



## Pride and Power

*The Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he wills.*

Daniel 4:32b

Daniel chapter 4 records the most dramatic press release by a ruler of a powerful empire in the entire history of this world. It was issued from the palace of Babylon (located very near to the town of Hillah in modern Iraq). The message was composed and declared by the most powerful emperor of his lifetime, and it is preserved for us in remarkable detail.

Nebuchadnezzar had personally conquered nations from India to Greece, all of the Fertile Crescent (east of the Mediterranean Sea) and parts of North Africa. These regions he absorbed within his own Babylonian Kingdom. Three times his armies defeated Judah and Jerusalem to make his dominion emphatic and complete. As a result select men from leading families of Judah served in the administration of this ruler who was so feared throughout the civilized world.

When men are dictators, kings, prime ministers, or presidents of prestigious world powers, their palaces and official offices are carefully watched by the public. Emissaries from other nations are coming and going, ever seeking audiences with the local chief of state. Word spreads quickly as to whether a ruler is present at his seat of government or if he has gone elsewhere for business or relaxation.

In this case, late in his life, the world-conquering monarch had been out of sight for a considerable time. His advisers and servants were not talking of his whereabouts. No decrees or messages were given out to his subjects. No diplomatic missions were received. The ruler appeared at no public or social events. Many of his own officials knew nothing of the emperor's affairs.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Personally Reports His Recent Experience**

Usually such dropping out of sight by powerful figures produces speculation and rumours. 'Is something wrong?' Are they covering up a debilitating illness? 'Has there been a coup?' We know that none of his divisions of soldiers has marched off with him to war. As curiosity about the lengthy, mysterious silence rose to great heights, a palace announcement from the emperor himself was issued.

The emperor admitted that for months he had been living in the fields of his estate, thinking himself to be a mere animal! He would not come into the palace even at night but slept in the open with dew forming on his body. During this time he had refused the fare prepared by his royal cooks, choosing rather to eat grass with the livestock. He had become very unkempt. His nails were claw-like. His matted and uncombed hair had a feathery appearance. For this long period of public silence he had been out of his mind. He had lost his sanity! Now His Majesty wished to make this sensational news public information, even though its content was, to put it mildly, humbling for him.

There is much more to this riveting report: The entire episode in the ruler's life had been clearly predicted an entire year before he went mad! The prediction had issued from a God unfamiliar to Babylonians. Yet the emperor now called this God 'The Holy God', 'The Most High God', 'The King of Heaven'.

The Most High had communicated to the Emperor in a dream a year before he had become insane. What is more, details of this mysterious dream were included in the news release. The interpretation of the dream by Daniel, a special servant of the Most High God, was provided. This was no terse statement but a document designed to give detailed information. We still have the document in our 21st century. It is not a myth, but rather a stunning occurrence in the history of this world.

Twelve months had passed between the coming of the frightening dream with its alarming interpretation and the actual fulfilment in Nebuchadnezzar's life. No doubt as time had gone by the strength of the dream's impact on the mind of the king had diminished. Nebuchadnezzar's personal account of the onset of his derangement points to an hour when he was surveying with self-satisfaction the results of his lifetime accomplishments. Under his reign massive power and wealth had been gathered for Babylon. Exquisite artistic works would have been accumulated during his time on the throne.

The *instant* before the Holy God inflicted insanity on the mighty and successful ruler, the emperor had been musing: *'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?'* While the words were still in the king's mouth the voice of the King of heaven announced to him, *'The kingdom has departed from you!'* At once he was compelled to live with the beasts of the field and to graze for meals of grass.

### **The Emperor's Testimony of the Impact of These Events on Him**

The ruler of most of the civilized world wanted to publish to the world how this astounding experience had changed him. It had entirely altered his outlook on reality and on his personal place in that reality. *'At the end of the days (of his madness) I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven'* (Dan. 4:34). Beforehand his attention had been riveted to the earth. Now he saw that heaven, the dwelling place of the Most High, was the centre point of our world. Furthermore the king professed, *'I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives forever.'* This God who had touched his life so profoundly is the Supreme Being. In contrast to men, who live but a few years and then depart this earth, the Holy God is eternal. *'Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven'* (Dan. 4:37). He was now devoted to the worship of the only living and true God!

As a result of this revolutionary change of heart the rule of the vast kingdom of Babylon was restored to him. Subordinate rulers sought his presence and counsel again. The greatness of his kingdom increased yet more (Dan. 4:36). His officers, who had once bowed to him and deferred to him, but who, during the lengthy madness of the king, had looked on him with pity and revulsion, now found even greater delight than ever before in serving him.

### **The Key Lesson of This Supernatural Incident**

*'Those who walk in pride the King of heaven is able to humble'* (Dan. 4:37). Nebuchadnezzar had been humbled at the moment when he had become arrogant in the expression of his own wisdom, might and dominion. Now self-admiration was replaced with humility as he bowed before the Holy God. No longer was the king captivated by his own works. Rather, *'All the works of the King of heaven are righteous and his ways are just'* (Dan. 4:37). He affirmed that even the humiliating chastisement for his own sinful thoughts by the Most High was righteous and just. He was now filled with a lowliness of spirit. Now the king was *'no longer living for himself but for the Lord of eternity'* (2 Cor. 5:15). In this palace declaration he humbled himself and exalted the Most High. The emperor had become altogether of a different heart and was unashamed to declare it.

If sufficient attention is given to all the Scriptures it will be discovered that this is the leading principle of God's work in shaping the history of our universe. *'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'* (Prov. 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5, Luke 1:51-55). *'Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth'* (Psa. 46:10)! Western nations which pride themselves in not praising, extolling, and honouring the King of heaven are yet to be humbled before him, both their rulers and their populations.

In conjunction with this assertion of God's Word comes the repetitive advice, *'Submit yourselves therefore to God ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you'* (James 4:7, 10). *'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you'* (1 Pet. 5:6).

Scripture joins together very closely saving faith and humility. Matthew records for us the appeal that a Roman Centurion made to Jesus for the healing of his servant (Matt. 8:5-10). He called Jesus 'Lord' and humbly said, *'I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.'* Jesus marveled at him and said, *'I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.'*

Pride places confidence in oneself and thereby prevents our putting trust in God and his only-begotten Son. But when a person *'puts no confidence in the flesh'* (Phil. 3:2), the way is open to *'worship God in spirit'*. It is only possible to draw near to God when we are humbled. It is your great need!

## **The Proud Emperor Was Transformed into the Messenger of the Most High God**

We must be impressed by the lengths to which Nebuchadnezzar went to *'extol and honour the King of heaven'*. His description of divine majesty fills our hearts with wonder and awe. Earthly rulers hold dominion for a few years and die as do the weakest of men. Their powers and possessions so soon pass to other hands. But the Most High *'lives forever'* (Dan. 4:34). Therefore *'his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation'* (Dan. 4:34), Nebuchadnezzar tells us. Would you not like to enter this kingdom of the God who showers grace upon the humble forever?

In the sight of the Eternal and Holy God *'all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing'* (Dan. 4:35). Men are but brief shadows cast upon God's universal dominion. Isaiah spoke this truth before the 'prophet' Nebuchadnezzar did: *'Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales ... All nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness'* (Isa. 40:15-17).

However, this does not mean that God stands aloof from the earth! God is acting *'among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth'*. Both heaven and earth are under God's dominion. His kingdom stretches throughout the domains of all the inhabitants of heaven and of every corner of the earth, encompassing all their affairs.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke eloquently of the absolute sovereignty of God *'among the inhabitants of the earth.'* He does *'according to his will,'* both in heaven and in the earth; *'and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"'* (Dan. 4:35).

We speak too much of man's will. Of course man has the power to choose what he would like his life to be! But no man has the power actually to do what he wills. We cannot add an inch to our stature or a day to our longevity. We can neither become as wealthy as we would like nor attain the beauty and strength upon which we set our hearts. Too many other forces and wills prevent our purposes from coming to pass.

God also has a will. We should give much more attention to what he wills. For all that the Most High wills he does. He accomplishes every wish and decree. There is no being in heaven or on earth who can successfully prevent God's will from being done. That is the way it should be. His supreme dominion means that no one has the right to question what he has done. This is the testimony of one of the most powerful monarchs of all time. He was humbled to an extraordinary degree in the sanatorium of his own meadow! But the hand upon him was supreme in wisdom, power and justice. There must be no questioning him. He is answerable to no will contrary to his own! The execution of his will is a matter of divine privilege.

How far below the understanding of a king who lived twenty-seven centuries ago are the rulers and citizens of modern nations! It is inexcusable. The account of these things concerns events of great interest. It has been delivered and preserved in clear language through all the subsequent years of history. Yet, in man's proud will, attention is not given to these essential truths. Instead arrogant men still seek to silence the Most High and to prevent others from reading and hearing the message essential to our own day. The voice from heaven came not only to one ruler. It was recorded and passed down for every man to ponder. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

This continues to be universally true. So for you the issue is clear: Does God oppose you, or does he grant you grace?

Walter J Chantry