

About Face: Nebuchadnezzar - “God Must Humble Me”

Daniel 2:26-28, 46-47; 3:16-18, 28; 4:22-27, 29-33; 6:4-5, 34-37; James 2:19

This is week 2 of ‘About Face’ where we are talking about the ‘bad guys’ of the Bible to see how they responded to an encounter with God. Last week, we discussed how Pharaoh encountered God’s grace and responded by hardening his heart. His response was, “I will not bow.” Spoiler: it didn’t turn out great for him. Jared had a mic drop moment when he said “if you won’t accept God’s mercy then you have to accept His judgement.”

This week we are going to be in the book of Daniel to see how God will humble what pride refuses to surrender. The idea is that we become truly human when we surrender ourselves to God.

King Nebuchadnezzar is different from Pharaoh. He doesn’t deny God’s existence. In fact, he repeatedly acknowledges Him, but his response is more subtle. “God can be God... as long as I still get to be king of my own life.” Where Pharaoh rejected God’s grace, Nebuchadnezzar resisted God’s sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream:

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that he cannot understand. The most powerful man in the world cannot understand what is happening in his own mind. All the king’s astrologers and all the king’s wise men couldn’t explain Nebby’s dream to him.

Here enters Daniel. Read Daniel 2:26-28.

Daniel then proceeds to explain what the dream meant. Read Daniel 2:46-47. Yay! Nebuchadnezzar is now a believer and all is well in Babylon! Except...let’s think about what he really did. He bowed before *Daniel*. He honored *Daniel*. He ordered that an offering and incense be presented to *Daniel*. He referred to God as “your (*Daniel’s*) God.”

On closer inspection it doesn’t look like Nebby had a heart change. He recognizes God’s wisdom and power, but he does not yet surrender to God. It’s like he can’t see past the position of humanity to see divinity.

You can recognize that God is powerful without allowing God to be Lord. Read James 2:19. Belief is not surrender.

So what was this dream about? There is a giant statue made of 4 different metals which each represents 4 kingdoms that will rule over Israel. Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold in the statue. He is important and powerful, but he is not the entire statue. He is part of a story bigger than himself.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Statue:

Apparently, Nebby didn’t forget about the statue idea but the warning about it kinda slipped his mind. God told him that he was part of a bigger story. Pride convinced him he *was* the whole story.

Historians believe that it was around 16 years after the dream that he built a giant statue made of gold as a show of dominance and affluence of Babylon. We can’t get too deep into this but here are a few nuggets for you guys to take home and chew on later.

First, this time line would make this event fall shortly after Babylon conquered Jerusalem and plundered all of the gold from the temple. It is quite possible that gold once used to honor God in the Temple was now part of a statue to honor Nebuchadnezzar.

Second, the dimensions of the statue are odd... they are based on the Babylonian numerical system which - long story short - makes it 90 feet tall and 9' feet wide. In cubits (the measurement of the day) it would be 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. In Babylonian culture, the numbers 6 and 60 were symbols of supreme mathematical order, strength, and imperial perfection. Also, the number 60 was the sacred number of Anu, the supreme god of the sky and the ruler of the Babylonian pantheon. By using the dimensions 60 and 6, Nebuchadnezzar was deliberately coding the statue with the numerical signatures of Babylon's highest gods and cosmic order.

In Hebrew culture, 6 is the number for humanity and imperfection. (Man was created on day 6 and falls short of perfection. 7 is the number for perfection.) A statue with dimensions of 60 by 6 is the ultimate expression of human pride reaching toward heaven, completely independent of God. It represents human kingdom power pushed to its absolute limit.

This could also be seen as the precursor to 666: Many scholars note that the repetition of the number 6 in the dimensions (60 cubits high, 6 cubits wide) foreshadows the "*Number of the Beast*" (666) found later in the Book of Revelation. Just as Nebuchadnezzar used the numbers of man and Babylon to force everyone to bow down and worship his image under threat of death, Revelation predicts a future global empire that will do the exact same thing using the number 666.

So King Nebuchadnezzar built a statue and required everyone to bow to it. We all know the story here...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow.

Read Daniel 3:16-18. God saved them from the fiery furnace.

Read Daniel 3:28. Once again Nebuchadnezzar encounters the power of God and responds to it with praise and astonishment. Yet his heart still has not surrendered.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream:

This brings us to Daniel 4. It is written from Nebuchadnezzar as a declaration that would have gone out to the whole kingdom to share what had happened to him. Nebuchadnezzar is probably in his 70's at this point and has conquered, built, and established his kingdom over 40ish years. He is settled and accomplished. Then he has another dream.

In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar dreams about an enormous tree. It is strong, beautiful, and everyone benefits from it. Then heaven commands: Cut it down. Daniel once again interprets the dream for Nebuchadnezzar:

Read Daniel 4:22-27.) Daniel doesn't just interpret the dream. He gives Nebuchadnezzar advice/opportunity for him to receive God's grace: turn from your sins, practice righteousness, and show mercy. The dream was God's warning to him. Then...God gave him time.

Read Daniel 4:29-30. God warned Nebuchadnezzar out of grace then gave him a year to humble his heart. But he couldn't let go of his pride.

Nebuchadnezzar's Humbling:

Read Daniel 4:31-33. Before the words even left his mouth...he loses his reason, is driven away, lives among the animals, and eats grass. The most powerful king in the world is reduced to a wild beast.

Back when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, Moses brought them a word from God: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God*

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) In other words...there is only one God and you should love God with every part of your being...heart, soul, and strength (Body, Mind, Soul). When we encounter God's grace, love, and mercy, our only response should be total surrender.

However, Nebuchadnezzar refused to surrender any part of himself completely. Instead, he had to be humbled, body, mind, and soul. The king who believed his own wisdom was enough lost his ability to reason. The powerful conqueror who controlled nations was driven into the wilderness. The man who said that the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was greater than all but never gave his allegiance to Him could no longer ignore His ultimate authority. God had Nebuchadnezzar's attention long before He had his surrender.

For 7 years, Nebuchadnezzar lived like a beast in the wilderness just as Daniel had interpreted from his dream. This is the turning point.

Nebuchadnezzar's Turning Point:

For his entire life, Nebuchadnezzar has looked around at Babylon, his power, his accomplishments, and himself. Finally...he looked up.

Read Daniel 6:34:35. This was his *About Face* moment. Nebuchadnezzar's life changed when the direction of his eyes changed. As a result, his reason returned, his kingdom was restored, and his humanity was restored. He finally understood that God was greater than any man.

Read Daniel 4:36-37. The king who demanded people to worship an idol now worships God. The king who ordered people to bow now bows to God. The king who thought he was supreme now recognizes God as the Most High.

Then he writes down a humiliating story of God humbling him and sends it throughout his entire empire. The former beast becomes a witness. That is a serious *About Face*!

Wrap-Up:

Last week, Pharaoh showed us what happens when a heart refuses grace. Nebuchadnezzar shows us how pride can keep us from surrendering to God.

Nebuchadnezzar's *About Face* began when he stopped looking at himself and lifted his eyes toward heaven. The question isn't whether God will encounter you. The question is: when He does, will your pride stand in your way or will you surrender to Him body, mind, and soul?

Reread Daniel 4:37b.

Reflection Questions:

- What happens when God asks you to surrender control? Do you willingly surrender or do you have to be humbled?
- How do your beliefs match with your obedience? Is your belief only verbal or do you serve God with all your heart, soul, and strength (mind, body, soul)?