

NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

The fourth chapter of Daniel consists of a most remarkable document. It is a personal confession in the form of a public proclamation by one of the greatest kings of either ancient or modern times, in which he gives his own account in detail of the experience which resulted in his conversion. On two occasions the God of heaven had revealed Himself through His servants to Nebuchadnezzar, so that the king had acknowledged that He was “a Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets,” and that “there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.” Thus the Gospel of the kingdom was publicly proclaimed throughout all the king’s realm, and the existence of the true God and His power to save were made known to all the people. But the Gospel of the kingdom is not preached as the Lord would have it, by merely calling public attention to these facts. The message, “Behold your God,” must be brought to each individual with a clearness and power which will require him to make a definite choice whether he will personally acknowledge the right of the King of heaven to rule in him, and whether he will yield himself to be His servant. So it was with Nebuchadnezzar, and it is this experience which he himself relates.

Daniel 4:1. “Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied unto you.”

This address of Nebuchadnezzar reads almost like a New Testament epistle where an apostolic salutation introduces the letter. The king addresses his letter universally to all. The God of peace had set up His kingdom in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, and the same power which had delivered the three captives from the burning fiery furnace had now wrought in him to deliver him from the violence of his own passions.

This chapter consists of five parts: a) The King’s Praise (vss. 1-3); b) The Dream (vss. 4-18); c) The Interpretation (vs. 19-27); d) The Fulfilment of the Dream (vss. 28-33); e) The King’s Praise (vss. 34-37). The King’s praise provides an envelope for the entire chapter.

Daniel 4:2. “I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me.”

No outward sign or wonder can be so great to any person as his own experience in being rescued from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God. There is then revealed to him and in him "the power of an endless life," and the conviction is wrought into his inmost soul that the kingdom and the dominion are eternal. And he who has had such an experience is prompted by an earnest desire to make it known unto all people.

Daniel 4:3. "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."

Nebuchadnezzar had seen with his own eyes the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrew worthies from the burning fiery furnace. He now experiences personally the converting power of God. Whereas before the king of lifted up his Babylon as the everlasting kingdom, he now has personally knowledge of the gospel of the eternal kingdom of God which he desires to uplift before the nations.

Daniel 4:4. "I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace."

This impressive dream occurred at a time when the king was in his palace, contented and prosperous. During the first third of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar took the army out in almost constant campaigns. During the last third, he went back on the road with the army again. It was especially during the middle third of his long reign that he was at peace and prosperous because his major military conquests had been accomplished by that time.

Daniel 4:5. "I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me."

One night during this prosperous and peaceful period the king was asleep in the palace when there came to him a most impressive dream. He was afraid because of the felling of the tree just as he had been afraid of the crushing of the great image in his first dream.

Daniel 4:6. "Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream."

In the case of his earlier dream described in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar could not remember the content when he awoke; this time, he remembered his dream clearly. To him the mysteries of the kingdom of God are puzzling. He does not have spiritual

discernment which only the Holy Spirit can impart. He sees things only through his earthly, human perspective.

Daniel 4:7. "Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof."

So he called his wise men and diviners, recounted the dream to them, and demanded an interpretation. The failure of the wise men of Babylon to meet the requirements of the occasion was more complete than when the king dreamed the dream of the great image. Then they said, "Tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation," but now they did not offer any interpretation, although the dream was related to them. They were utterly unacquainted with the King of heaven, or the principles of His kingdom, and so they could not interpret these mysteries to anyone else. But the king evidently remembered his former experience, and knew where to turn for help in his extremity.

Daniel 4:8. "But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying,"

Daniel was known and recognized in Babylon as one "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods." This was not due, however, to any claim which he made for himself, but to the simple fact that a power and a wisdom were manifested in his life, which testified to communion with a God greater than the gods of the wise men of Babylon. This is the testimony which carries weight with it, and is just what is needed in the world now. The Gospel of the kingdom cannot be proclaimed simply by expounding creeds and prescribing ceremonies, but by revealing the principles and the power of the kingdom in the life. Those who have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, are really the worst enemies of the truth, and they do more to hinder the kingdom of God in the earth than do the avowed unbelievers. Men are wanted today who know "the mystery of godliness," and who like Daniel are living representatives of the kingdom of heaven, and then in time of perplexity many of those who have come to feel their need of help will turn to them. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee; for, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and *His glory shall be seen upon thee*. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Isa. 60:1-3.

Daniel 4:9. "O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof."

Nebuchadnezzar knows there is something different about Daniel the seer. He has the spirit of the gods and therein lies the secret of understanding the mysteries of God's kingdom which the worldling cannot approach. The junior wise men could not accomplish the task, so their chief was called. Note that at first Nebuchadnezzar refers to Daniel by his Babylonian name of Belteshazzar.

Daniel 4:10. "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."

A tall tree attracted the king's attention and admiration. The tree was located at the center of the earth and was visible to all. It could be called a world tree that linked heaven and earth.

Daniel 4:11. "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 fact that the tree's top touched the sky brings to mind the story of the building of the city and the Tower of Babel, where the builders planned to construct an object "that reaches to the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). The object is to point out the Heaven defying exploits of the king who seeks to become God. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Isaiah 14:13, 14. The little horn of chapters 7 and 8 is characterized by the same ambition, and so is the contemptible king of Daniel 11:36.

Daniel 4:12. "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."

The tree was enormous and strong and visible to the ends of the earth. It also provided shade for the animals that lived under it and fruits for the birds who lived in its branches. The tree provided shelter and food for all the living creatures. This implies that in one sense the tree was God's representative on earth.

Daniel 4:13. "I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven."

This Watcher is never asleep. He is always awake to note the transpiration of events on earth. He comes down from heaven as an angelic messenger from the heavenly council.

"Today there is a Watchman taking cognizance of the children of men, and in a special sense of those who are to represent God by receiving his sacred truth into the heart and revealing it to the world. That Watcher is guarding the interests of all. Every individual is before him. There is not a thought of the heart that is unnoted. Nothing can be hidden from him. His ear hears the secret whisperings, and every secret thing is to be brought into judgment. All need to learn that the heavenly Watcher is acquainted with the children of men."¹

Daniel 4:14. "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."

A holy messenger angel came down from heaven with a decree that the tree be cut down, including branches, leaves, and fruit; the birds and animals that had previously lived in its protection were to be scattered. But all was not lost, for the stump of the tree was to be bound after the tree was cut down, and it would remain in the ground.

THE picture presented to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream was not an arbitrary one. The tree in the vegetable kingdom answers to man in the animal kingdom, and these two kingdoms may very properly be regarded as two portions of the same kingdom of life, and the man as a tree with the power of moving at will from place to place. And so the trees are constantly declaring to us that we should be "rooted and grounded in love," that it is "God that causes to grow," that "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit," and that "by their fruits ye shall know them." Thus every tree, through the interpretation given to it in the written word, ought to preach to us the Gospel of the kingdom, just as the one in his dream, through the interpretation given to it by Daniel, preached the same Gospel to King Nebuchadnezzar. With fair leaves, and abundant fruit, supplying food for all, it is a universal object lesson which tells of the man "crowned with glory and honour," a king and a priest, ministering the gifts of God to all about him. And

¹ Ellen G. White, "The Need of Consecrated Workers," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (September 8, 1896).

there is nothing in the structure of the tree which would indicate that it was not intended to “stand forever.” Under right conditions it ought to continue from generation to generation; but the tree of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was to be hewn down, the branches to be cut off, the leaves to be shaken off, and the fruit scattered. When Daniel had heard the dream, and the words of the watcher and the holy one, he saw that the King of heaven was sending a message of warning and yet of encouragement to Nebuchadnezzar, that he might cease to be a cumberer of the ground and become a tree of righteousness. But the experience was to be a severe one, and the contemplation of it disturbed the mind of the interpreter.

Daniel 4:15. “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.”

The tree is to be cut down and stripped of its branches, leaves, and fruit. Determinism is a characteristic of biblical apocalyptic prophecies. A major difference, however, is that in this dream, the destruction is not total, because the tree’s roots are spared—a detail that sends a signal of hope for a future restoration. Said Job: “At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again. and its new shoots will not fail, Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant.” Job 14:7-9.

In verse 15, the narrator passes almost imperceptibly from a symbolic vision of the fate of the tree (representing the king) to a more realistic description of the fate of Nebuchadnezzar himself. The transition is found in the description of the bands of iron and bronze that were used for binding animals and war captives. Psalm 149:8, 9 says that the holy warriors will “bind their [Gentile] kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them.”

Daniel 4:16. “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.”

The tree becomes a human being with the mind of an animal. The tree/person with the mind of an animal would live among the flora and fauna of the wild field for seven times or seasons—probably seven years. This same word has the meaning of a “year” in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, and, in the context of this verse, means year.

A beast does not acknowledge God and hence is not human. When one becomes so boastful that he proclaims his independence of God he has become like the beasts. "As the beasts have no knowledge of God, and therefore do not acknowledge his sovereignty, so Nebuchadnezzar had been unmindful of God and his mercies. Prosperity and popularity had led him to feel independent of God, and to use for his own glory the talent of reason that God had entrusted to him. Messages of warning were sent to him, but he heeded them not. The heavenly Watcher took cognizance of the king's spirit and actions, and in a moment stripped the proud boaster of all that his Creator had given him."²

Daniel 4:17. "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."

The purpose of this dream was to show that God is "sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." These words constitute what has been called "one of the immortal sentences of the Hebrew Scriptures. The theme of God's absolute sovereignty is "a scarlet thread which runs through all the stories of Daniel." The theme of Divine judgment permeates the whole book of Daniel.

Daniel 4:18. "This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee."

If you had been one of the wise men summoned by the king to explain this dream, what would it have meant to you? Remember, you would not have the clear hindsight we have today in reading the entire story.

It would have been clear that the dream applied to a man, for the words of the angel made that plain. But what man? It seems obvious to us, as we read the story today, that Nebuchadnezzar was the man involved. But would this have been the natural explanation to occur to the wise men facing the task of interpreting the dream? Probably not. More likely, they would have immediately thought in terms of an en-

² Ellen G. White, "Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation," *Youth's Instructor*, (March 28, 1905).

emy of Nebuchadnezzar. Because of the fate of the man in the dream, their first inclination would probably have been to pick out the king or opponent who was giving Nebuchadnezzar the most trouble and apply the dream to him.

If you had been one of the wise men commanded to interpret the dream, the one thing you would *not* want to do would be to apply the dream to Nebuchadnezzar! After all, messengers who brought bad news to the king could easily suffer his wrath. However, the wise men probably would not have thought of this interpretation anyway. It simply would not have occurred to them that a king so rich and powerful and famous could suffer such an affliction. At the time, mental illness was thought to be the work of demons, and how could demons afflict a man so obviously blessed by the gods?

Daniel 4:19. "Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies."

Thus Daniel's interpretation ran contrary not only to what the wise men thought about Nebuchadnezzar, but to the very theology of their belief system. A man so blessed by the gods could not be cursed by them at the same time too! If things had been going badly for Nebuchadnezzar, it could indicate that the gods were angry with him. If so, such an application of the dream might be true. But not now in a time of prosperity and peace.

Daniel 4:20, 21. "The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation."

In the Bible, trees are often used as symbols of a righteous person: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Psalm 1:3.

However, elsewhere, especially in the prophets, a tall tree stands for pride: "The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled), for all the

cedars of Lebanon, tall and lofty, and all the oaks of Bashan.” Isaiah 2:12, 13.

Daniel 4:22. “It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.”

The tree-man was Nebuchadnezzar himself. God deals with every man as an individual. His messages of warning, His instruction, His “exceeding great and precious promises,” are all personal. In all effective preaching of the Gospel, the message must be delivered as to the individual, and not to the mass, and each one must hear the voice saying to him, “Thou art the man.” Thus God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar through the dream and its interpretation, and through the same channel He is still speaking to all “those that walk in pride.” And so this experience is still preaching the Gospel of the kingdom to every man who reads it.

Daniel 4:23. “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.”

When Daniel received the interpretation of this dream from the true God, he too was shocked (vs. 19). Like the other wise men, Daniel was astounded that such a fate could happen to so prominent and powerful a figure. In chapter 1 Daniel had written that God had given Jehoiakim of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand (1:2). And if God had given Nebuchadnezzar control of the king of His own covenant people, how much more true must that be of those kings and kingdoms elsewhere in the world that Nebuchadnezzar had conquered? In his prayer of thanks-giving for the gift of the dream and its interpretation in chapter 2, Daniel had praised God because He “sets up kings and deposes them” (2:21). Given the prominence to which Nebuchadnezzar had come, it certainly looked as though God was the One who had placed him in his lofty position. Clearly, God had exalted Nebuchadnezzar and given him great power. But now He was going to demonstrate the other side of the coin. Whom He had set up, He could also depose, and Nebuchadnezzar was about to be deposed.

Daniel 4:24, 25. “This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king. 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.”

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle 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 the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes (vs. 25).

Daniel 4:26. “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.”

Daniel did not end his prophetic sermon without offering hope. The prophecy included restoration as its final element. Daniel concluded with an appeal to the king, calling him to repentance:

Daniel 4:27. “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.”

Acknowledging that the Lord He is God, that it is He that has made us and that His are we, and giving unto the Lord the glory due unto His name, and serving Him with gladness, mean eternal salvation; but self-exaltation, a claim to be independent of God, seeking one’s own glory, and allegiance to “the god of this world,” mean “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.”

The message to Nebuchadnezzar was a complete one. It did not simply warn him of the coming trouble, but it pointed out the remedy. Sin was the cause of the trouble; righteousness was the only remedy. “Break off thy sins by righteousness.” It required the courage of a Christian to give such counsel as this to the king of Babylon, but Daniel was a Christian, and so he was “strong and very courageous,” and in his faithfulness to the king he did not content himself by speaking of sins and iniquities in general, but he made it a personal matter,—“thy sins,” and “thine iniquities.” The Lord was seeking to bless Nebuchadnezzar by turning him away from his iniquities, and His spokesman, Daniel, did not thwart His purpose by seeking to please men. The Lord is no respecter of persons, but sends the same Gospel message to all, high and low, rich and poor. It sometimes happens, however, that the messenger forgets that he is simply to be

a mouthpiece for God, and prophesies smooth things to those in high position. Then the word becomes man's word merely, and the power of God unto salvation is not revealed. The Lord's instruction to every messenger is, "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak . . . all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word."

The result of the inward change in Nebuchadnezzar's character was to be manifested "by showing mercy to the poor." No grand temple was to be built in honor of the true God, which should surpass in its glory the temple of Belus in Babylon, but the king was to recognize the temple of the living God already built, "the temple of the Holy Ghost," revealing the character of God in his treatment of the poor. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me." The true king both reveals and retains his kingship by ministering to the lowly and the unfortunate. "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Daniel 4:28. "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar."

The experience of Nebuchadnezzar was not caused by any arbitrary decree against him by the God of heaven. The Lord saw what would be the inevitable result of the pride of his heart and his self-exaltation, and through the dream He instructed him concerning it, that he might learn the secret of true greatness and enduring glory.

The message which came to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel's interpretation of his first dream, when he said, "The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory," had not been accepted, and he had not acknowledged the true God as the Giver of those powers of the mind, or His providence as shaping the events, which had placed him upon the throne of the world. His greatness had grown, and his dominion reached unto the end of the earth, but he did not recognize the fact that he was simply a servant of One whose greatness is unsearchable, and whose dominion is over all the universe.

Daniel 4:29. "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon."

The kings of Judah would not repent of their folly, which led to the downfall of their kingdom and the exile of their people. Could we really expect a pagan king such as Nebuchadnezzar to repent in response to the prophet's appeal? Think about what would be involved in such a repentance.

The king would be admitting that he should not have made the conquests he had carried out. That the oppression he had imposed upon the various countries of the ancient Near East should not have been imposed. That he should not have imprisoned the war captives. That exiles, such as the very prophet who stood before him, should not have been brought to Babylon and that they should be returned to their own lands. In essence, the king would be saying that a large part of what he had done as king—some of his greatest exploits—were wrong. It would have taken a great and humble man to admit this, and Nebuchadnezzar was not up to—or down to—the task. He would not bow in repentance.

Although the king refused to submit to God when He appealed to him through Daniel and the interpretation of the dream, God gave Nebuchadnezzar more time to think it over. He gave him plenty of time. He gave him a whole year. Still Nebuchadnezzar would not yield and repent. One year later, he was walking on the roof of his palace. Perhaps he was thinking about the impressive dream he had had a year earlier (vs. 29). His response—a stubborn rejection of the prophet's appeal—was unchanged.

Daniel 4:30. “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?”

Nebuchadnezzar prided himself upon his achievements as a builder. “Is not this great Babylon which I have built?” He earned in history the name of being “the greatest builder of the world.” It was as the adorer and beautifier of his native land—as the builder and restorer of almost all her cities and temples—that this monarch obtained that great reputation which has handed down his name traditionally in the East as on a par with those of Nimrod, Solomon, and Alexander, and made it still a familiar term in the mouths of the people. Probably no single man ever left behind him as his memorial upon the earth one half the amount of building that was erected by this king.”

These facts are very significant, and show how each is involved in the few words of the record preserved to us. Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder, but he built for himself, and claimed all the glory for himself. “By the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty,”—these are the words which he himself used to express his own view of his work. Wonderful powers of mind had been bestowed upon him, that he was able to project and to bring to a successful completion such extensive operations; but in claiming these powers

as his own, and perverting them for his own gratification in preparing for himself a royal habitation, he was revealing the attribute of Satan, “the god of this world,” the inspiration of all the ways of Babylon, and representing him in the earth.

Was there any basis in fact for this boasting? Yes, quite a bit. Nebuchadnezzar had enlarged and beautified Babylon on a grand scale. Prior to his time, the city had consisted mainly of a smaller area—“the inner city” or central portion. Nebuchadnezzar added a new line of outer walls. This had the effect of strengthening the city’s defenses and enlarging its area at the same time. Inside these outer walls, he built a new palace. He also built the western section of the city across the Euphrates River. We know he was responsible for much of this construction because thousands upon thousands of the broken clay bricks which survive in the ruins of ancient Babylon have Nebuchadnezzar’s name stamped upon them.

In addition to physically building up the city of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar also built the nation into an empire by his political and military conquests. His father, Nabopolassar, threw off the Assyrian yoke, freeing Babylonian forces to undertake more wide ranging campaigns. But it was his son, Nebuchadnezzar, who welded the conquests made in those campaigns into an empire.

Then, too, there is the matter of the length of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The foundation of the Neo-Babylonian Empire can be dated to 605 B.C., the year Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne. The demise of this empire can be fixed in 539 B.C., the year the Media-Persian army conquered Babylon. Since Nebuchadnezzar reigned for forty three years, his rulership spanned some two-thirds of the entire time the Neo-Babylonian Empire existed.

So Nebuchadnezzar had solid reasons for glorying in his achievements in terms of building the city of Babylon, building an empire, and ruling over it for much of the time it existed. There is, however, another side to his accomplishments, a darker side. If Assyrian practices are any example, much of the construction of the city of Babylon was carried out by slave laborers captured in various military campaigns. The extension of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire exacted a high cost in human lives—both of the defeated and of his own soldiers who died in battle.

It used to be thought that Nebuchadnezzar’s reign was one long, uninterrupted rule. But now that we possess his annals for the first eleven years of his reign, we know that in his tenth year there was a

revolt against him in Babylon. This revolt was so serious that even in the palace there was hand-to-hand fighting in which the king himself was involved! Nebuchadnezzar's achievements may have been impressive, but they came with a high price tag for many of his subjects—some of whom were not entirely peaceful and accepting of his rule.

In spite of the suffering his projects had cost, Nebuchadnezzar could still boast about his own greatness and the greatness of his accomplishments. But the heavenly watchers recorded his boasting and pride. The whole picture of what these accomplishments had cost in terms of human suffering was open before God, and He did not approve. Nebuchadnezzar was raising himself up to an almost quasi divine status, like the figure of the king of Babylon who represents the devil in Isaiah 14:12-15.

Now Nebuchadnezzar was to receive his deserved punishment predicted in the prophetic dream of a year earlier. Now he would be cast down to the ground and take his position with the lowliest of the low, with the animals themselves. He had had a full year of probation in which to repent of what he had done and his pride in it, but he made no such move toward the true God. Now it was time for his sentence to be carried out.

It is true that Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder, "but He that built all things is God," and He it was who conferred upon Nebuchadnezzar all his ability. But this ability to build up is not to be used in providing a palace for one's self, in erecting a Babylon, with its temple of Belus, but in restoring and rebuilding the temple of the living God, which has been so sadly marred by sin. "Ye are God's building." "Whose house are we." The gifts of God are given "for the building up of the body of Christ."

In acknowledging that all our powers of body and mind are the gifts of God, and in consecrating them all to His service, we become "laborers together with God" in the building of Jerusalem, the city of the living God. Babylon and its builders will come to nought, but "as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever."

Daniel 4:31. "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."

It is through the mind that man is allied to God, and he is to serve God with all his mind. This power and privilege of fellowship with

God, this ability to know God, placed him but a little below the angels in the scale of being, and gave him dominion “over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The loss of this power of fellowship, or the refusal to make the right use of it, will result in the loss of his place of dominion. This is the lesson of Nebuchadnezzar’s experience. God permitted the result of his rejection of the former instruction sent to him to appear in a sudden and marked manner, as a final personal appeal to him, and as an object lesson for all time to come. He lost his kingdom, because he lost that power by which every man retains his place as ruler. He was driven from the society of men, because he was no longer a man among men.” Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish,” and so his dwelling became with the beasts of the field.

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.”

Even when Nebuchadnezzar sat upon the throne in Babylon, clothed with the royal apparel, with all the outward indications of authority, and prided himself upon the glory of his own achievements, the King of heaven, who looks not upon the outward appearance but upon the heart, estimated him at his true worth, and saw that apart from the splendid gifts of mind and reason which He Himself had bestowed upon him, he was simply as a beast of the field. This fact was then revealed to all the world, by withdrawing from him those gifts for a time, during which Nebuchadnezzar, as a natural result of the traits and habits which he revealed, had his dwelling with the beasts of the field, ate the food which was given to the beasts in the beginning, and became in a large degree conformed in outward appearance to other irrational animals. Thus was to be taught to Nebuchadnezzar, and to all man for all time, that all those powers of the mind and soul which distinguished man from the beast, and the possession of which in an unusual degree make men kings in the earth, are the direct gift of God, and that the greater the gift, the greater the obligation to glorify God in representing His character in the earth.

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."

The type of insanity to which Nebuchadnezzar was subjected is uncommon, but not unknown in modern psychiatric practice. The technical name for animal-like, or more specifically "wolf-like," behavior by human beings is *lycanthropy*.

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."

In view of the general situation that would exist in the case of a king who was incapacitated in this way for such a long period of time, the question arises: How did Nebuchadnezzar manage to hold on to his throne in spite of his madness? This would have been an ideal time for a usurper to assassinate the insane king and take the throne in his place.

The probable reason this did not happen has to do with the ancients' view of mental illness. They believed it was caused by demons, minor gods who were malevolent toward human beings. They also believed that if a person was deliberately killed while suffering from insanity, the demon god who had caused the mental illness would cause it to come upon the murderer. Thus no one would risk acquiring mental illness by killing a person so afflicted. Babylonian theology, or psychology, probably protected Nebuchadnezzar during the time of his incapacitation.

Several times the text gives the length of time the madness was to last as "seven times" (vss. 16, 23, 25). By a process of elimination, it can be seen that "years" is the only time unit with which the word "times" fits in this chapter. So it has been understood since pre-Christian times. The Greek Old Testament of Daniel chapter 4 translates this word as "years." Thus in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, "times" means "years." The king was to be incapacitated and insane for seven years.

We may consider the judgment severe, but it had the desired effect. At the end of the time, when Nebuchadnezzar came back to his normal senses, he also came back to a recognition and knowledge of the true God (compare 2:47; 3:28, 29). He acknowledged God in his psalm of praise at the beginning of the chapter (vss. 2, 3) and also in his song of praise at the end of the chapter (vss. 34, 35). Notice that

he glorified and praised the God of heaven *first* before he told about the return of his kingdom and his restoration to his position and power (vs. 34). He now saw divine and human affairs in their correct priority. In this entire recital, Nebuchadnezzar's closing statement was: "Those [like me] who walk in pride he [the Most High God] is able to humble" (vs. 37).

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?"

One of the questions we asked at the beginning of this chapter was this: Was God fair to judge Nebuchadnezzar in this way? And now we can see that the ultimate answer to that questions is Yes. It *was* fair of God. Even Nebuchadnezzar himself acknowledged that fact at the end of the story. While he was out with the animals, he probably was not able to see the great central fact of God in his experience. But when he was restored to his right mind and looked back over the entire affair, he could see God's hand in it all. At this juncture in his life he became a believer in the true God, in contrast with the false gods of polytheism he had worshiped previously.

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 counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me."

During the whole period of his life the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar had been fixed upon that which is earthly. The earthly kingdom, the earthly power, the earthly glory, had occupied his attention, and he had not looked at "those things which are unseen." The heavenly gifts had been perverted to earthly uses. But after seven years (times are years, see chap. xi. 13 and margin) during which he had experienced the result of debasing all the nobler powers in prostituting them to purely selfish ends, he turned his eyes from the earthly to the heavenly, and saw things in their true light. Looking as it were into the sanctuary of God, he saw the end of all that is human; and then his own attainments, big own glory, and his own dominion were lost in insignificance, and he glorified the ever-living One, whose dominion and kingdom, being simply the outshining of His life of righteousness, are like Himself, without end.

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."

First God showed him the history of all earthly kingdoms, and the end of all human greatness; then He taught in the deliverance of the three Hebrews the great truth that every man is a servant of the living God, and that He has the first claim upon his service; now that which has been revealed in the outward and visible kingdom, the kingdom outside of himself, was brought into his own experience, was applied to the kingdom within, and Nebuchadnezzar accepted the lesson and yielded himself to be of his own choice the Lord's servant, This very humbling of himself prepared the way for greater exaltation. As a steward of the Lord's gifts, he could be trusted with more than when he claimed all as his own, and sought only his own glory. Therefore he was replaced in his kingdom, and additional greatness was added unto him. Giving to God the place which belonged to Him as above all, raised Nebuchadnezzar to a higher position than he had before occupied, and established him in his kingdom, "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me; and prepareth a way that I may show him the salvation of God."

The same Gospel message which was preached to Nebuchadnezzar is now being proclaimed in all the earth. "Fear God and give glory to Him . . . and worship Him that made heaven, and earth; and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Those who receive this message, give to God the glory, and acknowledge Him as the Ruler of all, will be exalted to a greater dominion than was given to man at the first, and will be established in the kingdom. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be My son."