

Chapter 4 - The Great Tree

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

4 Nebuchadnezzar the king,

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

Peace be multiplied to you.

It is very clear from this introduction that Nebuchadnezzar himself is writing this part of the book, probably as a letter that Daniel, as a senior assistant, may have dictated or, considering their relationship, addressed to him. The authenticity of this, if it was actually penned by the king himself or if it was 'ghost-written' is unknown and unknowable but for the sake of this chapter we will assume that this was published with the Kings approval.

That may seem like an overstatement but let us consider what this document is from a historical perspective. If we assume, as we have done, that this was written at or near the time of Nebuchadnezzar, even in the close aftermath of his reign, then to have his name on, and be written as if by him, held the authority of his rule. If this document existed using the language we have within around 50 years of his death, then it could easily have been treasonous to own a copy, even under the following regime, unless there was some recognition that it was at least certified by Nebuchadnezzar himself.

This can be viewed as a good argument that Daniel's book was written much later, or it is an argument that supports Nebuchadnezzars pseudo-authorship. That conclusion I will leave up to the reader, but as we continue this chapter consider how well the discussed events align to Nebuchadnezzars experiences as far as history records them.

2 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.

3 How great are His signs,

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And how mighty His wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

And His dominion is from generation to generation.

Nebuchadnezzar gives glory to the Most High and acknowledges that He holds the dominion over all. This is a rather normal start to a document like this, giving a proper acknowledgement to the divinity that he is ascribing his life too.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation.

We have seen this before in Chapter 2. The repetition is either for reinforcement or to make a reference to the reader of elements they know before. That is not to say this part did not happen and its repetition is simply to press the story forward, but its literary form is more or less to remind the reader of the God that Nebuchadnezzar is worshiping.

In fact, if we assume this did happen as stated, or at least that the main elements of the story were happened as we saw in Chapter 2, then Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of God is reinforced by this happening again. If we consider that Nebuchadnezzar had this situation arise twice, and both times his best Chaldean astrologers were unable to tell him what was going on, and yet, as we are about to see, Daniel was, then from the Kings, or anyone else's perspective, Daniel and his God are the one that you can trust and believe in.

It is also a poor literary choice on Daniel's part if this is a fabrication. Even the Egyptians, 1200 years earlier knew that you did not repeat parts of the story, you added and changed them, speaking frankly, Daniel is demonstrating poor writing skills in his repetition. Yet, here we have extremely similar events being repeated. Although there

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is no conclusion that can be drawn from this literary interrogation, any author who takes pride in his fiction will admit that this demonstrates poor skill.

8 But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying: 9 “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.

This mirrors Daniel's attendance in Chapter 2 with a few notable differences. This time around, the King tells Daniel what he dreamt. Whether this is because this text is penned from Nebuchadnezzar's perspective and would therefore be an insult to his dignity to admit he cannot remember the dream, or because he did remember this time is not clear. Either way, the point of Daniel being able to tell the King the dream this time is not questioned.

What is interesting, however, is that we find the other “*magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers*” were still consulted before Daniel. This inclusion is, again, a notable one considering that there it makes no sense from the story's perspective. Nebuchadnezzar admits that he knows “*that the Spirit of the Holy God is in [Daniel], and no secret troubles*” him, meaning that anyone this text is addressed to must be acquainted with the story of Chapter 2. Again, it is poor story writing to have him repeat the same exercise of calling all the astrologers together only to turn to Daniel. We can only speculate that Daniel was working in a different part of the kingdom when Nebuchadnezzar had this particular dream.

It is also notable here that Daniel's name has not been reverted back to the Hebrew one, but that the king notes he is also called “*Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god*”. This is important context that a Hebrew author would probably ignore as there is little reason to include it in this particular text. Nebuchadnezzar is acknowledging, even through his use of the magicians et al, that he must play the political games with his people but brings Daniel in and recognises his connection to the “*Holy God*”. Yet, even this is questionable as he also reminds the reader that Daniel as “*Belteshazzar*” is “*chief of the magicians*” (my emphasis). As King, he certainly had the authority to demand his chief magician at the very earliest point, and yet seems to

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have indulged his underlings first. This, again, to a reader of the day, makes no sense. The King would not, should not, settle for anything less than the best unless there is some political motive or Daniel is not present at that time and is brought in later.

These textual questions are important because it is clear that certain literary inclusions have been made that go against both the common sense of the day and proper fiction writing, if this is a fabrication. The inclusions of this type reenforce the conclusion that someone was keeping elements in the text to tell an accurate story, as it actually makes the story less believable. People of the time, and for centuries to come, interrogating this text would be asking why the king first asked for the lesser magicians instead of his chief and why he was making a point to include elements like foreign gods that a Hebrew author would spit at. For modern historians, this adds credibility by reducing credulity for a reader of the time of writing.

10 "These were the visions of my head while on my bed:

I was looking, and behold,

A tree in the midst of the earth,

And its height was great.

11 The tree grew and became strong;

Its height reached to the heavens,

And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.

12 Its leaves were lovely,

Its fruit abundant,

And in it was food for all.

The beasts of the field found shade under it,

The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches,

And all flesh was fed from it.

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The dream itself is rather self-explanatory this time around. A single great and powerful tree stands on the centre of the world, growing tall and strong feeding the nations with its fruit. Everything finds shelter under it and all of the world were able to find peace under its branches. It is from this text that the idea of a monarch or other leader being the shelter and nourishment to his people comes from, at least in classic literature.

13 "I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 He cried aloud and said thus:

Far too much ink has been wasted defining 'the watchers'. All that is necessary for this story is that Nebuchadnezzar identifies him as "*a holy one*" who gives a declaration. Who this person is has almost no bearing on the story except to stat that his instructions are followed.

'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,

Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.

Let the beasts get out from under it,

And the birds from its branches.

15 Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth,

Bound with a band of iron and bronze,

In the tender grass of the field.

Let it be wet with the dew of heaven,

And let him graze with the beasts

On the grass of the earth.

16 Let his heart be changed from that of a man,

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Let him be given the heart of a beast,

And let seven times pass over him.

17 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers,

And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,

In order that the living may know

That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,

Gives it to whomever He will,

And sets over it the lowest of men.'

The tree is not to be destroyed. That is very clear. While it will be cut down, stripped and freed from its role supporting and nourishing its creature companions, “[n]evertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth”. The core of this tree is to be kept, and even preserved albeit “Bound with a band of iron and bronze”. Iron and Bronze are interesting metals to mix together as the one is stronger than the other.

In the next section, the explicit connection to identify Nebuchadnezzar with the Tree is made clear; when the **'it'** of “*Let it be wet with the dew of heaven*” becomes the **'him'** of “*let him graze with the beasts*” (my emphasis). It will be the King, therefore, that will become wet with heavens dew, eat grass with others and, generally act like a beast.

The watcher/angel is clear that this will last for “*seven times*” being 7 years as we have established in the time/year principal as detailed in an essay introducing this book.

What is interesting also is that this is not a natural event for Nebuchadnezzar, but rather it is the result of a judgement made on him. It is done “*by the decree of the watchers, [a]nd the sentence by the word of the holy ones*” to demonstrate that God is the ruler of all and not the kings of the earth. But no reason for this sentence is given. The fact that it is called a 'sentence' would indicate explicitly that this is the result of some offense given by Nebuchadnezzar, but no indication is given of what that could

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be. However, as this sentence is passed clearly to demonstrate that the Most High is ruler, we can only assume that Nebuchadnezzar is going to forget the lessons he learned through his earlier dream experience. We saw this immediately with the great statue, so that's no surprise, but we will have to see what crime he could commit against the Most High.

18 “This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.”

Nebuchadnezzar is clear that Daniel's authority comes from the Holy God and not from just any wisdom he might have gathered from Earth. What is again noteworthy is the reference that all the other wise men failed.

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19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. So the king spoke, and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you.”

Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!”

Although God clearly told him the meaning of the dream, it would have been rather obvious to any wise man what the interpretation was, and Daniel's hesitation is clearly not because he does not want to tell the king the meaning but because he does not want to upset his friend. Daniel protests and says the impossible, that the meaning should be dealt out to the king's enemies rather than the King himself.

There is an interesting tenderness between the king and his advisor here that, again, can be juxtaposed against the Nebuchadnezzar of Daniel 2. In that chapter, Daniel would have lost his head had he hesitated, and the boldness of youth is now removed in the wise councillor. This is somewhat touching and, although uncommon in similar ancient sources, is not as unusual as some literary elements mentioned above.

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20 “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which could be seen by all the earth, 21 whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— 22 it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

As stated, this is pretty self-explanatory. There should be no surprise here, a King is a fountain to his people and, especially at this time, almost everything in society happened at the will of the king or his people. We really can't imagine how absolute a monarch was during Nebuchadnezzar's time. Frankly, there is no surprise here.

23 “And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him’; 24 this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: 25 They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

The explanation here is rather clear when one takes a moment to process it. The King will go mad. He will eat grass and be rained on like an animal, he will live in a field like the common beasts, and he will live like this for 7 years. At the end of those seven years, he will realise his fault and recover, recognising his reliance on the Most High and praising Him.

26 “And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would not be taken away from him; his authority would be protected and secured for when he regained his senses. At first this seemed

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extremely strange, but in fact it's not as unusual as it might seem. The Divine Right of Kings has been unquestionable, and in this time, it was an absolute right. Kings and monarchs held unquestionable authority as derived from the Gods giving them their places, and it was almost impossible to shift them.

We need to make clear here that there is no clear ancient evidence for his loss of sanity, there is also rather little evidence for Nebuchadnezzar altogether. Apparently, a tablet in the British Museum, No. BM34113 (sp 213) has text that may relate to Nebuchadnezzar's insanity, but this is unconfirmed.

Needless to say, the events of Nebuchadnezzar's life are not closely recorded and the foreign sources we have would not have commented on his insanity in anything more than propaganda, if they choose to comment at all. We need to look at this overall story in a different way and ask if something like this is possible, and we do have a large number of examples of this disability, more recent than ancient but we are not short on ancient examples.

Practically all of the Roman Emperors had some insanity to them. Nero (37-68 AD) famously killed his mother, sang while he watched a large part of Rome burn to the ground in a fire he is strongly suspected of starting, and spent an absolute fortune on a massive palace only to have it burned down. Caligula named a horse to be a senator and marched an army to conquer England but when he arrived on the French coast, ordered his men to collect seashells before turning around and going home, claiming conquest of the sea. Charles VI of France (1368 - 1422) spent long periods when he believed he was made of glass and had iron bands sewn into his clothes to stop him from shattering. Henry VI of England (1421 - 1471) went into something of a catatonic state, not even responding to the birth of his son, Edward. Ivan the Terrible, Tsar of Russia (1530 - 1584) experienced something akin to psychotic paranoid schizophrenia, lashing out with extreme violence and anger, killing his eldest son and heir Ivan Ivanovich in 1581. After he lost the American Colonies, King George III England (1738 - 1820) started to demonstrate euphoric mania followed by crippling depressive episodes where he was unable to eat or sleep.

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This is only a short list of the seriously insane Kings and Emperors. It's not to mention the psychopaths like Commodus, Catherine the Great or Richard III who were not mentally ill but were certainly not, what we would conventionally call, 'normal'. Nor to consider great war leaders like General Patton who believed himself reincarnated hundreds of times in history as described in his 1922 poem 'Through a Glass, Darkly', or General Blücher who helped Wellington win the Battle of Waterloo shortly after believing he has become impregnated with an elephant by a French soldier the year before.

Nebuchadnezzar's insanity and preservation is possibly the earliest version of this regency being established and maintained but it is certainly not unique. Power corrupts the mind and when a King is seen as a living God like some of these examples, then unquestioned servitude can make any man go mad.

27 Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

Daniel is stipulating here that this is not a certainty, but a warning. It is what might happen, not what will happen, and he implores the King to think carefully about his actions so that this will not happen. Again, his affection for his master and their friendship is clear.

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28 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

This is a curious way of either Nebuchadnezzar speaking about himself in the third person, or the demonstration that Daniel has edited his text to fit with his readers. It may also be a later addition that has become copied into the text. Either way, it is notable for its bluntness and the type of language it uses. It's not a “I experienced all these things”; it is commentary.

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29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" 31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance brought him down and Psychologists have probably spent many pages interpreting his statement. "*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built*" is the oft quoted statement of bold arrogance that brought the mighty king down, and when one considers the nature of this statement, it is understandable. As stated, Kings were demi-gods on earth and in control of everything in their sphere. When Nebuchadnezzar asks this question, he is, effectively, setting a challenge.

Firstly, toward himself. How do I improve on this greatness? For him, this was insurmountable and his psychological destruction was ensured.

Secondly to all the tother Gods. I built Babylon, you didn't.

That is not to say that this was not a divine judgement. The text clearly stated at "While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you!" " but one can ask if this is not simply God taking some advantage the of king's mental decline. If we assume God knows all and knew that Nebuchadnezzar would send himself mad, he could simply have taken advantage and waited for this to happen, telling him that it would and giving Nebuchadnezzar a chance to avoid it himself through humility.

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This is a very common way that Prophecy works. The Divine Judgement is declared on a situation and, generally, has a circumstance to it. Decision can be taken to avoid the judgement being meted out, or as is the case here, will play out as expected. When one considers the multitude of psychological elements that go into circumstances and choices of this nature, this does not diminish God's power but makes his ability to read the complexities of the humans he supports more impressive.

God's judgement here was always conditional and Nebuchadnezzar's choices made it come about. The clear proximate cause, however, is not that Nebuchadnezzar put himself above God but that he put himself above everything. His psychological demise was because of his absolute arrogance, not just because he defied the almighty. If we look at the words of the Judgment, we find the clear acknowledgement that “*the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.*” Nebuchadnezzar's psychological demise was because he put himself above all things giving himself nowhere to grow.

The resultant psychosis, as stated, has been mirrored in other great leaders and the specifics of not washing and wandering like a beast need no revision. What is important is the timeframe. 7 years is a long time to be in such a state, but also is enough time for the mind to properly reset and recognise his need and how to fulfill it. It should also be stated that the number 7 has strong symbolic significance in numerical mysticism, but that is not evidenced in the text. In reality, all we can say is Nebuchadnezzar took the time that he needed to reset his mind.

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34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding 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 is from generation to generation.

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35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;

He does according to His will in the army of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses. He recognised he was not the most powerful individual in the universe and honoured God in his majesty. He recognised that there is one greater than he, and that he had a dependence on God that the king needed to recognise. Again, this psychological episode is not to diminish the fact that it was also a judgment from on high, but to reinforce to all people that there are those greater than them. God alone is above all and, as Nebuchadnezzar says "*No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*" That was Job's lesson.

36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

As stated before, Kings do not easily lose their power and when he returned to his senses, Nebuchadnezzar's associates started to recognise his authority again. Whatever regency was put in place was abolished and the power returned to Nebuchadnezzar. Bureaucracy and local governance were very different monsters in 900BC compared to today and, assuming there were no external threats, there was little need to take away the Kings power. Nebuchadnezzar, or whatever ghost-writer is penning this in his name, gives the final acknowledgment to the God that brought him out of his psychosis and gave him back his kingdom.

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promise of eternal glory.