

## **Royal Testimony**

This chapter contains the remarkable testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar, the reigning monarch of the world, who now humbled himself before the King of the universe and acknowledged his dependence upon the Lord, "the Most High," the One who "rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Dan. 4:25).

Over the course of his long reign (605-562 B.C.) he had learned that the Hebrew God is a revealer of secrets (Dan. 2:28) and that He saves His faithful followers from the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:27, 29). Yet, his heart remained proud and independent. God, therefore, removed him from his throne and humbled him into the dust. After the recovery from his sickness, he submitted fully to God. The "once proud monarch had become a humble child of God."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

From the earliest times of the great controversy, when Satan first tried to be God (Isa. 14:12-14), up through the rise of the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3, 4), and until the final crisis over worship (Rev. 14:9-11), humankind in one way or another, has wanted to be God. This trait was seen in Nebuchadnezzar, as well.

Nebuchadnezzar's second dream was not about an image but about a tree. This tree was so tall that it seemed to reach into heaven and could be seen from any part of the globe. Its immense size and spreading branches displayed its powerful influence.

"The tree symbolism was not strange to Nebuchadnezzar. Herodotus tells of the case of Astyages, Nebuchadnezzar's brother-in-law, who had also dreamed of a tree symbolizing his dominion over part of the world.

Nebuchadnezzar himself, in an inscription, compares Babylon to a great tree sheltering the nations of the world." Quoted by J. Doukhan, in *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 63.

In Daniel 4 the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is symbolized by the tree in the midst of the earth (vs. 22), highlighting its importance. Babylon was approximately in the centre of the then known world.

The king then sees "a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven" (vs. 13, NK110). Throughout history God has been the Holy "Watcher" who cares for His people. The prophet Hanani reminded King Asa that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the Holy Watcher was "similar in appearance to the One who walked with the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace."—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 1, 1881.

The stump and the band refer to Nebuchadnezzar's preservation, despite his humiliation. He was to be restored as king after he came to know God. During his madness, he also may have been bound with a bronze chain to restrict his movements. There is some evidence for a Mesopotamian custom of putting metal bands on trees, whether to prevent them from cracking or for some other reason that is not clear.

Remnants of a tree with bronze rings or bands were unearthed at Khorsabad, at the entrance to the temple of [the sun god] Shamash. (See J. J. Collins, Daniel [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], p. 226.)

Though they share much in common, a few crucial differences exist between the two stories. One of the most striking is that, in Daniel 4, the king doesn't threaten anyone with death. Though he has a long way to go spiritually, perhaps what we see here is a bit of the sanctifying process of God working on him. He no longer wants to kill those who don't satisfy his every whim.

Daniel was troubled because of the gravity of the situation. How do you tell the king that he will become insane for seven years? Yet, he had to tell him the truth, whatever the consequences. The counsel that Daniel eventually gave indicates that the king could still avoid the threatened judgment. God intended the king to learn a certain lesson from this dream; or, if not from that, from the experience it forecast. Then, when the lesson was learned, his kingdom would be restored to him.

God's rulership was the lesson God had been seeking to teach the king from the beginning. Some thirty years earlier Daniel had told the king, " 'the God of heaven has given you a kingdom'" (Dan. 2:37, 38, NKI19, but Nebuchadnezzar had set up an image of gold to declare his independence from the Most High. In other words, he had refused to accept God's sovereignty. Now he was given another opportunity to learn this lesson, but again he failed.

Pride goes before destruction. This Bible study is about King Nebuchadnezzar's pride, downfall, and conversion. This study will breakdown Daniel chapter 4 verse by verse to examine King Nebuchadnezzar's dream about a great tree that reached to the heavens and was later chopped down. The dream troubles him and of all the wise men, only Daniel interprets the king's dream. The dream is a foreshadowing of what is going to happen to the king because of his pride; and despite Daniel's advice to turn from his ways, the king continues down his destructive path. The dream was not just for the king but to inform all the inhabitants of the world throughout history of an important truth. We'll examine the details of what happens to the king and how/why he is later restored and blessed by God. We'll identify several critical lessons that warn us of pride and how we can avoid falling into its destructive path.

### **Message of Daniel Chapters 1-4**

Daniel Chapters 1 – 4: reveal a God who is in absolute control of history:

#### **Chapter 1:**

The Hebrews were taken captive to Babylon because 'God gave them' into the king's hand (Daniel 1:1, 2). God also gave them wisdom and understanding.

#### **Chapter 2:**

Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon because God placed him there (Daniel 2:37, 38). It is God who determines how history will flow and it is He who will establish a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. Only a God who is able to reveal the future history of the world can mold events so that they reach the climax which He has established (see Isaiah 46:9, 10).

### **Chapter 3:**

When the king flexed his muscles and attempted to change God's perspective of history (God's times) and kill everyone who did not agree, God showed him that his power is limited—there were three young men who would not bow to the king's authority. When the king threw them into the furnace God overturned their death sentence by personally delivering them from the fire.

### **Chapter 4:**

This chapter reveals, in multiple ways, that God is in control of history (Daniel 17, 24-26, 32, 34, 35 and 37). God took away the king's throne, preserved it while he was insane and then restored it to him at the end of the seven times. Notice carefully some of the expressions used in this chapter: "they shall" (verses 25 and 32), "was driven" (verse 33) "was established", "was added" (verse 36). These passive verbs indicate that someone besides the king is doing these things. And who is doing it? The answer is in verse 17: the Watchers from heaven.

Why do nations rise and fall? Daniel's counsel to Nebuchadnezzar gives the answer to this question (see Daniel 4:27). Notice also the following verses on why nations fall (Proverbs 14:34; 16:12; 20:28; Psalm 33:12).

### **Lessons from Daniel 4**

We are confronted with various diseases, among them mental and psychological illnesses. Depression has become a specific problem in our days. In Daniel 4 we read about King Nebuchadnezzar for the last time, and he is suffering from a mental disease.

#### **I. Discussion of the Chapter**

##### **A. The Frame**

The Aramaic text begins in Dan 3:31 while in English versions that Dan 3:31 is Dan 4:1. We will follow the English verse numbering.

vs. 1–3 The following report is Nebuchadnezzar's autobiography. What do these introductory words reveal about Nebuchadnezzar's relationship to God?

- He respects God as the One who is the Most High.
- He testifies to God's work in him.
- He acknowledges God's universal and eternal rule.

v. 37 Nebuchadnezzar's report ends with a doxology.

##### **B. The Dream and the Problem of Its Interpretation**

vs. 4, 5 Having reached the climax of his power, Nebuchadnezzar receives a second dream from God. The dream is terrifying.

vs. 6–9 The wise men cannot interpret the dream, although this time the dream is related to them (compare with Dan 2). Again Daniel is brought to solve the problem. The phrase "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" underlines the high esteem Daniel enjoyed. It is strange that people do not rely on God immediately; instead they first try to solve problems themselves.

v. 8 What does “according to the name of my god” express?

- Nebuchadnezzar had somehow acknowledged the true God (Dan 2 and 3) and yet adhered to his own god(s).
- There was no true conversion.
- Maybe for him the almighty God was one among many gods.

### C. The Dream

vs. 10–18 The dream refers to a tree that is to be cut down. A heavenly being announces the judgment on the tree. The tree is a symbol, for we hear about a human heart that will be replaced by the heart of a beast. A time span is given for this “beastly” condition.

v. 17 The main thought of the chapter is that God is the highest authority. He is the Lord of history and the Lord of humankind. This concept appears repeatedly in Daniel (2:21; 3:33; 4:17, 25, 26, 32, 34, 35, 37).

### D. The Interpretation

v. 19 How does this verse describe Daniel?

- He does not rejoice over Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment. Instead he feels sorry about what is to happen to him.
- He cares for the king.

How few bear in mind that the tempter was once a covering cherub, a being whom God created for His own name’s glory. Satan fell from his high position through self-exaltation; he misused the high capabilities with which God had so richly endowed him. He fell for the same reason that thousands are falling today, because of an ambition to be first, an unwillingness to be under restraint. The Lord would teach man the lesson that, though united in church capacity, he is not saved until the seal of God is placed upon him.

The Lord has a work for us all to do. And if the truth is not rooted in the heart, if the natural traits of character are not transformed by the Holy Spirit, we can never be collaborators with Jesus Christ. Self-will constantly appear, and the character of Christ will not be manifested in our lives.—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 969.

Speaking of Satan, the Lord declares that he abode not in the truth. Once he was beautiful, radiant in light. But God’s Word declares of him, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty.”

Satan instigated others to rebel, and after they were cast out of heaven he bound them together in a confederacy to do all the evil possible to man, as the only means of striking God. Excluded from heaven, he resolved to be avenged by injuring the workmanship of God... .

Satan’s aim had been to reproduce his own character in human beings. No sooner was man created than Satan resolved to efface in him the image of God, and to place his stamp where God’s should be. And he has succeeded in instilling into the heart of man the spirit of envy, of hatred, of ambition. In this world he has set up a kingdom of darkness, of which he, the leader in guilt, is prince. He desired to usurp the throne of God. Failing in this, he has worked in darkness, in crookedness, in deception, to usurp his place in the

hearts of men. He has set up his throne between God and man, to appropriate the adoration that belongs to God alone.—Ellen G. White Comments, in The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1911.

God's work of refining and purifying must go on until His servants are so humbled, so dead to self, that, when called into active service, their eye will be single to His glory. He will then accept their efforts; they will not move rashly, from impulse; they will not rush on and imperil the Lord's cause, being slaves to temptations and passions and followers of their own carnal minds set on fire by Satan. Oh, how fearfully is the cause of God marred by man's perverse will and unsubdued temper! How much suffering he brings upon himself by following his own headstrong passions! God brings men over the ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility and a transformation of character bring them into harmony with Christ and the spirit of heaven, and they are victors over themselves.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 86.