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Agitation: The King’s Dream

4: 4-18

Agitation: the king’s dream DIG: How does the king’s handling of this dream differ from his handling of the earlier one? Who is Belteshazzar? How does the tree seem to represent the king? What did the iron and the bronze stand for? What hope is conveyed by letting the stump of the tree remain? Who is the messenger, and how does he fit into the dream of the tree?

REFLECT: Describe a lesson that you or someone you know learned the hard way. In what ways have you seen pride function as a destructive force? How can you appreciate your accomplishments without bragging or putting yourself or others down? How is discomfort and disaster, or at least profound personal discomfort, often the necessary precursors of spiritual growth and change.

ADONAI saw the pride in Nebuchadnezzar’s heart and was prepared to deal with it.

Some students believe that twenty or thirty years may have elapsed between the episode of the fiery furnace described in **Chapter 3** and the events described in this **chapter**. **Nebuchadnezzar** was now enjoying a time of peace and security. After defeating all his enemies and completing several impressive building projects, he was able at last to rest at home and delight in what had been accomplished. **Nebuchadnezzar** thought that **he** was the builder of “Babylon the great” and the architect of its peace and prosperity, but **he** would soon learn that all these things had been permitted by the will of **the Most High God**. Once again **ADONAI**, in **His** grace, used **a dream** to communicate an important message to **Nebuchadnezzar**. In **his** first **dream** (**to see link click [Aw](#) - The King’ Dream**), the king saw a great metallic statue of which **he** was **the head of gold**, but in this **dream he** saw **a** huge flourishing **tree** that fed and sheltered a multitude of **animals and birds**. After the first dream, **the king** was troubled (**2:3**), but after **the second dream, he** was terrified (**4:5**).¹⁵³

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. This reminds us of **David walking around on the roof of his place in Jerusalem** (see the commentary on [the Life of David Dc - David and Bathsheba](#)). **The king** was quite literally, the lord of all that **his** eyes could see. Yet that situation of **contentedness** and **prosperity** was an obstacle to the very work of **God** in **his** life that had to be addressed before **his** heart was changed.

As Iain Duguid relates in his commentary on *Daniel*, this is an important point for us to recognize in our own experience. Discomfort and disaster, or at least profound personal discomfort, are very often the necessary precursors of spiritual growth and change. As long as we are comfortable and at ease in the world, we are not normally ready to examine our hearts and make deep changes. On the other hand, when **ADONAI** disturbs the calm waters of our lives, we begin to be ready to seek different paths to pursue. It is often when our career hopes are dashed, or our marriage relationship is in shreds, or the doctor announces the we have cancer that we are finally persuaded to become serious about spiritual things. Since that is true, however, it suggests that we should approach these troubled times of our lives with a far more positive outlook than we normally do. These shattering experiences should prompt within us the expectation and hope that **God** is going to do something important in our lives. It is precisely through the storms of life that **the Lord** will show us who we really are, and even more importantly, who **He** really is.¹⁵⁴



Suddenly **the king’s** carefree life was suddenly shattered by a strange **dream**. **I had another dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me (4:4-6).** The summons was more than just a friendly invitation. It was a **command**, which emphasized the seriousness of the situation. **The king** issued a **command** for **the wise men** to gather. Unlike the first time, **Nebuchadnezzar** only wanted **the interpretation** of **his dream**. **He** did not bother demanding that **the wise men** reveal the content as well.¹⁵⁵ However, **when the magi** (Hebrew: *chartom*, refers to a **magician** or **wise man**, often associated with the practice of interpreting dreams, or performing magic), **enchanters** (Hebrew: *ashshaph*, refers to a class or wise men who were often consulted for their ability to interpret dreams, signs, and omens, and as such, were key figures in **the king’s** advisory team), **sorcerers** (Hebrew: *kashaph*, refers to the use of drugs, potions, or spells and is associated with “sorcery” or “witchcraft”) **and diviners** (Hebrew: *gezar*, primarily means *to cut* or *divide*. The term conveys a sense of separation or determination, often implying authority or finality in a decision being made. **They** were important in a religious society that was shaped by divine and royal decrees) **came to see the king, he told them about the dream, but he was frustrated because they could not interpret it**

for him (4:7).

As he did in **Chapter 2** (see **Ax - Dani’el Interprets the King’s Dream**), **Dani’el** came to the rescue. **Finally, Dani’el came into my presence and I told him the dream.** After the experience of **the first dream**, when **the wise men** failed so miserably (see **As - The Challenge to the Magi**), you would think **Nebuchadnezzar** would have bypassed **his advisers** and called **Dani’el** immediately. But it seems in the record of both **dreams**, **Dani’el** was kept apart from **the wise men**, even though **he** was **chief of the magi**. This title was not meant to be a compliment. It was appropriate because that had been **Dani’el’s** position since **2:48**, when **he** became the head of the Babylonian school of astrology. In practice, however, **Dani’el** never performed astrology or any other form of sorcery.

He is called Belteshazzar (meaning *Bel protect life*), **after the name of my god** (Bel). When **Nebuchadnezzar** acknowledged that **the spirit of the gods** was with **Dani’el**, **he** was simply addressing **him** as a master astrologer. At this point, **Nebuchadnezzar** was obviously polytheistic although **he** had acknowledged **YHVH’s** sovereignty years before (**2:27** and **3:28-29**).¹⁵⁶ **I said, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magi, I know that the spirit of the gods [or God] is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me (4:8-9). These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land.**



The first part of the dream (4:10-12): Nebuchadnezzar remembered **the dream** vividly. This time, it was not an image of **an enormous statue**, but of **an enormous tree**. **The height of the tree was enormous. The tree grew large**

and strong and its top reached the heavens; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. It was truly unique. Previously, **Nebuchadnezzar** had traveled to Lebanon to watch the felling of the great cedars to provide timber for **his** construction projects in **Babylon**. **The tree he saw in his dream** was significant because of its size and beauty. **The tree** bore so much **fruit** that there was enough for all living creatures. **The animals of the earth** rested in **its** shadows and **the birds** nested in **its branches**. It was an ideal setting.

The second part of the dream (4:13-15a): The first part of **the king’s dream** probably would have caused **Nebuchadnezzar** no concern. In fact, it may have produced pride as **he** recognized **himself** as **the tree** who provided bountifully for the subjects of **his** reign. But the second part of **the dream**, that **the tree** was to be **cut down**, turned into a troublesome nightmare.¹⁵⁷ After the description of **the tree**, **the king** narrated the plot. It begins with the appearance of a **“messenger.”** **In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, an angelic messenger, coming down from heaven.** **He** made sure that the commands of **Ha’Shem** were carried out. With a **shout, the angel** gave the order that **the great tree** was to be **cut down and its branches trimmed**. Not only that, but **its leaves** were to be **stripped off and its fruit scattered**. **The animals** were to **flee from under it and the birds from its branches**. **But he** commanded that **the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field**. **The stump** indicates that even though **the tree** is to be devastated, **the tree’s stump** was to be preserved, yet bound with **iron** and **bronze**. As we will see later, **4:23** and **26** demonstrate that this **metal band** is symbolic of the preservation of **Nebuchadnezzar’s** life and kingdom.¹⁵⁸

The third part of the dream (4:15b-16): In the third part of **Nebuchadnezzar’s dream**, **the tree** had abruptly morphed into a person. This must have been even more terrifying as **the king** realized that **he** would live like **an animal** for **seven years**. **Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven years pass by for him** (see **Bx - Humiliation: The King’s Discipline**).

The purpose (4:17-18): This **dream** was designed to be a part of **God’s** revelation of **Himself** and **His** authority over **Nebuchadnezzar** who in pride had

exalted **himself** above **YHVH**. **The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people (4:17). ADONAI** saw the pride in **Nebuchadnezzar’s** heart and was prepared to deal with it. **The king** could issue **his** decrees, but it was the decrees from **the throne in heaven** that **rules** the events **on earth (4:17 and 24, 9:24-27). ADONAI has made the heavens His throne; from there He rules over everything (Psalm 103:19 NLT).**¹⁵⁹ **This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the gods is with you (4:18).** With **his** account of **the dream** concluded, **Nebuchadnezzar** turns with confidence to **Dani’el** in order to hear **his** interpretation (see [Bv](#) - **Interpretation: The King’s Danger**).

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that as **the Almighty Sovereign Ruler** of the universe **You** have amazing love that seeks to bless by guiding and warning so they bend the knee before **You** worshiping and acknowledging you as **the King of heaven**, so **You** can pour **Your** love on them. **You** can see into the heart and **You** desire a heart that loves **You** back and repents/turns from wrong to following **You**. **The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you - not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9).** **You** are sovereign over the realms of men and women. The same sun that hardens clay, melts wax. **Lord**, let my heart melt like wax in love and obedience to **You**. To **the One** who sits at **Your** right hand. Amen.*