

# Nebuchadnezzar's Judgment



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 4.*

**Memory Text:** “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase” (*Daniel 4:37, NKJV*).

**H**arry Truman was the caretaker of a recreation lodge on Spirit Lake, five miles north of Mount St. Helens' smoke-enshrouded peak in Washington State, U.S.A. Harry had been warned by rangers and neighbors that the mountain was going to explode. Warnings blared from loudspeakers on patrol cars and helicopters and blinked from battery-powered signs at every major crossroad. Radio and television announcers pleaded with their audiences to flee. Harry Truman ignored them all. He grinned on national television and said, “Nobody knows more about this mountain than Harry, and it don't dare blow up on him.” On May 18, 1980, at 8:31 A.M., the mountain exploded, flattening everything for 150 square miles, including Harry, his cabin, and his cats.

Harry was warned but not forced. In a sense, it's the same with God and us: We're warned but not forced, even if those warnings can sometimes be very forceful. This week we'll take a look at one instance in which the Lord worked in a powerful way to get someone's attention.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was King Nebuchadnezzar's fundamental problem? What parallels exist between this chapter and Daniel 2?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 23.*

## A Royal Testimony (*Dan. 4:1-9*).

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, NKJV*). 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.

**Read** carefully the king’s words in Daniel 4:3, where he talks about God’s kingdom as an “everlasting kingdom.” Contrast those words with what happened in Daniel 3 and with Daniel’s interpretation of the dream in chapter 2 (*vs. 44*). What did the king seem to finally learn about humankind’s futile attempts at immortality apart from God?

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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.

**Go back** through everything we’ve read about Nebuchadnezzar so far. In what ways was he trying to be God or, at least, playing the role of God?

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You don’t need to be a proud, powerful monarch in order to fall into this trap of trying to be God. In what ways, often very subtle, can anyone, rich or poor, weak or powerful, be tempted to play God? Why is falling broken before the Cross the only sure remedy against this dangerous spiritual trap?

## **Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream** (*Dan. 4:10-18*).

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.

**Read Daniel 4:10-17. What was the dream about? What sequence of events happened in the dream? And what does the dream itself say about the purpose of the dream?**

“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 center of the then known world.

The king then sees “a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven” (*vs. 13, NKJV*). 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, NKJV*). 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.)

**Read Daniel 4:17. What do you understand those words spoken to the king to mean? Why must the “living” know these things? What comfort does knowing these things give you? At the same time, what difficult questions does this knowledge raise?**

## **Daniel's Advice** (*Dan. 4:19-27*).

**Compare** Daniel 2 with Daniel 4:1-9. What are the parallels between the two events?

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.

**How** did the dream affect Daniel, and why was he so reluctant to speak? *Dan. 4:19.*

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.

**What** was it God wanted the king to understand? *Dan. 4:25.* Why would the Lord want him to know this?

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, NKJV*), 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.

**The king was someone given great privileges yet who flouted those privileges, someone whom the Lord had touched in a miraculous way and yet who still continued to defy Him. And yet, in all this, God wasn't going to give up on the king (see *Dan. 4:27*). What does this tell us about our God (*Exod. 34:6; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15*)? What hope does this offer to you, who in your own sphere might be guilty of the same thing as Nebuchadnezzar?**

## **The King's Humiliation** (*Dan. 4:28-33*).

**Why** did God punish Nebuchadnezzar when he exclaimed, “**Is not this the great Babylon I have built?**” (After all, it was true, he had built large parts of the city.) *Dan. 4:30, NIV*

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Babylon covered an area of approximately two square miles. The total length of its inner and outer walls was about thirteen miles long; the double wall fortifying the city measured more than ninety-six feet in width. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 795.) It was a religious center without rival. “A cuneiform tablet of Nebuchadnezzar’s time lists 53 temples dedicated to important gods, 955 smaller sanctuaries, and 384 street altars—all of them within the city confines.”—Page 797. The center of Babylon’s glory was the famous temple tower Etemenanki, dedicated to the god Marduk, which was 300 feet square at the base and more than three hundred feet high. In ancient times it was only surpassed by the two great pyramids at Giza in Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar’s reputation as a builder has been preserved in the writings of the Babylonian priest Berossus. (See Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.19.)

**As soon as the boastful words, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built?” (NIV), had left the monarch’s lips, judgment was meted out, and he became insane. What do we know about the sickness with which Nebuchadnezzar was afflicted?**

Nebuchadnezzar possibly suffered from a form of insanity in which a man thinks that he is an animal. It could have been lycanthropy, which is the wolf-man syndrome, or boanthropy, in which a person thinks he/she is an ox. A Babylonian cuneiform text, published in 1975, may refer to Nebuchadnezzar’s madness. The text states that the king gave contradictory orders, refused to accept counsel, showed love neither to son nor daughter, neglected his family, and no longer performed his duties as head of state. (See Siegfried H. Horn, in *Ministry*, April 1978, p. 40.)

**Read carefully verses 28-33 of Daniel 4. The exact thing that Nebuchadnezzar boasted about was the exact thing that he lost. What spiritual principle is seen here? What lessons can we, on a smaller scale, learn from this incident? Contrast what happened here with the story of the rich young ruler (*Matt. 19:16-23*). What differences do you see here in how the Lord dealt with these two people?**

## **Nebuchadnezzar's Conversion** (*Dan. 4:34-37*).

Royal conversions are unusual but not unknown. King Agbar of Edessa in Mesopotamia, it is said, became a Christian when the gospel was preached to him.

**What** were the important points of Nebuchadnezzar's "sermon" after God restored him to his throne? *Dan. 4:34, 35, 37.*

The return of reason is said to have come to the king with his recognition of the true God. "The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. . . .

"God's purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

**How** does Nebuchadnezzar's hymn of praise indicate that he had experienced a true conversion? *Dan. 4:34-37.*

There are a number of indicators to show that this conversion was genuine. (1) His desire to give God publicly the glory at the expense of his own humiliation shows that the once proud monarch no longer thought himself to be the greatest king on earth. (2) In chapter 3 he had defied the God of the Jews; now he acknowledged Him as the true God of heaven who held the king's destiny in His hand. (3) His selfishness and self-glorification gave way to concern for the glory of God.

True repentance and sorrow for sin denote that inward change of mind, affections, convictions, and commitment that leads to the outward turning from sin to God and His service.

**Notice carefully the language of Daniel 4:34-37. See the sense of the king's utter dependence upon God. Why is that attitude so crucial for anyone who seeks to serve the Lord? How does the Cross help us understand our total dependence upon God, especially for salvation?**

**Further Study:** Read the chapter entitled “True Greatness” in Ellen G. White’s *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 514–521.

“King Nebuchadnezzar, before whom Daniel so often honored the name of God, was finally thoroughly converted, and learned to ‘praise and extol and honour the King of heaven.’”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1170.

“God’s judgments against men may be averted by repentance and conversion (see *Isa. 38:1, 2, 5; Jer. 18:7-10; Jon. 3:1-10*). For this reason God announced the impending judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar but gave him a full year in which to repent, and thus avert the threatened calamity (see *Dan. 4:29*). However, the king did not change his way of life, and accordingly brought upon himself the execution of the judgment. . . . God forewarns peoples and nations of their impending doom. He sends a message to the world today, warning of its rapidly approaching end. Few may heed such warnings, but because adequate warning has been given them men will be without excuse in the day of calamity.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 792.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In the eyes of humankind, Nebuchadnezzar was one of the greatest kings in the ancient world; but in the eyes of God, what really constitutes greatness?
- 2** Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of individuals. Is there anything we can do to help a person who is under conviction to yield to God’s Spirit?
- 3** A theme seen in this chapter, as well as in some preceding it, is the sovereignty of God. Why is this such an important topic to understand? What role does the Sabbath play in helping us understand this crucial truth?

**Summary:** The experience of Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter is an illustration of the truth of Proverbs 29:23, “A man’s pride will bring him low” (*NKJV*). Yet, his public confession and his desire to give God the glory indicate that he had a true conversion experience.

# My Father Knows, Part 1

Homer Trecartin

No! Michelle silently pleaded. You can't want to be baptized! The color drained from Michelle's cheeks, and tears formed in her eyes. What could she say to this young girl?

Sixteen year old Anna had matured so much in the three years since her mother had been—Michelle couldn't bring herself to form the word—since her mother had died. Anna had her mother's fine features and that same peaceful, determined look that her mother, Sofia, had shown when she told Michelle she wanted to give her life to Jesus.

Anna and her brother, Hans, had been attending Michelle's "English" classes for children. It was more like a Vacation Bible School, and 40 or 50 children had come each week. They came from all backgrounds, and they enjoyed the singing and stories she shared with them.

When Anna and Hans didn't show up for two weeks, Michelle began to worry. Her translator seemed hesitant to share with her why the children weren't coming. Finally Michelle got impatient and said she would go to the home and talk with the parents herself.

A lovely woman met Michelle and her translator at the door. The woman introduced herself as Sofia and invited them in. Michelle noticed a Bible in the book shelf, and her hopes soared that Sofia was a Christian. But when Sofia excused herself and left the room, Michelle could hear angry voices in a heated argument.

Sofia seemed pale when she returned to the room with tea. Michelle realized her visit was awkward and not well planned. She had not asked her husband to go with her, and it had further alienated Sofia's Muslim husband.

Michelle told Sofia that she enjoyed having Hans and Anna at the "classes" and hoped they could return. Sofia made no promises, but the next week the children were at the meeting when the program began.

Several months passed, and Michelle felt her friendship with Sofia deepening. Sofia began attending the classes with her children. Then one day Sofia confided, "Michelle, I love Jesus. I want to give my heart to Him. I want to carry my Bible openly, not wrapped up in garbage paper. I want people to know I love Jesus!"

Tears of happiness filled Michelle's eyes as she hugged Sofia. She had made mistakes, but God had won the victory. But Michelle's happiness was short lived.

(continued next week)

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