

CHAPTER 4

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S HUMBLING

GENTILE SUBJUGATION TYPIFIED

In the 33d chapter of the book of Job, verses 14 to 17, we are told, " God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man pereeiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose (or work), and hide pride from man." This is how God often speaks to men where they have not open Bibles to give them the clear revelation of His will. He has many ways of reaching those who seem bent upon their own destruction. This fourth chapter of Daniel is a remarkable example of God's matchless grace, and illustrates most preciousely the words of Elihu.

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 willful, 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 unsubjects 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.

In the passage in Job, Elihu goes on to show that when dreams and visions do not avail, God sometimes allows disease to grip the body till the poor sinner is broken in spirit and crushed in heart, ready at last to cry, " I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not!" "*Then* He is gracious unto him, and saith, deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

So, in this stirring chapter, written by Nebuchadnezzar himself, and preserved and incorporated into the volume of inspiration by Daniel, we have the interesting account of the means God used to bring this haughty king to the end of himself, and lead him to abase himself before the Majesty in the heavens. In other words, this is Nebuchadnezzar's conversion, and seems clearly to show that a work of grace took place in his soul ere he laid down the sceptre entrusted to his hand by Jehovah. It is typical too, no doubt; for in Nebuchadnezzar, we see a picture of all Gentile power, its departure from God, its degradation and bestial character, and its final subjugation to God in the Time of the End, when Christ shall return in glory, and all nations shall prostrate themselves before Him, owning His righteous and benevolent sway. Nebuchadnezzar set up in intelligence was the embodiment of authority giver, from Heaven: "The powers that be are ordained of God." But it is written, " Man being in honor abideth not, but is as the beasts that perish." This, the king's madness clearly sets forth the turning away of the nations from God, and the corruption of governments to serve human ends. Has not this been characteristic of the great ones of this world? Instead of kings standing for God, and acting as His representatives to maintain justice and judgment in the earth, do we not find pride and self-will, covetousness and self-seeking, generally controlling them? All this is pictured by the debasement of Nebuchadnezzar, when his heart was changed to the heart of a beast, and he was driven forth to eat grass like the oxen of the fields.

But the day draws near when God will assert Himself, and all Gentile dominion shall come to an end. Then the long-promised King will shine forth in His glorious majesty, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor unto the new Jerusalem, the heavenly throne-city of the coming kingdom. Then will the nations look up as redeemed men, and not down as the beasts that perish.

Even in this present age history teaches us the value of a national recognition of God's moral government. We have heard of the heathen chieftain who came from his distant domain to visit Queen Victoria. One day he asked her if she would tell him the secret of England's progress and greatness. For answer, it is said, the queen presented him with a Bible, saying, "This book will tell you." Who can doubt that according to the measure in which that Book of books has been believed and loved by any people, God has honored them; and you will find that every nation that has welcomed and protected the gospel has been cared for and blessed in a special way.

On the other hand, let there be a national rejection of His Word, as in the case of the French nation, who were among the first favored by Him in Reformation times, but drove out the truth He gave them, and you will find disaster following disaster; for He who cannot lie has said, "Them that honor Me, I will honor; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

But let us now turn directly to our chapter for a concrete example of all this, it begins with: "Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth." This comes home to my heart in a most marked way. I realize that I am reading the personal testimony of one who was in some respects the greatest monarch this world has ever known; and I am privileged to have his own account of how he, a proud, self-willed man, was brought to repentance and to the saving knowledge of the God of all grace! For, as already intimated, I gather from this proclamation that this mighty potentate was quickened from on high, and that a divine work was accomplished in his soul by that ever-blessed One who, in mercy, had revealed Himself to him.

What a wonderful thing this is! And what a miracle! The fact is, every conversion is a miracle, every soul that is saved knows what it is to be dealt with in supernatural power. It is God alone who changes men about like this. He picks up a vile, wretched sinner, and makes him a holy, happy saint. He works in the drunkard's soul, and changes him to a sober, useful member of society. He breaks down the proud and stubborn, and they become meek and lowly, easy to be entreated. Are not these things miracles? Surely; and they are being enacted all around us: and yet men sneer and say the miraculous never happens in this law-controlled, workaday world of ours! Oh that men might have their eyes opened to *see*, and their ears to *hear*, what God in His grace is doing on the basis of the one offering for sin of His blessed Son upon the cross!

"I thought it good," Nebuchadnezzar goes on, "to show 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." What a splendid confession this is, and how different from his previous acknowledgments in chapters 2 and 3! Ah, his conscience has been reached now, and he knows God for himself, and delights to tell of His signs and wonders wrought toward *him*! He owns Him now not as a god, but as the one true and living God whose kingdom ruleth over all, and shall continue forevermore.

This is not, of course, the mediatorial kingdom of Christ of which he speaks, but God's moral government of the universe, which nothing ever alters for a moment.

And now I would like to be very personal, and press some questions home upon each listener. Have *you* anything to tell, about the signs and wonders that the high God has wrought toward you? Have you ever been brought into direct contact with Him, so that you can speak confidently of what He has done for your soul? Have you been humbled by getting a sight of yourself as a lost, undone sinner before Him? Have you taken that place your only rightful place and owned yourself unclean and undone, in dire need of sovereign mercy? And do you know what it is to have fled for refuge to the very God against whom you have sinned so grievously, and to have found in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ a hiding-place from the judgment your sins deserved? I beseech you, do not attempt to turn these questions to one side; but if you cannot answer each one unhesitatingly in the affirmative, stop and ponder them again, and ask yourself if there is any valid reason why you should longer persist in your neglect of God's way of salvation, and why you should longer leave your soul in jeopardy? Oh, that Nebuchadnezzar's testimony might speak loudly to your heart and conscience, if still a stranger to the God he had learned to adore.

Something very definite had been done for his soul, and he delighted to tell of it, and to give an answer to every man as to the reason of the hope that was in him.

Ere God awakened him, he had been "at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace. "Think of that! At rest and flourishing while still in his sins and a stranger to God! Ah, there is a deceitful rest, a deceitful peace, which lulls many a soul into a false security. To be untroubled is no evidence of safety. To be at peace does not prove that all is well. I once caught hold of a blind man and drew him back just in time to keep him from plunging headlong into an open cellar way. He thought all was well, and was in peace of mind as he walked along; and yet, two more steps, and he would have gone down! Be sure that your peace is one founded on the blood of Christ shed upon the cross, and you will then have that peace which is true and lasting. Every other is false and fleeting. The peace of God is that which comes from relying on the testimony of God, and follows exercise as to the sins that have separated the soul from Him.

Nebuchadnezzar tells us how he was aroused from that false security in which he had dwelt for so long. "I saw a dream," he says, "which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." The vision was sent for this very purpose. God saw that he needed to be troubled he needed to be awakened from his sleep of death. It was grace that thus exercised him. And in some way every soul that is saved has to pass through this period of soul-anxiety and concern. Nebuchadnezzar turned, as before, to the wrong source for help in his time of difficulty. He calls in his magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, to whom he narrates his dream; but all to no purpose. They who before could not recall to his mind the dream that had vanished cannot now interpret this one. But at last Daniel comes in, and to him the king turns expectantly. He tells how he had seen a great tree in the midst of the earth, which grew so strong and tall that the height reached the heavens, and the sight of it to the ends of the earth. Clothed with leaves and loaded with fruit, it supplied food 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." But the king had seen a watcher and a holy one come down from heaven, who cried aloud, saying, "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." This was the dream, and the king anxiously inquires if Daniel, or Belteshazzar, could declare the interpretation of it.

The meaning was evidently clear to Daniel from the first; but we are told that he was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. It is plain that Nebuchadnezzar's character had in it much that was noble and admirable; and this appealed to the prophet. He had also been highly favored by the king, and the thought of the solemn judgment that was soon to fall upon his royal master saddened him. Nebuchadnezzar must have discerned the anxiety and sorrow in the face of his minister; for he speaks in a way to give him confidence to proceed with the interpretation. It was not smooth words made up for the occasion that were wanted. Little as he realizes what is coining, he yet desires to know the truth. It is a blessed thing for any soul to get to the place where he can say: " Give me God's word, and let me know it is His word, and I will receive it, no matter how it cuts, and interferes with my most cherished thoughts."

"My lord," answers Daniel, " the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies." He then goes on to explain that the great tree represented Nebuchadnezzar himself, who had been set by God in a special place of prominence in the earth as the head of all peoples and dominions. The cutting down of the tree signified that he was to be humbled to the very lowest depths, even to being driven from among men; his dwelling to be with the beasts of the field, where he would eat grass as oxen, and be wet with the dew of heaven, until seven times had passed over Jura: till he should know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it unto whomsoever He will. But the fact that the stump of the tree was left, indicated that his kingdom should be sure unto him after he had known that the heavens ruled. The prophet adds a word of faithful counsel, beseeching the king to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in the hope that thereby the days of his tranquility might be lengthened. Observe that it is no question of earning eternal salvation of which Daniel here speaks. His advice has to do with the government of God upon earth, and Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment and subjection to it.

All happened exactly as Daniel had said; for Nebuchadnezzar, still unhumiliated, though he had listened so respectfully to the words of the prophet, walked one day, a year later, in the palace of his kingdom, which was evidently upon an eminence overlooking his capital. As he walked, he said to himself, " 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?" Thus did Nebuchadnezzar forget, how he was indebted to the most-high God for the position he occupied and the riches and the glory of it, and took all the credit to himself. While the word was in his mouth the decree was spoken, and he was informed by a voice from heaven that the time had come when the dream should be fulfilled. The same hour he lost his reason, and became a pitiable spectacle truly, unfit to associate with his fellows; and he was driven from men into the open fields, where he became in

very deed like the beasts that perish. We need have no difficulty in crediting this solemn account when we remember the treatment generally meted out to the insane in the oriental countries. Looked upon as the afflicted of God, they are left to wander at their own will, none interfering nor making them afraid.

Now in all this we see a picture of Gentile power in its alienation from God and bestial character. What madness have not rulers and nations been guilty of who have trampled the word of God beneath their feet and despised His mercy and grace, refusing subjection to His government! A great tree towering up, in its independence, toward heaven is a symbol frequently used in Scripture to set forth the great ones of this world. Ezekiel uses it as a picture of the Assyrian kingdom; and in the New Testament it is used by our Lord Jesus Christ as a symbol of the kingdom of heaven as it has become in the hands of men.

"Until seven times pass over him." I want to dwell a little on that, in connection with what has frequently been put forth by a certain school of prophetic teachers, called "the year day theory." This is a system of interpretation that takes prophetic seasons and times, and says: All days are to be understood as years, months as thirty years, and years as periods of three hundred and sixty years. Now "a time" is undoubtedly, as all are agreed, a year. Seven times, then, would be seven years. If the year-day theory be true, it would apply here as well as elsewhere in this book. But what would seven times three hundred and sixty years mean in this connection? It would amount to two thousand five hundred and twenty years. In that case Nebuchadnezzar's madness would still be going on, and he would have to eat grass as an ox for some fifty years yet. But if this be ridiculously impossible, then it is folly to attempt to apply the theory elsewhere, as this is distinctly a time-prophecy. Now in every instance where any of these time-prophecies have already been fulfilled, and are clearly so stated in Scripture, it is evident that days, months, or years, were always fulfilled literally. For instance, God said of the antediluvians, (*Before the flood, or deluge, in Noah's time; existing, happening, or relating to what happened before the deluge.*), that their days should be one hundred and twenty years; and in exactly that length of time the world, that then was, was overthrown with a flood. Suppose the year-day theory had been held by Noah, he would have calculated that there certainly could be no hurry in building the ark, inasmuch as the flood could not come for at least forty-three thousand two hundred years, or one hundred and twenty prophetic years of three hundred and sixty literal years each. Again: God told Moses that the children of Israel, because of their unbelief, should wander in the wilderness for forty years, according to the number of the days in which *they* had searched the land. Now here, if anywhere, we might be supposed to have authority for this year-day theory; but, on the contrary, we have the very opposite. Days mean days, and years mean years. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet was told to lie upon his left side for three hundred and ninety days, that he might bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. Then he was to lie upon his right side forty days, to bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; and God adds "I have appointed thee each day for a year." This passage is often adduced as evidence of the scriptural-ness of the theory referred to. But surely it gives no title from which to reason that wherever times and seasons are specified in the prophetic scriptures the principle of a day for a year can be relied upon as correct. In the case of the great prophecy of the seventy weeks, it might appear that we have a case in point; but there, as we shall see when we come to consider the ninth chapter, the term week does not necessarily refer to seven days at all.

The fact is that all kinds of contradictory systems have been built up on this year-day conception, and dates have been set again and again for the second coming of the Lord and the fulfilment of other prophetic events, only to result in disappointment and confusion, and to give occasion to the enemies of the truth to blaspheme when the dates specified have passed away with nothing of moment occurring upon them. The whole thing rests on supposing something that God had never revealed.

In the instance before us Daniel declared that the king would be mad until seven times had passed over him; and in exactly seven years Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his eyes; his reason returned to him; he saw that God had been dealing with him; his lesson was learned; he blessed the most-high God; he turned to Him in repentance; he owned Him as his God; and then wrote out this account of his conversion, that others might, with him, be humbled before the only true God and bless Him for His mercy. Thus, will it be with the spared nations after the judgments that are to take place in the Time of the End. Nebuchadnezzar aptly typifies all Gentile power, as we have already noticed. It has been haughty, insolent, and heaven-defying. Forgetting God, the true source of authority and power, it has become like the beasts of the earth. You know something of its course since it crucified the Lord of glory. The nations have been mad, as utterly bereft of all true reason as was the demented king of Babylon. But the day is nearing when God, in His grace, is going to end all this, and deliver a groaning world from the evils of selfish despotism, (*Absolute power; authority unlimited and uncontrolled by men, constitution or laws, and depending alone on the will of the prince; as the despotism of a Turkish sultan.*), and national jealousies. Christ's personal return from heaven will conclude the long period of Gentile misrule. Creation groans for the hour when the one true King will be manifested; when our Lord Jesus Christ "in His times will show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords."

"The blessed Potentate" that is, a truly happy ruler! The world has never seen a happy potentate in the past. Shakespeare's line has passed into a proverb, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." But in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He takes the rod of power and reigns in righteousness, the world, for (the first time, will see a *happy* Potentate. Who can measure the happiness of the Son of God when He descends to take the kingdom for which He has waited so long; when He has His own beloved bride with Himself to share His glory! Then He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. Those will be the days of heaven upon earth, of which we read in the Canticles, when "the time of the singing" shall have come, and all redeemed creation will rejoice beneath Immanuel's rule. Our translators have put in two little words in that verse which do not belong there. They have made it say, "The time of the singing *of birds* is come." Oh, how they have weakened it! It should simply read, "The time of the singing is come" the time when the heavenly saints will be hymning His praises from the glory; when Israel, blessed on the earth, will rejoice in His loving-kindness; when all creation will fall at His feet to worship, and He will joy over them with singing in that day of the gladness of His heart. Then He will show who is that happy and only Potentate. "That happy Potentate" excludes all sorrow and disappointment. "That only Potentate" excludes every other ruler. Upon His head will be many crowns. Every other crown will be cast at His feet, and He will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Happy for those, in that day, who have humbled themselves in this, and who, like Nebuchadnezzar, have owned the righteousness of His dealings with them; who have confessed their sins before Him; and who will be able to exclaim with joy, when He descends in

majesty, "This is our God: we have waited for Him. Of such He will cry with rejoicing," Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice " (Ps. 50:5). Ere that day dawns, it is the path of wisdom to " kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." Have *you* kissed the Son? I mean, have you bowed in contrition at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and trusted Him as your own Saviour, and owned Him as your rightful Lord? If you have, you can look up and say with happy confidence, " Come, Lord Jesus." But whether you have or not, the Lord Jesus is coming, coming very soon; and unhappy indeed will be your state for all eternity if He find you in your sins, a stranger to God and to grace. " Because there is wrath, beware, lest He take thee away with His stroke; then, a great ransom cannot deliver thee." *Now*, that ransom avails for all who believe in Him. In that day the precious blood of Christ will not be offered for salvation to those who have done despite to the Spirit of grace, and finally refused to heed the gospel message.

" Oh, do not let the word depart, and close thine eyes against the light;
Poor sinner, harden not thy heart; Thou would'st be saved why not to-night?

" The world has nothing left to give It has no true, no pure delight;
Look now to Jesus Christ, and live; Thou would'st be saved, why not to-night?

" Our blessed Lord refuses none Who would to Him their souls unite;
Then be the work of grace begun; Thou would'st be saved, why not to-night? "