

# A Bible Adventure

Edition 03

July 2nd, 2021

## The Humbled King

*A retelling of Daniel 4*

Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, stood with his queen amid the rooftop gardens of his imperial palace and gazed out over the capital of Babylon. The setting sun was casting a golden light on the tops of the glorious buildings and temples in the distance.

“It is so good to be back home,” he said, his face beaming.

“It’s good to have you back, my lord,” the queen replied. “You were gone for many months on your last conquest.”

“Ah, and such great conquests they were, my dear. You should have seen me lead my armies as we swept into Palestine and the nations of Jordan. Nothing could withstand me! We absolutely crushed their armies, battered down their city walls, and burned their palaces. Never has there been an empire as great as mine ... er, *ours*, or a conquering king as glorious and mighty as me.”

“You also brought back much wealth and riches.”

“Yes,” said the king, “and *slaves!* I am going to put

several thousand of them to work in beautifying Babylon.”

“Yet how wonderful it already looks,” said the queen. “Never has there been a greater or more magnificent city in the entire world.”

Nebuchadnezzar took a deep breath and smirked. “And I intend to see that it becomes even *more* glorious,” he said. “With more slaves, I can push the work along even faster now.”

After a hearty feast and several glasses of wine, Nebuchadnezzar and his

queen retired to bed, and the great monarch, ruler of Babylon and the world, drifted off to sleep. Elsewhere in the city, men and women of many nationalities, shivering from the cold and exhausted from their day’s labor, fell asleep on rough straw mats. How quickly the night passed for them. Before the sun rose, they were summoned to get up, and after eating a meal of bread and soup, they were herded out to labor. With their blood, sweat, and tears, they built Babylon, the most magnificent city on earth.

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Just after sunrise that morning, an important official in his late forties was walking down the famous Processional Way, Babylon's main avenue. As he was passing through the Ishtar Gate, a chariot came racing toward him. The horses were abruptly reined in and stopped beside him.

"Daniel, get in!" an aged Jewish nobleman called out. "King Nebuchadnezzar wishes to see you right away."

Lord Belshazzar, known to his Hebrew friends as Daniel, climbed into the chariot beside his friend Abednego, and the chariot raced back toward the royal palace. As soon as he arrived at the palace steps, a dozen guards escorted him into the king's throne room.

Magicians and astrologers were muttering around the throne, but as Daniel entered, King Nebuchadnezzar put

them all out of his chamber. "Come. Come here, Belshazzar," he said.

Daniel bowed and approached the throne. "What is it, O king?"

"Early this morning, I had an incredible dream—a nightmare," the king replied, wide-eyed with fear. "As I was lying in my bed, the visions that had passed through my head terrified me.

"But I don't understand what it meant. I told my dream to all the wise men of Babylon—the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners—but they could not interpret it.

"But you, Belshazzar, are master of the magicians. I know that the spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Many years ago, you were able to tell me the meaning of my dream of the great shining

image. Perhaps you will be able to do so again. So ... here then is my dream:

"In the midst of the earth before me stood a very tall tree. It grew large and strong and so high that its top touched heaven; it was visible to the very ends of the earth. It had beautiful leaves and abundant fruit with food for all. The beasts of the field found shelter under it, and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches, and all beings on earth were fed by it."

Then Nebuchadnezzar's face grew pale and sweat beaded on his face as he relived the experience: "Then in my vision, I looked, and a watcher stood before me. Not a normal watchman such as guards a city wall, but..."

The king's voice dropped in awe. "It was a holy one, an angel descending from heaven.

"Then the watcher cried out: 'Cut down the tree and chop off his branches; shake off his leaves and scatter his fruit! Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds fly from his branches! Nevertheless, let the stump and his roots be bound with iron and bronze and remain in the ground, in the 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!'"

Trembling, Nebuchadnezzar paused, caught his breath and continued: "Then the watcher commanded, 'Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of a beast, until seven times pass over him. The sentence is decreed by the watchers; the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He wishes and sets over them the lowest of men!'"

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“That is my dream, Belteshazzar. Now, tell me what it means.”

Daniel sat down deep in prayer and thought, and as the meaning of the king’s dream came to him, he was astonished and greatly troubled. He knew that the king would not be pleased with his answer, but he also knew that he must tell him the truth for his own good.

“Do not let the dream or its meaning trouble you,” Nebuchadnezzar said, seeing Daniel’s anxious expression. “Tell me what it means.”

“My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries,” Daniel reverently replied. “The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to

the whole earth ... is *you*. You have become great and strong. Your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth, from Persia all the way to the border of Egypt.

“Here then is the interpretation of the watcher’s words, O king, the decree the Most High has issued against you:

“You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild beasts. You will eat grass like oxen and be drenched with the dew of heaven for seven years, until you know that the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to anyone He wishes.

“The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will

be restored to you when you acknowledge that heaven rules over the earth.”

Daniel knew only too well that this message had been given to the king because Nebuchadnezzar had great pride in thinking that he alone had built the city of Babylon and the Babylonian Empire.

Hoping that King Nebuchadnezzar would change or repent so that he wouldn’t have to endure such an ordeal, Daniel went on to say, “O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Maybe then your tranquility and prosperity will continue.”

The stunned King Nebuchadnezzar sat for a long time quietly pondering what Daniel had said. These

were bold words for any man alive to say to the ruler of the world—even someone whom he respected as much as Daniel.

After several months, however, any fear that the dream might have given him must have faded, because Nebuchadnezzar became even more haughty and tyrannical.

A year passed, and one morning as he was strolling on his palace roof, Nebuchadnezzar looked out over the great city that he had built. He thought of the great golden temple to his god, Marduk, and of the fifty-three different temples and eighty altars to the gods that he had spent so much time and expense building and decorating. He thought of his palace—the most magnificent building on earth—and of how he was living in luxury unsurpassed by any king on earth.

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*Never had there been—and never would there be—a city as magnificent and glorious as Babylon, he mused.*

Then Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Is not this the great Babylon that I have built as my royal residence by my might and for the glory of my majesty?”

The words were still on his lips when a voice boomed from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, O King Nebuchadnezzar: the kingdom is departed from you, and you shall be driven from people, and your dwelling shall be with the wild beasts. You shall be made to eat grass like oxen, and seven years shall pass

over you until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will.”

Suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar staggered dizzily and fell to the floor. In that same hour, the prophecy was fulfilled upon him. Nebuchadnezzar was driven from people and ate grass as oxen do, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.

Seven long years passed, and one day something clicked inside Nebuchadnezzar’s mind, and his sanity was restored. Realizing all that had happened to him, he

raised his eyes toward heaven and began to praise and honor the Most High God.

With tears streaming down his face, he said: “His dominion is an eternal dominion; His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are esteemed as nothing in His sight. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: ‘What are you doing?’”

Within a day, all his advisers and nobles came to him and, seeing the king in his right mind, restored him to his throne. His honor and splendor was reestablished,

and he became a greater king than before.

Nebuchadnezzar was so changed that he wrote a letter to the Babylonian world and had it translated into every language in his empire, confessing his sin and proclaiming his faith in God. This official letter of public apology is preserved in the Bible in the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel.

His letter ends with this proclamation: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, extol and honor the King of heaven, because all His works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those who walk in pride He is able to abase.”<sup>1</sup>

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See “Heroes of the Bible: Daniel” for more on this fascinating Bible character.

**Footnote:**

<sup>1</sup> Daniel 4:37 KJV