

CHAPTER 4

The penman of this chapter is Nebuchadnezzar himself: the story here recorded concerning him is given us in his own words, as he himself drew it up and published it; but Daniel, a prophet, by inspiration, inserts it in his history, and so it has become a part of sacred writ and a very memorable part. Nebuchadnezzar was as daring a rival with God Almighty for the sovereignty as perhaps any mortal man ever was; but here he fairly owns himself conquered, and gives it under his hand that the God of Israel is above him. Here is,

- I.** The preface to his narrative, wherein he acknowledges God's dominion over him (v. 1-3).
- II.** The narrative itself, wherein he relates,
 - 1.** His dream, which puzzled the magicians (v. 1-18).
 - 2.** The interpretation of his dream by Daniel, who showed him that it was a prognostication of his own fall, advising him therefore to repent and reform (v. 19-27).
 - 3.** The accomplishment of it in his running stark mad for seven years, and then recovering the use of his reason again (v. 28-36).
 - 4.** The conclusion of the narrative, with a humble acknowledgment and adoration of God as Lord of all (v. 37). This was extorted from him by the overruling power of that God who has all men's hearts in his hand, and stands upon record a lasting proof of God's supremacy, a monument of his glory, a trophy of his victory, and a warning to all not to think of prospering while they lift up or harden their hearts against God.

~~2015~~ DANIEL 4:1-3

NEBUCHADNEZZAR MAGNIFIES GOD

Here is,

- I.** Something of form, which was usual in writs, proclamations, or circular letters, issued by the king, v. 1. The royal style which Nebuchadnezzar

makes use of has nothing in it of pomp or fancy, but is plain, short, and unaffected — *Nebuchadnezzar the king*. If at other times he made use of great swelling words of vanity in his title, how he laid them all aside; for he was old, he had lately recovered from a distraction which had humbled and mortified him, and was now in the actual contemplation of God's greatness and sovereignty. The declaration is directed not only to his own subjects, but to all to whom this present writing shall come — *to all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth*. He is not only willing that they should all hear of it, though it carry the account of his own infamy (which perhaps none durst have published if he had not done it himself, and therefore Daniel published the original paper), but he strictly charges and commands all manner of persons to take notice of it; for all are concerned, and it may be profitable to all. He salutes those to whom he writes, in the usual form, *Peace be multiplied unto you*. Note, It becomes kings with their commands to disperse their good wishes, and, as fathers of their country, to bless their subjects. So the common form with us. We send greeting, *Omnibus quibus hae praesentes literae pervenerint, salutem* — *To all to whom these presents shall come, health; and sometimes Salutem sempiternam* — *Health and salvation everlasting*.

II. Something of substance and matter. He writes this,

1. To acquaint others with the providences of God that had related to him (v. 2): *I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God (so he calls the true God) has wrought towards me*. He thought it *seemly* (so the word is), that it was his duty, and did well become him, that it was a debt he owed to God and the world, now that he had recovered from his distraction, to relate to distant places, and record for future ages, how justly God had humbled him and how graciously he had at length restored him. All the nations, no doubt, had heard what befell Nebuchadnezzar, and rang of it; but he thought it fit that they should have a distinct account of it from himself, that they might know the hand of God in it, and what impressions were made upon his own spirit by it, and might speak of it not as a matter of news, but as a matter of religion. The events concerning him were not only wonders to be admired, but signs to be instructed by, signifying to the world that Jehovah is greater than all gods. Note, We ought to show to others God's dealings with us, both the rebukes we have been under and the favours we have received; and though the account hereof may reflect disgrace upon ourselves, as this did upon Nebuchadnezzar, yet we must not conceal it, as long as it may redound to

the glory of God. Many will be forward to tell what God has done *for their souls*, because that turns to their own praise, who care not for telling what God has done against them, and how they deserved it; whereas we ought to give glory to God, not only by praising him for his mercies, but by confessing our sins, accepting the punishment of our iniquity, and in both taking shame to ourselves, as this mighty monarch here does.

2. To show how much he was himself affected with them and convinced by them, v. 3. We should always speak of the word and works of God with concern and seriousness and show ourselves affected with those great things of God which we desire others should take notice of.

(1.) He admires God's doings. He speaks of them as one amazed: *How great are his signs, and how mighty are his wonders!* Nebuchadnezzar was now old, had reigned above forty years, and had seen as much of the world and the revolutions of it as most men ever did; and yet never till now, when himself was nearly touched, was he brought to admire surprising events as God's signs and his wonders. Now, *How great, how mighty*, are they! Note, The more we see events to be *the Lord's doing*, and see in them the product of a divine power and the conduct of a divine wisdom, the more marvellous they will appear in our eyes, ^{<1823>}Psalm 118:23; 66:2.

(2.) He thence infers God's dominion. This is that which he is at length brought to subscribe to: *His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*; and not like his own kingdom, which he saw, and long since foresaw, in a dream, hastening towards a period. He now owns that there is a God that governs the world and has a universal, incontestable, absolute dominion in and over all the affairs of the children of men. And it is the glory of this kingdom that it is everlasting. Other reigns are confined to one generation, and other dynasties to a few generations, but God's *dominion is from generation to generation*. It should seem, Nebuchadnezzar here refers to what Daniel had foretold of a kingdom which the God of heaven would set up, that should *never be destroyed* (^{<2124>}Daniel 2:44), which, though meant of the kingdom of the Messiah, he understood of the providential kingdom. Thus we may make a profitable practical use and application of those prophetic scriptures which yet we do not fully, and perhaps not rightly, comprehend the meaning of.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S SECOND DREAM

Nebuchadnezzar, before he relates the judgments of God that had been wrought upon him for his pride, gives an account of the fair warning he had of them before they came, a due regard to which might have prevented them. But he was *told of them*, and of the issue of them, *before they came to pass, that, when they did come to pass*, by comparing them with the prediction of them, he might see, and say, that they were the Lord's doing, and might be brought to believe that there is a divine revelation in the world, as well as a divine Providence, and that the works of God agree with his word.

Now, in the account he here gives of his dream, by which he had notice of what was coming, we may observe,

I. The time when this alarm was given to him (v. 4); it was when he was *at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace*. He had lately conquered Egypt, and with it completed his victories, and ended his wars, and made himself monarch of all those parts of the world, which was about the thirty-fourth or thirty-fifth year of his reign, ~~2397~~ Ezekiel 29:17. Then he had this dream, which was accomplished about a year after. Seven years his distraction continued, upon his recovery from which he penned this declaration, lived about two years after, and died in his forty-fifth year. He had undergone a long fatigue in his wars, had made many a tedious and dangerous campaign in the field; but now at length he is *at rest in his house*, and there is *no adversary, nor any evil occurrent*. Note, God can reach the greatest of men with his terrors even when they are most secure, and think themselves at rest and flourishing.

II. The impression it made upon him (v. 5): *I saw a dream which made me afraid*. One would think no little thing would frighten him that had been a man of war from his youth, and used to look the perils of war in the face without change of countenance; yet, when God pleases, a dream strikes a terror upon him. His bed, no doubt, was soft, and easy, and well-guarded, and yet his own *thoughts upon his bed* made him uneasy, and the *visions of his head*, the creatures of his own imagination, *troubled him*. Note, God can make the greatest of men uneasy even when they say to

their souls, *Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry*; he can make those that have been the troublers of the world, and have tormented thousands, to be their own troublers, their own tormentors, and those that have been *the terror of the mighty* a terror to themselves. By the consternation which this dream put him into, and the impression it made upon him, he perceived it to be, not an ordinary dream, but sent of God on a special errand.

III. His consulting, in vain, with the magicians and astrologers concerning the meaning of it. He had not now forgotten the dream, as before, ch. 2. He had it ready enough, but he wanted to know the interpretation of it and what was prefigured by it, v. 6. Orders are immediately given to summon *all the wise men of Babylon* that were such fools as to pretend by magic, divination, inspecting the entrails of beasts, or observations of the stars, to predict things to come: they must all come together, to see if any, or all of them in consultation, could interpret the king's dream. It is probable that these people had sometimes, in a like case, given the king some sort of satisfaction, and by the rules of their art had answered the king's queries so as to please him, whether it were right or wrong, hit or missed; but now his expectation from them was disappointed: He *told them the dream* (v. 7), but they *could not tell him the interpretation of it*, though they had boasted, with great assurance (²⁰¹⁴Daniel 2:4, 7), that, if they had but the dream told them, they would without fail interpret it. But the key of this dream was in a sacred prophecy (²⁵¹⁸Ezekiel 31:3, etc.), where the Assyrian is compared, as Nebuchadnezzar here, to a *tree cut down*, for his pride; and that was a book they had not studied, nor acquainted themselves with, else they might have been let into the mystery of this dream. Providence ordered it so that they should be first puzzled with it, that Daniel's interpreting it afterwards might redound to the glory of the God of Daniel. Now was fulfilled what Isaiah foretold (²⁴⁷²Daniel 47:12, 13), that when the ruin of Babylon was drawing on her *enchantments and sorceries*, her *astrologers* and *star-gazers*, should not be able to do her any service.

IV. The court he made to Daniel, to engage him to expound his dream to him: *At the last Daniel came in*. v. 8. Either he declined associating with the rest because of their badness, or they declined his company because of his goodness; or perhaps the king would rather that his own magicians should have the honour of doing it if they could than that Daniel should

have it; or Daniel, being *governor* of the wise men (^{212B}Daniel 2:48), was, as is usual, last consulted. Many make God's word their last refuge, and never have recourse to it till they are driven off from all other succours. He compliments Daniel very highly, takes notice of the name which he had himself given him, in the choice of which he thinks he was very happy and that it was a good omen: "His *name was Belteshazzar, from Bel, the name of my god.*" He applauds his rare endowments: He has *the spirit of the holy gods*, so he tells him to his face (v. 9), with which we may suppose that Daniel was so far from being puffed up that he was rather very much grieved to hear that which he had by gift from the God of Israel, the true and living God, ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar's god, a dunghill deity. Here is a strange medley in Nebuchadnezzar, but such as is commonly found in those that side with their corruptions against their convictions.

1. He retains the language and dialect of his idolatry, and therefore, it is to be feared, is no convert to the faith and worship of the living God. He is an idolater, and his speech betrayeth him. For he speaks of many gods, and is brought to acquiesce in one as sufficient, no, not in him who is all-sufficient. And some think, when he speaks of *the spirit of the holy gods*, that he supposes there are some evil malignant deities, whom men are concerned to worship, only to prevent their doing them a mischief, and some who are good beneficent deities, and that by the spirit of the latter Daniel was animated. He also owns that Bel was his god still, though he had once and again acknowledged the *God of Israel* to be Lord of all, ^{212B}Daniel 2:47; 3:29. He also applauds Daniel, not as *a servant of God*, but as *master of the magicians* (v. 9), supposing his knowledge to differ from theirs, not in kind, but only in degree; and he consulted him not as a prophet, but as a celebrated magician, so endeavouring to save the credit of the art when those blundered and were nonplussed who were masters of the art. See how close his idolatry sat to him. He has got a notion of many gods, and has chosen Bel for his god, and he cannot persuade himself to quit either his notion or his choice, though the absurdity of both had been evidenced to him, more than once, beyond contradiction. He, like other heathens, would not change his gods, though they were no gods, ^{212B}Jeremiah 2:11. Many persist in a false way only because they think they cannot in honour leave it. See how loose his convictions sat, and how easily he had dropped them. He once called the God of Israel a *God of gods*, ^{212B}Daniel 2:47. Now he sets him upon a level with the rest of those whom he calls the *holy gods*. Note, If convictions be not speedily

prosecuted, it is a thousand to one but in a little time they will be quite lost and forgotten. Nebuchadnezzar, not going forward with the acknowledgements he had been brought to make of the sovereignty of the true God, soon *went backwards*, and relapsed to the same veneration he had always had for his false gods. And yet,

2. He professes a great opinion of Daniel, whom he knows to be a servant of the true God, and of him only. He looked upon him as one that had such an insight, such a foresight, as none of his magicians had: *I know that no secret troubles thee*. Note, The spirit of prophecy quite outdoes the spirit of divination, even the enemies themselves being judges; for so it was adjudged here, upon a fair trial of skill.

V. The particular account he gives him of his dream.

1. He saw a stately flourishing tree, remarkable above all the trees of the wood. This tree was *planted in the midst of the earth* (v. 10), fitly representing him who reigned in Babylon, which was about the midst of the then known world. His dignity and eminency above all his neighbours were signified by the height of this tree, which was *exceedingly great*; it *reached unto heaven*. He over-topped those about him, and aimed to have divine honours given him; nay, he over-powered those about him, and the potent armies he had the command of, with which he carried all before him, are signified by the strength of this tree: it *grew and was strong*. And so much were Nebuchadnezzar and his growing greatness the talk of the nations, so much had they their eye upon him (some a jealous eye, all a wondering eye), that the sight of this tree is said to be *to the end of all the earth*. This tree had every thing in it that was pleasant to the eye and good for food (v. 12); *The leaves thereof were fair*, denoting the pomp and splendour of Nebuchadnezzar's court, which was the wonder of strangers and the glory of his own subjects. Nor was this tree for sight and state only, but for use.

(1.) For protection; the boughs of it were for shelter both to the beasts and to the fowls. Princes should be a screen to their subjects *from the heat* and *from the storm*, should expose themselves to secure them, and study how to make them safe and easy. If the bramble be *promoted over the trees*, he invites them to come and *trust in his shadow*, such as it is, ⁽¹⁰⁹⁵⁾ Judges 9:15. It is protection that draws allegiance. The kings of the earth are to their subjects but as the shadow of a great tree; but Christ is to his subjects as

the *shadow of a great rock*, ^{<281D>}Isaiah 32:2. Nay, because that, though strong, may be cold, they are said to be hidden under the *shadow of his wings* (^{<307B>}Psalms 17:8), where they are not only safe, but warm.

(2.) For provision, The Assyrian was compared to a *cedar* (^{<351B>}Ezekiel 31:6), which affords shadow only; but this tree here had much fruit — in it was *meat for all* and *all flesh was fed of it*. This mighty monarch, it should seem by this, not only was great, but did good; he did not impoverish, but enrich his country, and by his power and interest abroad brought wealth and trade to it. Those that *exercise authority* would be called *benefactors* (^{<402B>}Luke 22:25), and the most effectual course they can take to support their authority is to be really benefactors. And see what is the best that great men, with their wealth and power can attain to, and that is to have the honour of having many to live upon them and to be maintained by them; for, *as goods are increased, those are increased that eat them*.

2. He heard the doom of this tree read, which he perfectly remembered, and related here, perhaps word for word as he heard it. The sentence was passed upon it by an angel, whom he saw *come down from heaven*, and heard proclaim this sentence aloud. This angel is here called a *watcher*, or *watchman*, not only because angels by their nature are spirits, and therefore neither slumber nor sleep, but because by their office they are *ministering spirits*, and attend continually to their ministrations, watching all opportunities of serving their great Master. They, as watchers, encamp round those that fear God, to deliver them, and *bear them up in their hands*. This angel was a *messenger*, or *ambassador* (so some read it), and a *holy one*. *Holiness becomes God's house*; therefore angels that attend and are employed by him are *holy ones*; they preserve the purity and rectitude of their nature, and are in every thing conformable to the divine will. Let us review the doom passed upon the tree.

(1.) Orders are given that it be cut down (v. 14); now also *the axe is laid to the root* of this tree. Though it is ever so high, ever so strong, that cannot secure it when its day comes to fall; the beasts and fowls, that are sheltered in and under the boughs of it, are driven away and dispersed; the branches are cropped, the leaves shaken off, and the fruit scattered. Note, Worldly prosperity in its highest degree is a very uncertain thing; and it is no uncommon thing for those that have lived in the greatest pomp and power to be stripped of all that which they trusted to and gloried in. By the turns of providence, those who made a figure become captives, those who lived

in plenty, and above what they had, are reduced to straits, and live far below what they had, and those perhaps are brought to be beholden to others who once had many depending upon them and making suit to them. But the *trees of righteousness*, that are *planted in the house of the Lord* and bring forth fruit to him, shall not be cut down, nor shall their leaf wither.

(2.) Care is taken that the root be preserved (v. 15); “*Leave the stump of it in the earth*, exposed to all weathers. There let it lie neglected and buried in the grass. Let the beasts that formerly sheltered themselves under the boughs now repose themselves upon the stump; but that it may not be raked to pieces, nor trodden to dirt, and to show that it is yet reserved for better days, let it be hooped round with a *band of iron and brass*, to keep it firm.” Note, God in judgment remembers mercy; and may yet have good things in store for those whose condition seems most forlorn. There is *hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, that through the scent of water it will bud*, ^{<344>}Job 14:7-9.

(3.) The meaning of this is explained by the angel himself to Nebuchadnezzar, v. 16. Whoever is the person signified by this tree he is sentenced to be deposed from the honour, state, and dignity of a man, to be deprived of the use of his reason, and to be and live like a brute, till *seven times pass over him. Let a beast's heart be given unto him*. This is surely the saddest and sorest of all temporal judgments, worse a thousand times than death, and though, like it, least felt by those that lie under it, yet to be dreaded and deprecated more than any other. Nay, whatever outward affliction God is pleased to lay upon us, we have reason to bear it patiently, and to be thankful that he continues to us the use of our reason and the peace of our consciences. But those proud tyrants who *set their heart as the heart of God* (^{<370>}Ezekiel 27:2) may justly be deprived of the heart of man, and have a beast's heart given them.

(4.) The truth of it is confirmed (v. 17); *This matter is by the decree of the watchers and the demand by the word of the holy ones*. God has determined it, as a righteous Judge; he has signed this edict; pursuant to his eternal counsel, the decree has gone forth, And,

[1.] The angels of heaven have subscribed to it, as attesting it, approving it, and applauding it. It is by *the decree of the watchers*; not that the great God needs the counsel or concurrence of the angels in any thing he determines or does, but, as he uses their ministration in executing his

counsels, so he is sometimes represented, after the manner of men, as if he consulted them. *Whom shall I send?* ^{<2168>}Isaiah 6:8. *Who shall persuade Ahab?* ^{<1221>}1 Kings 22:20. So it denotes the solemnity of this sentence. The king's breves, or short writs, pass, *Teste me ipso — in my presence*; but charters used to be signed, *His testibus — In the presence of us whose names are under-written*; such was Nebuchadnezzar's doom; it was by the *decree of the watchers*.

[2.] The saints on earth petitioned for it, as well as the angels in heaven: *The demand is by the word of the holy ones*. God's suffering people, that had long groaned under the heavy yoke of Nebuchadnezzar's tyranny, cried to him for vengeance; they made the demand, and God gave this answer to it; for, when the *oppressed cry to God, he will hear*, ^{<1222>}Exodus 22:27. Sentence was passed, in Ahab's time, that there should be no more rain, at Elijah's word, when he *made intercession against Israel*, ^{<1171>}1 Kings 17:1.

(5.) The design of it is declared. Orders are given for the cutting down of this tree, *to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules*. This judgment must be executed, to convince the unthinking, unbelieving, world, that *verily there is a God that judges in the earth*, a God that governs the world, that not only has a kingdom of his own in it, and administers the affairs of that kingdom, but rules also *in the kingdom of men*, in the dominion that one man has over another, and *gives that to whomsoever he will*; from him promotion comes, ^{<1316>}Psalms 75:6, 7. He advances men to power and dominion that little expected it, and crosses the projects of the ambitious and aspiring. Sometimes he *sets up the basest of men*, and serves his own purposes by them. He sets up mean men, as David from the sheepfold; *he raises the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, ^{<1317>}Psalms 113:7, 8. Nay, sometimes he sets up bad men, to be a scourge to a provoking people. Thus he can do, thus he may do, thus he often does, and *gives not account of any of his matters*. By humbling Nebuchadnezzar it was designed that the living should be made to know this. The dead know it, that have gone to the world of spirits, the world of retribution; they know that *the Most High rules*; but the living must be made to know it and lay it to heart, that they may make their peace with God before it be too late.

Thus has Nebuchadnezzar fully and faithfully related his dream, what he saw and what he heard, and then demands of Daniel the interpretation of it (v. 18), for he found that no one else was able to interpret it, but was

confident that he was: *For the spirit of the holy gods is in thee*, or of the *Holy God*, the proper title of the God of Israel. Much may be expected from those that have in them the *Spirit of the Holy God*. Whether Nebuchadnezzar had any jealousy that it was his own doom that was read by this dream does not appear; perhaps he was so vain and secure as to imagine that it was some other prince that was a rival with him, whose fall he had the pleasing prospect of given him in this dream; but, be it for him or against him, he is very solicitous to know the true meaning of it and depends upon Daniel to give it to him. Now, When God gives us general warnings of his judgments we should be desirous to understand his mind in them, to hear *the Lord's voice crying in the city*.

~~2019~~ DANIEL 4:19-27

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM INTERPRETED

We have here the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; and when once it is applied to himself, and it is declared that he is the tree in the dream (*Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur — Change but the name, the fable speaks of thee*), when once it is said, *Thou art the man*, there needs little more to be said for the explication of the dream. *Out of his own mouth he is judged; so shall his doom be, he himself has decided it*. The thing was so plain that Daniel, upon hearing the dream, was *astonished for one hour*, v. 19. He was struck with amazement and terror at so great a judgment coming upon so great a prince. *His flesh trembled for fear of God*. He was likewise struck with confusion when he found himself under a necessity of being the man that must bring to the king *these heavy tidings*, which, having received so many favours from the king, he had rather he should have heard from any one else; so far is he from desiring the woeful day that he dreads it, and the thoughts of it trouble him. Those that come after the ruined sinner are said to be *astonished at his day*, as *those that went before*, and saw it coming (as Daniel here), *were affrighted*, ~~1880~~ Job 18:20.

I. The preface to the interpretation is a civil compliment which, as a courtier, he passes upon the king. The king observed him to stand as one astonished, and, thinking he was loth to speak out for fear of offending

him, he encouraged him to deal plainly and faithfully with him; *Let not the dream, nor the interpretation thereof, trouble thee.* This he speaks either,

1. As one that sincerely desired to know this truth. Note, Those that consult the oracles of God must be ready to receive them as they are, whether they be for them or against them, and must accordingly give their ministers leave to be free with them. Or,

2. As one that despised the truth, and set it at defiance. When we see how regardless he was of this warning afterwards we are tempted to think that this was his meaning; "*Let it not trouble thee,* for I am resolved it shall not trouble me; nor will I lay it to heart." But, whether he have any concern for himself or no, Daniel is concerned for him, and therefore wishes, "*The dream be to those that hate thee.* Let the ill it bodes light on the head of thy enemies, not on thy head." Though Nebuchadnezzar was an idolater, a persecutor, and an oppressor of the people of God, yet he was, at present, Daniel's prince; and therefore, though Daniel foresees, and is now going to foretell, ill concerning him, he dares not wish ill to him.

II. The interpretation itself is only a repetition of the dream, with application to the king. "As for *the tree* which thou sawest *flourishing* (v. 20, 21), *it is thou, O king!*" v. 22. And willing enough would the king be to hear this (as, before, to hear, *Thou art the head of gold*), but for that which follows. He shows the king his present prosperous state in the glass of his own dream; "*Thy greatness has grown and reaches as near to heaven as human greatness can do, and thy dominion is to the end of the earth,*" ^{<193>}Daniel 2:37, 38. "As for the doom passed upon the tree (v. 23), it is *the decree of the Most High, which comes upon my lord the king,*" v. 24. He must not only be deposed from his throne, *but driven from men,* and being deprived of his reason, and having a beast's heart given him, his dwelling shall be *with the beasts of the field,* and with them he shall be a fellow-commoner: he shall *eat grass as oxen,* and, like them, lie out all weathers, and be *wet with the dew of heaven,* and this till *seven times* pass over him, that is, *seven years;* and then he shall know that the *Most High rules,* and when he is brought to know and own this he shall be restored to his dominion again (v. 26): "*Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, shall remain as firm as the stump of the tree in the ground, and thou shalt have it, after thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.*" God is here called *the heavens,* because it is in heaven that he has *prepared his throne* (^{<193>}Psalm 103:19), thence he *beholds all the sons of men,* ^{<193>}Psalm 33:13.

The *heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's*; and the influence which the visible heavens have upon this earth is intended as a faint representation of the dominion the God of heaven has over this lower world; we are said to *sin against heaven*, ^{<DIS>}Luke 15:18. Note, Then only we may expect comfortably to enjoy our right in, and government of, both ourselves and others, when we dutifully acknowledge God's title to, and dominion over, us and all we have.

III. The close of the interpretation is the pious counsel which Daniel, as a prophet, gave the king, v. 27. Whether he appeared concerned or not at the interpretation of the dream, a word of advice would be very seasonable — if careless, to awaken him, if troubled, to comfort him; and it is not inconsistent with the dream and the interpretation of it, for Daniel knew not but it might be conditional, like the prediction of Nineveh's destruction. Observe,

1. How humbly he gives his advice, and with what tenderness and respect: “*O king! let my counsel be acceptable unto thee*; take it in good part, as coming from love, and well-meant, and let it not be misinterpreted.” Note, Sinners need to be courted to their own good, and respectfully entreated to do well for themselves. The apostle beseeches men to *suffer the word of exhortation*, ^{<DIS>}Hebrews 13:22. We think it a good point gained if people will be persuaded to take good counsel kindly; nay, if they will take it patiently.

2. What his advice is. He does not counsel him to enter into a course of physic, for the preventing of the distemper in his head, but to break off a course of sin that he was in, to reform his life. He wronged his own subjects, and dealt unfairly with his allies; and he must *break off this by righteousness*, by rendering to all their due, making amends for wrong done, and not triumphing over right with might. He had been cruel to the poor, to God's poor, to the poor Jews; and he must *break off this iniquity* by *showing mercy* to those poor, pitying those oppressed ones, setting them at liberty or making their captivity easy to them. Note, It is necessary, in repentance, that we not only *cease to do evil, but learn to do well*, not only do no wrong to any, but do good to all.

3. What the motive is with which he backs this advice: *If it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility*. Though it should not wholly prevent the judgment, yet by this means a reprieve may be obtained, as by *Ahab's*

humbling himself, ^{<1019>}1 Kings 21:29. Either the trouble may be the longer before it comes or the shorter when it does come; yet he cannot assure him of this, but *it may be*, it may prove so. Note, The mere probability of preventing a temporal judgment is inducement enough to a work so good in itself as the leaving off of our sins and reforming of our lives, much more the certainty of preventing our eternal ruin. “*That will be a healing of thy error*” (so some read it); “thus the quarrel will be taken up, and all will be well again.”

^{<208>}DANIEL 4:28-33

NEBUCHADNEZZAR DRIVEN AMONG BEASTS

We have here Nebuchadnezzar's dream accomplished, and Daniel's application of it to him justified and confirmed. How he took it we are not told, whether he was pleased with Daniel or displeased; but here we have,

I. God's patience with him: *All this came upon him*, but not till *twelve months after* (v. 29), so long there was a *lengthening of his tranquility*, though it does not appear that he *broke off his sins*, or showed any *mercy to the poor captives*, for this was still God's quarrel with him, that he *opened not the house of his prisoners*, ^{<2147>}Isaiah 14:17. Daniel having counselled him to repent, God so far confirmed his word that he gave him space to repent; he *let him alone this year also*, this *one year more*, before he brought this judgment upon him. Note, God is long-suffering with provoking sinners, because he is not willing that *any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*, ^{<639>}2 Peter 3:9.

II. His pride, and haughtiness, and abuse of that patience. He walked *in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon*, in pomp and pride, pleasing himself with the view of that vast city, which, with all the territories thereunto belonging, was under his command, and *he said*, either to himself or to those about him, perhaps some foreigners to whom he was showing his kingdom and the glory of it, *Is not this great Babylon?* Yes, it is great, of vast extent, no less than forty-five miles compass within the walls. It is full of inhabitants, and they are full of wealth. It is a *golden city*, and that is enough to proclaim it great, ^{<2346>}Isaiah 14:4. See the grandeur of the houses, walls, towers, and public edifices. Every thing in Babylon he thinks looks

great; “and this *great Babylon I have built.*” Babylon was built many ages before he was born, but because he fortified and beautified it, and we may suppose much of it was rebuilt during his long and prosperous reign, he boasts that he has built it, as Augustus Caesar boasted concerning Rome, *Lateritiam inveni, marmoream reliqui — I found it brick, but I left it marble.* He boasts that he built it *for the house of the kingdom*, that is, the metropolis of his empire. This vast city, compared with the countries that belonged to his dominions, was but as one house. He built it with the assistance of his subjects, yet boasts that he did it *by the might of his power*; he built it for his security and convenience, yet, as if he had no occasion for it, boasts that he built it purely *for the honour of his majesty.* Note, Pride and self-conceitedness are sins that most easily beset great men, who have great things in the world. They are apt to take the glory to themselves which is due to God only.

III. His punishment for his pride. When he was thus strutting, and vaunting himself, and adoring his own shadow, *while the proud word was in the king's mouth* the powerful word came from heaven, by which he was immediately deprived,

1. Of his honour as a king: *The kingdom has departed from thee.* When he thought he had erected impregnable bulwarks for the preserving of his kingdom, now, in an instant, it *has departed from him*; when he thought it so well guarded that none could take it from him, behold, it departs of itself. As soon as he becomes utterly incapable to manage it, it is of course taken out of his hands.

2. He is deprived of his honour as a man. He loses his reason, and by that means loses his dominion: *They shall drive thee from men*, v. 32. And it was fulfilled (v. 33): he was *driven from men the same hour.* On a sudden he fell stark mad, distracted in the highest degree that ever any man was. His understanding and memory were gone, and all the faculties of a rational soul broken, so that he became a perfect brute in the shape of a man. He went naked, and on all four, like a brute, did himself shun the society of reasonable creatures and run wild into the fields and woods, and was driven out by his own servants, who, after some time of trial, despairing of his return to his right mind, abandoned him, and looked after him no more. He had not the spirit of a beast of prey (that of the royal lion), but of the abject and less honourable species, for he was made to *eat grass as oxen*; and, probably, he did not speak with human voice, but

lowed like an ox. Some think that his body was all covered with hair; however, *the hair* of his head and beard, being never cut nor combed, grew like *eagles feathers*, and *his nails like birds' claws*. Let us pause a little, and view this miserable spectacle; and let us receive instruction from it.

(1.) Let us see here what a mercy it is to have the use of our reason, how thankful we ought to be for it, and how careful we ought to be not to do any thing which may either provoke God or may have a natural tendency to put us out of the possession of our own souls. Let us learn how to value our own reason, and to pity the case of those that are under the prevailing power of melancholy or distraction, or are delirious, and to be very tender in our censures of them and conduct towards them, for it is a trial common to men, and a case which, some time or other, may be our own.

(2.) Let us see here the vanity of human glory and greatness. Is this Nebuchadnezzar the Great? What this despicable animal that is meaner than the poorest beggar? Is this he that looked so glorious on the throne, so formidable in the camp, that had politics enough to subdue and govern kingdoms, and now has not so much sense as to keep his own clothes on his back? *Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?* ^{<246>}Isaiah 14:16. Never let the *wise man* then *glory in his wisdom*, nor the *mighty man in his strength*.

(3.) Let us see here how God resists the proud, and delights to abase them and put contempt upon them. Nebuchadnezzar would be more than a man, and therefore God justly makes him less than a man, and puts him upon a level with the beasts who set up for a rival with his Maker. See ^{<301>}Job 40:11-13.

^{<208>}DANIEL 4:34-37

NEBUCHADNEZZAR RESTORED

We have here Nebuchadnezzar's recovery from his distraction, and his return to his right mind, *at the end of the days* prefixed, that is, of the seven years. So long he continued a monument of God's justice and a trophy of his victory over the children of pride, and he was made more so by being struck mad than if he had been in an instant struck dead with a

thunderbolt; yet it was a mercy to him that he was kept alive, for while there is life there is hope that we may yet praise God, as he did here: *At the end of the days* (says he), *I lifted up my eyes unto heaven* (v. 34), looked no longer down towards the earth as a beast, but begun to look up as a man. *Os homini sublime dedit — Heaven gave to man an erect countenance*. But there was more in it than this; he looked up as a devout man, as a penitent, as a humble petitioner for mercy, being perhaps never till now made sensible of his own misery. And now,

I. He has the use of his reason so far restored to him that with it he glorifies God, and humbles himself under his mighty hand. He was told that he should continue in that forlorn case till he should know that the Most High rules, and here we have him brought to the knowledge of this: *My understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High*. Note, Those may justly be reckoned void of understanding that do not bless and praise God; nor do men ever rightly use their reason till they begin to be religious, nor live as men till they live to the glory of God. As reason is the substratum or subject of religion (so that creatures which have no reason are not capable of religion), so religion is the crown and glory of reason, and we have our reason in vain, and shall one day wish we had never had it, if we do not glorify God with it. This was the first act of Nebuchadnezzar's returning reason; and, when this became the employment of it, he was then, and not till then, qualified for all the other enjoyments of it. And till he was for a great while disabled to exercise it in other things he never was brought to apply it to this, which is the great end for which our reason is given us. His folly was the means whereby he became wise; he was not recovered by his dream of this judgment (that was soon forgotten like a dream), but he is made to feel it, and then his *ear is opened to discipline*. To bring him to himself, he must first be *beside himself*. And by this it appears that what good thoughts there were in his mind, and what good work was wrought there, were not of himself (for he was not his own man), but it was the gift of God. Let us see what Nebuchadnezzar is now at length effectually brought to the acknowledgment of; and we may learn from it what to believe concerning God.

1. That the *most high* God *lives for ever*, and his being knows neither change nor period, for he has it of himself. His flatterers often complimented him with, *O king! live for ever*. But he is now convinced that no king lives for ever, but the God of Israel only, who is still the same.

2. That his kingdom is like himself, *everlasting*, and his *dominion from generation to generation*; there is no succession, no revolution, in his kingdom. As he lives, so he reigns, for ever, and of his government there is no end.
3. That *all nations* before him are *as nothing*. He has no need of them; he makes no account of them. The greatest of men, in comparison with him, are less than nothing. Those that think highly of God think meanly of themselves.
4. That his kingdom is universal, and both *the armies of heaven* and *the inhabitants of the earth* are his subjects, and under his check and control. Both angels and men are employed by him, and are accountable to him; the highest angel is not above his command, nor the meanest of the children of men beneath his cognizance. The angels of heaven are his armies, the inhabitants of the earth his tenants.
5. That his power is irresistible, and his sovereignty uncontrollable, for he *does according to his will*, according to his design and purpose, according to his decree and counsel; whatever he pleases that he does; whatever he appoints that he performs; and none can resist his will, change his counsel, nor *stay his hand, nor say unto him, What doest thou?* None can arraign his proceedings, enquire into the meaning of them, nor demand a reason for them. Woe to him that strives with his Maker, that says to him, *What doest thou?* Or, *Why doest thou so?*
6. That every thing which God does is well done: His *works are truth*, for they all agree with his word. *His ways are judgment*, both wise and righteous, exactly consonant to the rules both of prudence and equity, and no fault is to be found with them.
7. That he has power to humble the haughtiest of his enemies that act in contradiction to him or competition with him: *Those that walk in pride he is able to abuse* (v. 37); he is able to deal with those that are most confident of their own sufficiency to contend with him.

II. He has the use of his reason so far restored to him as with it to re-enjoy himself, and the pleasures of his re-established prosperity (v. 36): *At the same time my reason returned to me*; he had said before (v. 34) that his *understanding returned* to him, and here he mentions it again, for the use of our reason is a mercy we can never be sufficiently thankful for. Now his

lords sought to him; he did not need to seek to them, and they soon perceived, not only that he had recovered his reason and was fit to rule, but that he had recovered it with advantage, and was more fit to rule than ever. It is probable that the dream and the interpretation of it were well known, and much talked of, at court; and the former part of the prediction being fulfilled, that he should go distracted, they doubted not but that, according to the prediction, he should come to himself again at seven years' end, and, in confidence of that, when the time had expired they were ready to receive him; and then *his honour and brightness returned to him*, the same that he had before his madness seized him. He is now established in his kingdom as firmly as if there had been no interruption given him. *He becomes a fool, that he may be wise*, wiser than ever; and he that but the other day was in the depth of disgrace and ignominy has now *excellent majesty added to him*, beyond what he had when he went from kingdom to kingdom conquering and to conquer. Note,

1. When men are brought to honour God, particularly by a penitent confession of sin and a believing acknowledgment of his sovereignty, then, and not till then, they may expect that God will put honour upon them, will not only restore them to the dignity they lost by the sin of the first Adam, but *add excellent majesty to them* from the righteousness and grace of the second Adam.
2. Afflictions shall last no longer than till they have done the work for which they were sent. When this prince is brought to own God's dominion over himself.
3. All the accounts we take and give of God's dealing with us ought to conclude with praises to him. When Nebuchadnezzar is restored to his kingdom he *praises, and extols, and honours the King of heaven* (v. 37), before he applies himself to his secular business. Therefore we have our reason, that we may be in a capacity of praising him, and therefore our prosperity, that we may have cause to praise him.

It was not long after this that Nebuchadnezzar ended his life and reign. Abydenus, quoted by Eusebius (Prap. Evang. i. 9), reports, from the tradition of the Chaldeans, that upon his death-bed he foretold the taking of Babylon by Cyrus. Whether he continued in the same good mind that here he seems to have been in we are not told, nor does any thing appear to the contrary but that he did: and, if so great a *blasphemer and persecutor* did find mercy, he was not the last. And, if our charity may reach so far as

to hope he did, we must admire free grace, by which he lost his wits for a while that he might save his soul for ever.