⁶At the same time that my sanity was restored to me, my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and my nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne, and I became even greater than before. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honor the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just, and he is able to humble those who walk in pride. (Dan. 4:1-37)

Introduction

Dave testifies that the faith in Christ he professed as a teenager dwindled down to nothing more than “habitual Sunday morning appearances at church.” He further testifies that he never attended Sunday School, because he couldn’t understand why

he should bother to study the Bible twice in one morning. He confesses that he even said to himself, "I don't need God. I can do anything, so long as I have money."

But more recently he has been heard to say such things as this: I went to Sunday School. I wanted to go. I wanted a better relationship with God than I'd had." "My life has been renewed in Christ. I want to serve Him." "My desire in life is no longer money, but drawing closer to God and serving Him."

What made the difference? What happened to Dave? God did something drastic. In God's providence, Dave had a devastating auto accident that nearly killed him; and then God did something even more drastic: He changed Dave's heart and life. (POWER, 7/26/81)

In the passage of Scripture before us now, we find a similar story of another proud man, King Nebuchadnezzar. What lessons should we learn from this account of the fall and rise of a once proud man?

I. If You Are Filled with Pride, You May Have Forgotten the God Who Has Blessed You (Dan. 4:4,30)

According to verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar found himself in a most pleasant and enviable situation. He testifies, "*I was at rest in my house*"—he was protected and secure; he having conquered and subjugated every threat to his empire, he could now rest in peace and tranquility. He further testifies, "*I was flourishing in my palace*"—it was a time of great prosperity and glory for Babylon; the king and his kingdom were flourishing like a tree beside a wide river.

Nebuchadnezzar thoroughly enjoyed the royal splendor of his great kingdom as he walked upon the roof of his royal palace and surveyed his vast domain (vs. 29.)

As he considered the great empire of Babylon that lay spread out before him, he became filled with pride: "*The king said, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?'*" Compare these words of Nebuchadnezzar found in Daniel 4:30 with the Apostle Paul's testimony of praise to the Lord God: "*from him, and through him, and for him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen*" (Rom. 11:36.) Note that Nebuchadnezzar views his kingdom as having originated **from himself**, as being sustained **by himself**, and as existing **for himself**; his pride has caused him to view himself in "God-like" terms. Bear in mind the comment of the man mentioned in the introduction: "I don't need God. I can do anything, so long as I have money."

Prosperity and success greatly incline the heart towards pride:

The word of Jehovah again came to me, saying, ²Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, This is what the Lord Jehovah says, In the pride of your heart you say, "I am

*a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.” But you are a man and not God, though you think you are as wise as God. ³Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you? ⁴By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries. By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and **because of your wealth your heart has become proud.** (Ezek. 28:1-5)*

If our hearts are filled with pride, we may have forgotten the God who has blessed us. The LORD warned Old Testament Israel of the negative effects wealth can have, if one is not careful:

Be careful that you do not forget Jehovah your God, failing to observe his commandments, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²[Be careful] for fear that, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart becomes proud and you forget Jehovah your God ... ¹⁷[Beware that] you do not say in your heart, My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. ¹⁸But remember Jehovah your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. (Deut. 8:11-14a, 17-18a)

II. If You Are Filled with Pride, God May Graciously Warn You, to Spare You from Calamity (Dan. 4:5-27)

Nebuchadnezzar’s state of earthly bliss was interrupted by a message from God—it took the form of a dream (vs .4-5.)

King Nebuchadnezzar initially relates his dream to the Chaldean astrologers. He testifies that in his dream, he saw a tree in the center of the earth, a tree of enormous height. The tree grew and became strong, reaching up to the heavens, able to be seen from the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit was abundant, and it provided food for all. The beasts took shelter under it, the birds rested in its branches, and all creatures were fed by its food. But suddenly a holy angel (literally, “*a watchman*”) came down out of heaven. In a loud voice he commanded that the tree be cut down, its branches be cut off, its leaves be shaken off, its fruit be scattered, and that it be abandoned by the beasts and the birds. Nevertheless, the angel commanded that the stump be left rooted in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze—in other words, the tree would be devastated, yet it would be kept alive, but held in the grip of some unbreakable, iron-like bondage. Suddenly the angel no longer speaks about a tree, but about a man, in verse 15 the “*let it*” of the previous verses now becomes “*let him*”:

*... let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. **Let it** be drenched with the dew of heaven, and*

let him live with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from being that of a man and let him be given the mind of a beast, and let seven [years] pass over him. (Dan. 4:15-16)

The statement, "*let seven [years] pass over him,*" indicates that God shall accomplish His divine work, which will be to utterly abase this proud man, but in His mercy He will not destroy him.

The angel declares this to be a divine sentence with this specific purpose:

This sentence is by the decree of the watchmen and this verdict is a command of the holy ones, so that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires and sets up over it the lowliest of men. (vs. 17)

Curiously, it is only after the Chaldean astrologers fail that Nebuchadnezzar calls upon Daniel for the interpretation of his dream. Why? Men by their sinful and proud nature always look first to their own wisdom and resources, and only as a last resort do they look to the LORD. Men by nature seek to avoid an encounter with the LORD; His truth is extremely uncomfortable and disconcerting. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar remembered the full interpretation of his previous dream, namely, his kingdom and all succeeding kingdoms will finally be supplanted by the kingdom of God:

... the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be passed on to another people. It will break all those kingdoms into pieces and consume them, and it will stand forever. ⁴⁵This is the meaning of the vision ... The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy. (Dan. 2:44-45)

Nebuchadnezzar must have recognized that this present dream was uncomfortably reminiscent of the first dream.

But the king finally does summon Daniel, and Daniel does supply the interpretation. He informs Nebuchadnezzar that the tree represents Nebuchadnezzar himself (vs. 20-22.) He explains to him that the Most High has decreed, "*You shall be driven away from men and you shall live with the beasts of the field; you will be forced to eat grass like the cattle and will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven [years] shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires*" (vs. 25.) The fact that the stump is left in the ground indicates that the LORD has chosen to be merciful and restore Nebuchadnezzar, once he has learned that the LORD is Ruler over all (vs. 26.)

Daniel then warns the king to repent and reform his life so that he may be spared from the awful calamity revealed to him in his dream: *“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my counsel. Renounce your sins by doing what is right; and your iniquities, by showing mercy to the poor. By so doing, you may possibly continue in your honorable state”* (vs. 27.) Here is a call to repentance, so that, if the call is heeded, Nebuchadnezzar might be spared from the forewarned calamity.

If we are filled with pride, God may (and does) graciously warn us, so as to spare us from calamity. We must remember how reprehensible pride is in the sight of the LORD: *“Jehovah detests all those who are proud in heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished”* (Prov. 16:5.) We must take seriously the warning of Scripture: *“Scripture says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’”* (Jas. 4:6.)

III. If You Are Filled with Pride, God May Visit You with Calamity, to Spare You from Damnation (Dan. 4:28-37)

What has the king experienced so far? There has been a striking and frightening encounter with God by means of his God-given dream (vs. 5.) There has come the warning of an impending calamity, if he does not humble himself before God (vs. 24-25.) There has come the godly counsel that he turn from his sins and walk humbly before God (vs. 27.)

What happens next? The answer is, “Nothing!” Time passes by (a few days, a few weeks, a few months), and nothing happens; consequently, the king’s convictions also pass away. Twelve uneventful months pass by. The dream has been forgotten; the conviction of sin and the fear of divine judgment have passed; and the old pride has reasserted itself: *“Twelve months later, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰The king said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* (vs. 29-30.)

Then it happened. A full twelve months after the initial revelation by means of the dream, a voice from heaven informs the king that the hour of his appointment with God has arrived:

While the word was [still] on the king’s lips, there came a voice from heaven, [saying,] O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: The kingdom has been taken away from you. ³²Furthermore, you shall be driven away from men and you shall live with the beasts of the field; you shall be forced to eat grass like the cattle. Seven [years] shall pass over you, until you acknowledge that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he desires. (Dan. 4:31-32)

Immediately following the announcement, the foretold calamity falls upon him: *“In that very hour what had been declared to Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He*

was driven away from men and he ate grass like the cattle; and 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” (vs. 33.) The man mentioned in the Introduction, testifies that he encountered the grace of Christ in 1970 through God’s dealing with his wife, he states: “My wife knew she needed God’s help in her life, and in 1970, asked Christ’s forgiveness for her sins. I felt no such need.” It was seven years later that Dave encountered a God-appointed calamity in the form of his devastating auto accident.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, as the LORD had foretold, the divine visitation he encountered was intended to result in restoration, not destruction. In the life of Nebuchadnezzar there was a true return to sanity, not only mental sanity, but also spiritual sanity: *“At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my sanity was restored to me”* (vs. 34a.) There then followed a sincere expression of adoration and praise of the LORD: *“Then I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him who lives forever”* (vs. 34b.) There was also the acknowledgement from the heart that the LORD reigns:

... his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom continues from generation to generation. ³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can push away his hand, or demand of him, What are you doing? (vs. 34c-35)

Note that as soon as Nebuchadnezzar bowed before the LORD, the LORD exalted him to greater honor than he had enjoyed before:

At the same time that my sanity was restored to me, my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and my nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne, and I became even greater than before. (vs. 36)

Nebuchadnezzar leaves us with two last words. First, there is his personal testimony: *“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honor the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just”* (vs. 37a.) Second, he offers a word of warning: *“he [the LORD] is able to humble those who walk in pride”* (vs. 37b.)

If we are filled with pride, God may visit us with calamity, to spare us from damnation, note Isaiah 14:12-15,

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! How you have been cut down to the ground, you who [once] laid low the nations! ¹³You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned upon the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of [the sacred mountain]! ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I

will make myself like the Most High!" ¹⁵But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. (Isa. 14:12-15)

In the ultimate sense, this passage is a reference to the devil and his final fate. But, as Isaiah 14:4 indicates, historically, this is also a reference to the king of Babylon. It would be fulfilled in the days of Belshazzar, the successor to Nebuchadnezzar, who refused to humble himself before the LORD.