

Humbling the Proud

We read of the character of God that He takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11 – see also 18:23).

Because of this, God does not always leave people to continue their wrong behaviours. Sometimes He intervenes in their lives, to correct them and bring them back to Him. A good example of this is where He chooses to humble the proud.

One man who was proud and boastful about his achievements was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. God intervened in this man’s life in an extraordinary way in order to humble him. The good news for the king was that he responded positively.

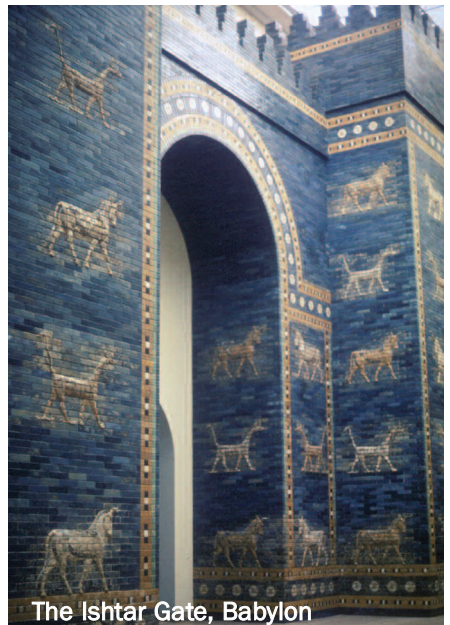
Sadly, his descendant Belshazzar did not follow Nebuchadnezzar’s example but continued to be very proud. The lessons from these two ancient kings are timeless – as applicable today as they were when they took place so many centuries ago.

The Dream

Nebuchadnezzar had a fascinating dream given to him by God, the Most High, recorded in Daniel 4:10–17. A great and fruitful tree was to be cut down and have its branches removed, and then have metal bands put around its stump. Then there was a picture of a man living like an animal, with animal instincts, eating grass and soaked by the dew.

It was the Jewish prophet Daniel who gave the shocking interpretation of the dream. The king was to be:

Driven away from mankind and your dwelling place is to be with the beasts of the field, and you are to 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. 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. 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 (Daniel 4:24–27).



The Ishtar Gate, Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar was an extremely proud man who required dramatic events to unfold in his life to bring about his repentance. This did not happen instantly. Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king 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? (Daniel 4:29).

Nebuchadnezzar had not heeded the dream's message to change his ways and instead carried on in his arrogance, believing that his prosperity was solely due to his actions. He did not acknowledge that his sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty were all given to him by God (see Daniel 5:18). This blasphemy did not go unpunished and the dream was fulfilled.

The Fulfilment

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' feathers and his nails like birds' claws (Daniel 4:33).

This proud monarch was brought to his lowest point, living like an animal with no power or even human dignity. He endured this punishment for a great length of time, the 'seven periods of time' (Daniel 4:16) may well have been seven years! In this incident, the Proverb is shown to be true:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling (Proverbs 16:18).

How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to the divine punishment that was inflicted on him? Did he feel hatred towards God because of the suffering he endured? Did he think God was unjust; a cruel dictator to be avoided at all costs? Not at all.

The Response

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 honoured Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 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?' At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendour were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counsellors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was re-established in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honour 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 (Daniel 4:34–37).

Once Nebuchadnezzar had demonstrated that his pride had turned into humility and had acknowledged the greatness of God, the Lord was merciful. He restored the king's majesty and splendour, all the power of his kingdom.

The end result was that Nebuchadnezzar turned from his evil ways to



worship the only true God. In fact, he became a believer. When we think of Nebuchadnezzar, it is easy to picture his arrogance and pride. It is much harder to remember that he repented. In doing so, he was therefore in the same position as all those who have changed their lives, repented from their sins and turned to God.

This episode serves as a reminder that anyone can be brought low by circumstances in their life. These may even have been brought about by God in order to correct them. The great news is that anyone can repent, become a believer in God and be reconciled to Him.

Learning the Lesson?

Sadly, although the later King Belshazzar knew what happened to his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar, he did not act upon this knowledge. After recounting the events which had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, it was again the prophet Daniel who declared to Belshazzar:

Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this... (Daniel 5:22).

Belshazzar continued to be proud and self-confident, ignoring the Most High. He did not humble himself, even though he was aware of the incredible events which had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. His punishment was severe:

That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain (Daniel 5:30).

Evidently, with knowledge comes responsibility to act upon it. Let us apply what we can learn from studying the lives of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, as summarised in the Proverb:

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honour (Proverbs 29:23).

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*All quotations from the
New American Standard Bible*

