

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR ... WHO SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

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. (Dan. 4:33)

poor man' He resembled a beast without a cage, an outcast deprived of his sanity. The tragedy was the result of personal stupidity; his desire for fame ran away with his brain. He should have known better!

## His Unparalleled Privileges... Convincing

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was among the world's greatest architects, engineers, and builders. Without the machines so commonplace today, he erected a city, which if it still existed would be the world's greatest tourist attraction. He was exceedingly wise, but not wise enough to understand that without God he was nothing.

The second chapter in the book of Daniel describes how the king saw a great image, and when the prophet explained its meaning, the monarch was informed he was the head of gold; his domain was superior to any other. It is not known if this encounter with Daniel was the king's introduction to Jehovah, but later events proved that, to some degree at least, knowledge of the Most High God commanded his attention. Daniel was a man of exceptional ability, a revealer of secrets, whose wisdom came from Jehovah.

Nebuchadnezzar witnessed the miraculous deliverance of three Hebrew boys who had been cast into the fiery furnace, and had seen the mysterious form of the Deliverer of whom it was said, "The form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25b). Finally, he had been given a vision of a great tree whose magnificence was destroyed. The prophet explained the meaning of the dream, saying, "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which

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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" (Dan. 4:24-25).

God was patient with the man who said, "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Dan. 3:29). Was this an excitable outburst, or a statement of faith? The king would have been a wiser man had he obeyed his own edict.

God always does His utmost to bring people to a knowledge of His truth. When men and women continue to ignore divine warnings they condemn themselves, and have no valid excuse for their conduct. Nebuchadnezzar should have known better!

## His Unsurpassed Pride ... Condemning

The king of Babylon was his greatest enemy; he enthroned his own ego! Daniel wrote, "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. 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?" (Dan. 4:29-30). It was significant that Jehovah waited and watched for twelve months as the king became increasingly self-

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centered. It was a year of grace when, unfortunately, Jehovah was forgotten by the monarch who worshipped at his own shrine.

As Nebuchadnezzar stood on the terraces of his elevated palace, the entire city could easily be seen. From the walls, which were four hundred feet high, he had a full view of greater Babylon. The city was foursquare, with a circumference of approximately sixty miles. Archaeologists state there were twenty-five streets that intersected each other. They were one hundred and fifty feet wide and fifteen miles long. There were one hundred brazen gates in the massive wall, which was three hundred feet high and eighty feet wide at the top. This enabled chariots drawn by four horses to pass each other in competitive races. The River Euphrates slowly made its way through the city, and there was a beautiful bridge that enabled people to cross from the palaces to the ornate temple on the other side of the water. The hanging gardens of Babylon are still considered to have been among the wonders of the

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world. When the king surveyed the scene, he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built'?" Unfortunately, his vision quickly faded, his pride diminished, and he became the most miserable of men. At a later date, Daniel reminded the successor Belshazzar why his predecessor had suffered such tragic losses: "But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne" (Dan. 5:20, emphasis mine).

This has happened many times throughout history. At frequent interval great leaders have dominated the nations; they were thought to be invincible. The world knows what happened to Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. Homes and empires that are erected on sand always collapse.

His Unique Predicament Confusing

"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" (Dan. 4:31). The news spread quickly that a strange malady had afflicted the monarch, but only the prophet expected what followed. The king was expelled from his palace, and no one had compassion for him. It was horrifying to see Nebuchadnezzar grazing with cattle and lying with them at night. Filthy, untrimmed hair covered his shoulders, and even the nails on his toes and hands resembled talons.

Later, when the man regained his sanity, he said, "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me" (Dan. 4:34a). This infers that during the long ordeal he was not aware of his predicament. He was another kind of man, a lost soul struggling through a maze of mental anguish. All appreciation of normal food had been lost, and he had no desire to be with other human beings.

Did the Savior think of this king when He told the story of the Prodigal Son who abandoned his father and home? The Lord indicated that the true personality of the wayward boy was overshadowed by the depravity that compelled him to seek the food and company of swine. He who had known the warmth of a father's home became insensitive to such luxuries. "He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him" (Luke 15:16). It was illuminating when Jesus said, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17).

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It is wonderful to remember that in spite of human tragedies, God never forgets that beneath the disappointing exterior is a soul capable of restoration. When a fallen sinner recognizes his plight and remembers

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his father's home, the impossible becomes reachable. David said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121:1). God may appear to lose us—but He never loses sight of us. He knows where we are at all times, even when we appear to be irretrievably lost.

His Unexpected Pardon ... Conferred

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 honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: . . . At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase. (Dan. 4:34, 36-37)

It seemed to the king that he had awakened after a long and terrifying nightmare. When his sanity returned, he looked at his unkempt body, his long, matted hair, and his claw-like fingernails and wondered if he were dreaming. He stared at his horrifying appearance, but as his mind cleared he began to praise the God of heaven: his ordeal had terminated. As the news of the king's recovery spread through the palace, noblemen ran to greet their old master and shock waves of delight swept through the city. Crowds gathered before the palace, and when the king appeared before his subjects, onlookers were ecstatic. Nebuchadnezzar could hardly speak, but later when he dictated his memoirs to a scribe, he said, "And excellent majesty was added unto me."

Many years later, when the prophet Joel addressed Israel, he repeated one of the greatest promises ever made by Jehovah: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm; my great army which I sent among you" (Joel 2:25). It is worthy of attention that the prophet spoke of the years that the locust had eaten. Locusts do not eat time! They devour

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ears of corn or any other vegetation they encounter. Yet all the translators retain the word years. The Amplified Bible renders the passage, "And I will restore or replace for you the years that the locust hath eaten, the hopping locust; the stripping locust; and the crawling locust. My great army which I sent among you."

Joel evidently was referring to the material losses suffered when the invading enemies ruined crops and devastated the land. God promised to restore what had been lost; the impoverished Hebrews would be recompensed. The story of Job and how he ultimately received twice as much as he had lost provides an excellent example of God's ability to fulfill His promises. Nebuchadnezzar's return to his throne provides another example of the miracles that God can perform.

I shall always remember a man who came to me at the close of one of my evangelistic meetings. He was very disturbed when he described the continuing mistakes made during his lifetime. Repeatedly, he had refused to obey his conscience, and "had wasted his substance with riotous living." Finally, the word of God prevailed, but the peace of God was hard to retain for he was continually harassed by memories of former indiscretions. I listened for a long time, but finally said, "My brother, stop worrying. God promised to restore the years which the locusts have eaten." My friend apparently had never read that text, and asked for an explanation. When I told him that God could make up for the time that had been lost, that He could and would—with the man's

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help create new opportunities for service and supply the spiritual  
power necessary for successful endeavor, he still had difficulty  
believing what was being spoken. He said, "Show me that text." When  
I did, the man's eyes began to gleam. The following evening he shouted  
across the pews in the church, "He can restore what the locusts have  
eaten!" That grateful Christian had discovered a source of spiritual  
wealth that he never knew existed.

Millions of men and women have shared that experience. Continued  
failure begets disgust, disgrace, and despair. Ultimately discouraged  
people hear a sinister voice suggesting the abandoning of everything  
noble. Some people contemplate suicide as a way of release from a  
troubled conscience. It is wise to remember that the Savior stands before  
such folk with His arms outstretched. When He is permitted to help,  
the Lord can lift beggars from the dunghill and set them among princes  
(see 1 Sam. 2:8).

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