

Skiing is one of my favorite sports. I vividly remember two situations. Both happened some time ago when I sat on a 3-seater chairlift in Ischgl, one of the top regions for skiing.

The first situation: one of my neighbors on the chairlift said to the other one: "You know, when I heard through a phone call, how successful my project was, I had to lay down my phone, so that I could pat myself with both hands on my shoulders."

The second situation: a skier, obviously a beginner, inched his way in a snowplow to make a turn. The commentary of one of my neighbors: "Some never learn it, some even later."

Both situations can serve as an illustration of Daniel chapter 4. King Nebuchadnezzar had built an enormous empire: He crushed Egypt and Assyria, subdued Israel, took the elite and the golden vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem home to Baghdad. He ran his empire as an absolute monarch. However, he was warned in a dream that his empire had an expiration date (ch.2). Later, he had a tall golden statue erected that everybody had to revere (ch.3). In both cases he learned that there is God, a higher power. But he did not take the message to heart.

At the beginning of chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar, as the sovereign in Mesopotamia, addresses his subjects first by wishing them peace.

*<sup>1</sup>Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound!"*

This includes a prosperous life. The empire does well. Its finances are stable. Enemies don't bother or threaten the empire. Next he is patting himself on his shoulders:

*<sup>4</sup>"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.*

Does he experience peace? Does he experience inner peace? At least he thinks he does. He feels strong and explains to his subjects where the abundance came from. He mentions "the Most High God". From the wording one might conclude that he sees some other high gods and/or lesser gods. Nebuchadnezzar did not recognize in the previous chapters 2 and 3 that the dream and the miracle of the fiery furnace point to an all-powerful God who has no other gods next to Him. He did not learn the lesson. Instead he boasts.

We see here Nebuchadnezzar as an "I-person". I did it, I provided this splendid life. I made the peace happen... **N** was at ease = peace of the ungodly, focused on worldly achievements. This is false security. The story in the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel is a wonderful example that the Lord does not allow trees to grow as tall as heaven. The king, like many leaders is a narcissist, focused on himself. What is **N**'s problem? What was the driving force that led him? – Pride! Pride has existed since the beginning of history. Satan fell because of pride. He wanted to take God's place. **N** did the same. If you look for verses containing the word "pride" you will get more than 50 answers. Some are specific, some are more general. Here is a selection:

- *Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogance."*

- *Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride comes, then comes shame."*
- *Proverbs 16:5, "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."*
- *Proverbs.16: 18 - Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.*
- *Proverbs 21:4 - "A proud heart is sin."*
- *Proverbs 29:23 says, "A man's pride shall bring him low."*

I wonder if one person in Babylon wrote a "Dear God"-letter, like "Dear God, our king thinks he is You. Can you please fix this misconception?" As we will see in the rest of this chapter, God does deal with arrogance, He sends him a wake-up call in the form of a dream. In the Bible, God communicates to people through dreams. This might not be necessary anymore today. Sometimes I think it might solve problems, looking especially at autocratic rulers. There is one exception that I know of: Martin Luther King: "I had a dream." Nebuchadnezzar had one as well:

<sup>5</sup>*"I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.*

Therefore, **N** called for wise men, because he could not make rhyme or reason out of this narrative. Finally Daniel (Belteshazzar) arrived. Daniel is addressed with his Babylonian name because the king saw him as a link to his god, BEL. Here is the dream:

<sup>10</sup>*...there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. <sup>11</sup>The tree grew large and became strong And its height reached to the sky, And it was visible to the end of the whole earth. <sup>12</sup>Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all the beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it.*

A tree is often the symbol of a great ruler. See Ezek.17:22 and 31:3, Amos 2:9. Then

<sup>13</sup> *... an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. <sup>14</sup>He shouted out and spoke as follows: "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. <sup>15</sup>Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. <sup>16</sup>Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him.*

Interpreting:

- The expression "angelic watcher" may be new to you. Simply said it is a heavenly being, vigilant, a guardian and holy. In one word an angel.
- **N**'s mind will be changed to the one of a beast. No talking, no boasting, just figuring out where to get food. There are very, very rare cases, when a person thinks he/she is an animal. The figure of a werewolf is based on this feature. Thickening of hair and nails are observed, like here with **N**.
- The tree is still alive. The roots preserve the juice and in the next growing period shoots will sprout.
- The stump of the tree is held together.
- Seven times, see ch.7:25, time = year.

It is the same situation as in ch.2, only this time **N** is revealing the dream. The pagan wise men are unable to interpret, only Daniel does. Does this not sound familiar? (Situation 2: Some never learn it, some even later!) Daniel hesitated for a while, because he knew that to tell **N** the interpretation might upset the king. He felt sorry for Nebuchadnezzar. After a while he started the interpretation:

*<sup>20</sup>The tree that you saw, ... <sup>22</sup>it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.*

We find a similar situation in 2 Samuel 12:7: Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! ...”

*<sup>24</sup> ... O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: <sup>25</sup>that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. <sup>26</sup>And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.*

Daniel could not help but give his two cents:

*<sup>27</sup>Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’*

Nebuchadnezzar had a last chance. He did not realize that the dream could be fulfilled literally and immediately. And did the events mentioned in the dream happen? Yes, the king did not repent for 12 months. God gave him time. **N** was a hard case to convert.

*<sup>28</sup>“All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. <sup>29</sup>“Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. <sup>30</sup>“The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’*

Here the narrative changes from the first person to the third person. A drastic change happened. The prophecy was immediately fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar became an animal and grazed in the fields. Nebuchadnezzar became a vegan, unintentionally.

Abydenus, a Greek historian, wrote in 268 B.C. that Nebuchadnezzar was “possessed by some god” and that he had “immediately disappeared.” Psychiatrists may be able to identify the psychic state of the king. I would assume, he did not remember his glorious state. However, the king remembered the end of the seven year period. In this time the empire did not fall apart, though the tree as a symbol of his power was taken from him. The iron and bronze belt held the empire together. Normally you would expect that when the sovereign is gone people at the court would fight for the position of running the country. One speculation might be that Daniel replaced the king. He was promoted governor in ch.3 in the province of the capital Baghdad.

Some dismiss this account of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness as unhistorical, but there is no historical record of his governmental activity between 582 B.C. and 575 B.C. This silence is deafening, especially when we keep in mind how Near Eastern leaders liked to egotistically trumpet their achievements – and hide their embarrassments. [enduringword.com]

**N** woke up from his madness and worshipped. He looked up towards God and acknowledged now God as the real “Most High”

<sup>34</sup>*“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.<sup>35</sup>“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’*

The words from v3 “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation” are repeated in v34, but now they are not a formality but **N** really means what he says.

<sup>36</sup>*“At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup>“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”*

Nebuchadnezzar’s power and splendor was restored to him.

James 4:6 - *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

Life was as before in court. People respected him who was an animal for seven years.

What we learn from this passage?

- v17: God grants power to the rulers.  
Rom.13:1 *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*
- v26: Recognize that heaven rules.
- v27: Break away from your sins.
- v27: Show mercy to the poor.
- v27: Doing righteousness.
- v37: He humbles those who walk in pride.

Reward for Nebuchadnezzar was a prolonged prosperity. It is a lesson for us all; the ones who run a state, a company, a family. Take **N’s** experience to heart!

On a broader scale [©2018 David Guzik]:

- Nebuchadnezzar’s madness foreshadows the madness of Gentile nations in their rejection of God.
- Nebuchadnezzar’s fall typifies Jesus’ judgment of the nations.
- Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration foreshadows the restoring of some of these nations in the millennial kingdom.

A few verses from the OT may add some color to the topic of pride:

- *Ez.7:24 ...I will also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned.*

- *Is.13: 19 And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*
- *Is.23: 9 The LORD of hosts has planned it, to defile the pride of all beauty, to despise all the honored of the earth.*

Do you remember times in your life when you were proud of your achievements? To whom did you give the glory?

Klaus,

In but not of the field.

The structure of the passage

X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	v	interpretation	text
1			1	N's kingdom, peace abounds	<sup>1</sup> Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and <i>men of every</i> language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound!
2			2-4	N praises God	<sup>2</sup> "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> "How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders!His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation. <sup>4</sup> "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.
3			5-19a	warning against self-exaltation	
	1		5	the alarming dream, 'on his bed'	<sup>5</sup> "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and <i>these fantasies as I lay</i> on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.
	2		6-9	interpretation sought	
	1		6-7	Chaldeans can't interpret	<sup>6</sup> "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. <sup>7</sup> "Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.
	1'		8-9	D should interpret	<sup>8</sup> "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, <sup>9</sup> "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.
3			10-17	the dream narrated	
	1		10-12	the tree flourishing, growing large	<sup>10</sup> "Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. <sup>11</sup> "The tree grew large and became strong And its height reached to the sky, And it was visible to the end of the whole earth. <sup>12</sup> "Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. the beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it.
	2		13-16	the tree chopped down	<sup>13</sup> "I was looking in the visions in my mind <i>as I lay</i> on my bed, and behold, an <i>angelic</i> watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. <sup>14</sup> "He shouted out and spoke as follows: "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. <sup>15</sup> "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze <i>around it</i> in the new grass of the field; and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. <sup>16</sup> "Let his mind be changed from <i>that of</i> a man and let a beast's mind be given to him, and let seven periods of time pass over him.

	1'	17	God ruling, in power	<sup>17</sup> “This sentence is by the decree of the <i>angelic</i> watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.”
	2'	18	N asks D for interpretation	<sup>18</sup> This is the dream <i>which</i> I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell <i>me</i> its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.’
	1'	19a	D alarmed, D comforts	<sup>19</sup> “Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.’
4		19b-28	N as the focus of the dream/lesson	
	1	19b	the dream concerns N	Belteshazzar replied, ‘My lord, <i>if only</i> the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!
	1	20-22	the rise of power	<sup>20</sup> The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth <sup>21</sup> and whose foliage <i>was</i> beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which <i>was</i> food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged— <sup>22</sup> it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.
	2	23-25	the fall	<sup>23</sup> In that the king saw an <i>angelic</i> watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, “Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze <i>around it</i> in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him,” <sup>24</sup> this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: <sup>25</sup> that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.
	1'	26	the restoration	<sup>26</sup> And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that <i>it is</i> Heaven <i>that</i> rules.
	2	27	D's advice, the lesson to be learned	<sup>27</sup> Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by <i>doing</i> righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to <i>the</i> poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.’
	1'	28	it happened to N	<sup>28</sup> “All <i>this</i> happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.
	3'	29-33	self-exaltation punished	

	1	29-30	N's self-exaltation manifested	<p><sup>29</sup>"Twelve months later he was walking on the <i>roof of</i> the royal palace of Babylon.</p> <p><sup>30</sup>"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'</p>
	2	31-32	humiliation announced	<p><sup>31</sup>"While the word <i>was</i> in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, <i>saying</i>, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, <sup>32</sup>and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place <i>will be</i> with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.'</p>
	1'	33	self-exaltation punished	<p><sup>33</sup>"Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' <i>feathers</i> and his nails like birds' <i>claws</i>.</p>
	2'	34-35	N praises God	<p><sup>34</sup>"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom <i>endures</i> from generation to generation.<sup>35</sup>"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and <i>among</i> the inhabitants of earth and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'</p>
	1'	36-37	N's kingdom restored, peace abounds	<p><sup>36</sup>"At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup>"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."</p>