

Daniel 4:31–33

³¹ "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.'

³³ "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*."

There is a subtle nuance in text that might have slipped by us. The king was making this proclamation of his own worth audibly. While the word was in the king's mouth is a fancy way of saying the king SPOKE this arrogant diatribe to himself! Imagine the cold water on the pot after Nebuchadnezzar received the interpretation of the dream. Month after month he had a chance to ponder the ramifications of the dream, month after month he considered it. Eleven months he began to wonder if the dreams interpretation was correct, the water of his ego started bubbling, steam started coming from the surface. And then boom, he could not contain his arrogance any more, the pot boiled over

"IS THIS NOT BABYLON ... WHICH I MYSELF HAVE BUILT ..."

At that moment, in the speaking of those words ... the promised judgment had come ... the judgment was reiterated for the third or fourth time. He began eating grass like cattle thus implying the specific condition of boanthropy (from a few classes ago). His body was drenched with the dew of heaven (each day presumably). His hair had grown like eagles' feathers. Do a google search on the growth rate of human head hair. It's about 0.35 mm/day with is about 6 in/yr. In seven years, it would grow to 3.5 feet, which would be about the wing span of a medium sized eagle. What about his nails? If he just sat in a chair for the seven years his finger nails would be quite long. Have you ever seen those "stylish" women who lets them grown 6 or 8 inches long? The description of his nails being like bird claws would be more in line with them breaking off periodically due to activity, but never being trimmed for his insanity time.

... and that is all that is said about king Nebuchadnezzars seven-year insanity. There is nothing else in the Bible, there is nothing in the annals of Babylon, and there is very little in extra-Biblical literature. Recall the story told to Megasthenes by the Chaldeans during the Greek empire. This should not be surprising as

Baldwin notes that information concerning Nebuchadnezzar's last thirty years is sparse, and no record of the king's illness has been found in Babylonian annals. Yet such a humiliating experience certainly would have been omitted from official accounts, for "corroboration of it [the illness] can hardly ever be expected from archaeology, for royal families do not leave memorials of such frailties.¹

Now the text goes back to first person singular ...

Daniel 4:34–35

³⁴ "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward 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, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

"But at the end of that time ..." ... many Bible chronologists (one who estimates the when of Biblical events and create chronologies or timelines) estimate that Nebuchadnezzars illness ended about a year before his death, approximately 563 BC. The king said he raised his eyes toward heaven. This would certainly indicate that the king now knew what he was looking at as his gaze directed toward the location of the Most High. His sense that God was actually located in heaven, and he looked in that direction indicate his sense of awareness had returned to him. Some would even see this as proof that Nebuchadnezzar prayed

¹ Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, pp. 220–221.

to God in his returned awareness. Though the text does not explicitly say the king repented, the response of blessing, praise, and honor toward the Lord God gives ample evidence, in my opinion, that the king at this point repented of his pride. True worship is only possible as a result of repentance and conversion. I cut and paste directly from Garland ...

Looking up is the antithesis of pride. "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."

Those that are well-read in Christian literature will recognize the quotation above from Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis.

What about the rulership while the king was deposed? Critics find it untenable that Nebuchadnezzar could have gone mad for seven years and his kingdom not be overtaken by one of his ambitious subordinates. Someone surely would have usurped his rule, they say. While it is true, historically, you would expect the critics to be correct on this; several explanations are possible.

First, when a king was absent from his rule, it was not uncommon for his son to rule in his stead. This would be called a coregent form of rulership. In Daniel chapter 5, we will find Belshazzar ruling while his father Nabonidus was away from Babylon. Solomon began his rulership as coregent with the aging king David (1 Kings 1:39, 1 Chron. 23:1; 29:22). King Hezekiah, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all had coregencies with their fathers. Second, Jewish legend suggests Nebuchadnezzar's son, Amel-Marduk may have served as king during his father's madness. Another possibility is that the queen (Nebuchadnezzar's wife) may have served in the king's absence with the help of Daniel and his friends. Recall they were high officials in Babylon and were certainly in a position to continue doing their jobs in the kingdom.

But perhaps the simplest explanation eludes the liberal scholar because of their predisposition to deny predictive prophecy a priori. Consider the fact that Daniel was already the "ruler over the province of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48). In this position, and given the fact that it was he who provided the interpretation of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, he would have reminded any so-called usurper that the malady that afflicted the king was only temporary and that the king would be restored after his repentance. This would surely have been a major deterrent to an ambitious would-be despot. Remember, the affliction did not overtake the king until 12 months after the dream. Surely when the events depicted in the dream came true, the counselors and nobles of Babylon would have then been convinced of the certainty of the divinely-predicted recovery of Nebuchadnezzar. Any would-be ruler that had aspirations of the throne would have been dissuaded by the possibility of punishment if the king recovered as predicted by Daniel. Also, all the nobles and rulers that were in place at the time of the king's ailment would have wanted to preserve their own positions as they were. Surely any change in the government of Babylon would have been to their own detriment if another ruler took the reins of power. Any regime change would most likely have been to their disadvantage.

Finally, what is the evidence that king Nebuchadnezzar had a true conversion?

- **He Honored God** - Nebuchadnezzar previously praised and honored Daniel whereas now his focus is on God alone.
- **He Praised God** - The praise Nebuchadnezzar directs toward God is reminiscent of the vocabulary of other believers as found in the Psalms.
- **His Knowledge of God** - "There is discernible progress in his knowledge of God. Compare Dan. 2:47 and Dan. 3:28 with Dan. 4:34-35. The king acknowledges the utter sovereignty of God with respect to his experience (Dan. 4:37b). . . . The king utters true statements concerning the omnipotence of the true God (Dan. 4:35-35). The king would worship this God, whom he identifies as King of heaven (Dan. 4:37a). Although the faith of Nebuchadnezzar may indeed have been weak and his knowledge meager, yet it is possible that his faith was saving faith, and his knowledge true."
- **His Transformation** - There is significant evidence of a God-ward change in Nebuchadnezzar's world view. Now you can immediately tell, based on what we have studied in Daniel 1-3, that something has happened. Nebuchadnezzar hasn't been talking like this. There's a complete change in this man. Compare Daniel 4:35 with Daniel 3:15, look at the difference in this man, how far he's come in twenty years. Twenty years ago this is what he was saying, 'And who is that God, that shall deliver you out of my hand.' Twenty years later he says 'none can stay His hand.' How was Nebuchadnezzar changed? When it says, 'How great are His signs!' notice the exclamation point, there's an involvement, this is an act of worship. In fact, verses 1-3 depict Nebuchadnezzar in an act of worship because it's an act of praise; it's a public rehearsal of the works and words of God.
- **The Contrast with Belshazzar** - In the next chapter, Daniel contrasts the godly repentance of Nebuchadnezzar with Belshazzar's failure to humble himself. "But when his [Nebuchadnezzar's] heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of

men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till **he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men**, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this” [emphasis added] (Dan. 5:20-22).

- **His Regard for Jeremiah** - Nebuchadnezzar developed a high regard for the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 39:11-12). Jeremiah may have even witnessed to Nebuchadnezzar.

Applications

- **Fallen Human Nature is Beastly** - Before coming to Christ, we are like Nebuchadnezzar: we think highly of ourselves until God reveals our pride and sinful inclinations. “Tragically it seems that human nature is such that every society has enough misfits, fanatics, sadists and murderers to run concentration camps.” The Bible reveals *every person* is fundamentally marred as a result of Adam’s fall into sin. Sin does not make us sinners, we sin because of our fallen nature: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23); “the Scripture has confined all under sin” (Gal. 3:22); “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Even when we *think* we are acting upon laudable principles, our self-centered motives betray us. It isn’t that we sin in everything we do, but—apart from the work of the Holy Spirit within us—every aspect of our nature is adversely affected by Adam’s disobedience (Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Acts 17:26). “But sinful men are full of sin; principles and acts of sin; their guilt is like great mountains, heaped one upon another till the pile is grown up to heaven. They are totally corrupt, in every part, in all their faculties; in all the principles of their nature, their understanding, and wills; and in all their dispositions and affections. Their heads, their hearts, are totally depraved; all the members of their bodies are only instruments of sin; and all their senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, etc., are only inlets and outlets of sin, channels of corruption. There is nothing but sin, no good at all. Rom. 7:18.”² This painful reality is illustrated by Scripture’s depiction of nations as beasts. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we are initially convinced of our self-righteousness (Rom. 10:3). Until we acknowledge our sin, we refuse to look up and avail ourselves of God’s remedy for our condition.
- **God’s Global Concern for the Lost** - “God’s concern for persons in every part of the world may also be observed here. Even in pagan Babylon there was a witness—spiritual light—to the power and reality of Yahweh. Nebuchadnezzar and all his subjects were precious to the Lord and were granted a revelation capable of leading them to salvation (1 Tim 2:4).” How difficult it can be for us to accept the depth of God’s concern and the enormous grace He extends to others (Jonah 1:2-3; 4:10-11; Luke 4:25-28; 7:39; Acts 22:21-22).
- **Evangelization Requires Patience** - On God’s part and our own. “God had spoken *once* to Nebuchadnezzar in giving him the dream of the great image of the Times of the Gentiles. But the heart of the king was wilful, and he continued to go on with his own purpose, in his pride and folly. God spoke *twice* by the marvelous vision of the Son of God in the midst of the fiery furnace, keeping His faithful witnesses from all danger and harm. But again the proud king kept on his way, with unsubject heart and unsubdued will. Now God speaks the *third* time, and this in a most humiliating manner, to this great world-ruler’s confusion before his princes.” “One of the interesting principles that we discover right away is that God works slowly. Between chapter 1 and chapter 4 of the book of Daniel there are anywhere between 20 and 25 years of time. So it is taking the Holy Spirit a long time, decades, to bring this one person out of total paganism to Himself.” “The Holy Spirit has taken at least two decades to bring Nebuchadnezzar around to Himself . . . two decades of time have been involved in this situation. He was not won by a two-minute presentation of the gospel with an invitation to accept Jesus into his heart.”
- **God Opposes the Proud** - So long as we exhibit a prideful attitude, we are of little use to God. “In God we are anything he pleases, in ourselves we are nothing.” “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6b). “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). The apex of the king’s spiritual and personal development occurs in this chapter when he finally realizes he is nothing apart from God.
- **God Responds to Repentance** - When God gives a warning we continue to ignore, He is forced to bring judgment. “Twelve months of trial and opportunity for reform were given. God is slow in the execution of His threatenings, and very long-suffering to usward. But when wickedness has come to the full His visitations are apt to be terrifically sudden.” Nevertheless, once we *do* repent, He quickly responds with forgiveness and restoration. “. . . if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” (Ezek. 18:21-23).

² Jonathan Edwards, *On Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1893, 1993)