

1. Kings II 25:6-11 (adapted from JPS 1985 translation)

They captured the king [Zedekiah] and brought him before the king of Babylon at Riblah; and they put him on trial. They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes; then Zedekiah's eyes were put out. He was chained in bronze fetters and he was brought to Babylon.

On the seventh day of the fifth month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nevuchadnezzar of Babylon—Nevuzaradan, the chief of the guards, an officer of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the House of the Lord, the king's palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; he burned down the house of every notable person. The entire Chaldean force that was with the chief of the guard tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. The remnant of the people that was left in the city, the defectors who had gone over to the king of Babylon—and the remnant of the population—were taken into exile by Nevuzaradan, the chief of the guards.

2. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews Book X 6:3 (Whiston translation)

Now a little time afterward, the King of Babylon made an expedition against Jehoiakim: whom he received [into the city;] and this out of fear of the foregoing predictions of this Prophet: as supposing he should suffer nothing that was terrible; because he neither shut the gates, nor fought against him. Yet when [Nevuchadnezzar] was come into the city, he did not observe the covenants he had made; but he slew such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity: together with their King Jehoiakim: whom he commanded to be thrown before the walls, without any burial; and made his son Jehoiachin King of the country, and of the city; he also took the principal persons in dignity for captives, three thousand in number, and led them away to Babylon.

3:31-33 Prologue

3. Daniel 3:31-33 (adapted from JPS 1985)

"King Nevuchadnezzar to all people and nations of every language that inhabit the whole earth: May your well-being abound! The signs and wonders that the Most High Gd has worked for me I am pleased to relate. How great are His signs; how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures throughout the generations."

4. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 5

He thought that he would erase the heavenly decree and arrange the earthly empires such that they would be humbled and enslaved before him and his seed forever... Due to this empty arrogance, it was decreed that he would be chased from human society, to travel like a wild donkey among the beasts...

5. Ibn Ezra to Daniel 4:3

The letter tells the entire story that happened, and it was written thus [here] in honour of Daniel, for the king wrote thus to all of the lands of his reign, and it was a great source of splendour for Israel.

4:1-15 The Nevuchadnezzar Tree

6. Daniel 4:1-15 (adapted from JPS 1985)

I, Nevuchadnezzar, was living serenely in my house, flourishing in my palace. I had a dream that frightened me, and my thoughts in bed and the vision of my mind alarmed me. I gave an order to bring all the wise men of Babylon before me to let me know the meaning of the dream.

The magicians, exorcists, Chaldeans, and diviners came, and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its meaning known to me. Finally, Daniel, called Belteshazzar after the name of my god, in whom the spirit of the holy gods was, came to me, and I related the dream to him, [saying], "Belteshazzar, chief magician, in whom I know the spirit of the holy gods to be, and whom no mystery baffles, tell me the meaning of my dream vision that I have seen. In the visions of my mind in bed I saw a tree of great height in the midst of the earth; The tree grew and became mighty; Its top reached heaven, And it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its foliage was beautiful And its fruit abundant; There was food for all in it. Beneath it the beasts of the field found shade, And the birds of the sky dwelt on its branches; All

creatures fed on it. In the vision of my mind in bed, I looked and saw a holy Watcher coming down from heaven. He called loudly and said: 'Hew down the tree, lop off its branches, Strip off its foliage, scatter its fruit. Let the beasts of the field flee from beneath it And the birds from its branches, But leave the stump with its roots in the ground. In fetters of iron and bronze Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And share earth's verdure with the beasts. Let his mind be altered from that of a man, And let him be given the mind of a beast, And let seven seasons pass over him. This sentence is decreed by the Watchers; This verdict is commanded by the Holy Ones So that all creatures may know That the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man, And He gives it to whom He wishes And He may set over it even the lowest of men.'

"I, King Nevuchadnezzar, had this dream; now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its meaning, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make its meaning known to me, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

#### 7. Judges 9:7-15 (adapted from JPS 1985 edition)

When Jotham was informed, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and called out to them in a loud voice. "Citizens of Shechem!" he cried, "listen to me, that Gd may listen to you.

"Once the trees went to anoint a king over themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' But the olive tree replied, 'Have I, through whom Gd and men are honored, stopped yielding my rich oil, that I should go and wave above the trees?'

So the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.' But the fig tree replied, 'Have I stopped yielding my sweetness, my delicious fruit, that I should go and wave above the trees?'

So the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.' But the vine replied, 'Have I stopped yielding my new wine, which gladdens Gd and men, that I should go and wave above the trees?'

Then all the trees said to the thornbush, 'You come and reign over us.' And the thornbush said to the trees, 'If you are acting honorably in anointing me king over you, come and take shelter in my shade; but if not, may fire issue from the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'

#### 8. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 5

They showed him that man is a tree of the field. He is like that great, tall, beautiful tree, but he must [likewise] grow, exist, and then be destroyed.

#### 4:16-25 The interpretation

#### 9. Daniel 4:16-25 (adapted from JPS 1985)

Then Daniel, called Belteshazzar, was perplexed for a while, and alarmed by his thoughts. The king addressed him, "Let the dream and its meaning not alarm you."

Belteshazzar replied, "My lord, would that the dream were for your enemy and its meaning for your foe! The tree that you saw grow and become mighty, whose top reached heaven, which was visible throughout the earth, whose foliage was beautiful, whose fruit was so abundant that there was food for all in it, beneath which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged— it is you, O king, you who have grown and become mighty, whose greatness has grown to reach heaven, and whose dominion is to the end of the earth. The holy Watcher whom the king saw descend from heaven and say, Hew down the tree and destroy it, But leave the stump with its roots in the ground. In fetters of iron and bronze In the grass of the field, Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And share the lot of the beasts of the field Until seven seasons pass over him— this is its meaning, O king; it is the decree of the Most High which has overtaken my lord the king.

You will be driven away from men and have your habitation with the beasts of the field. You will be fed grass like cattle, and be drenched with the dew of heaven; seven seasons will pass over you until you come to know that the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man, and He gives it to whom He wishes. And the meaning of the command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots is that the kingdom will remain yours from the time you come to know that Heaven is sovereign.

Therefore, O king, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by beneficence and your iniquities by generosity to the poor; then your serenity may be extended."

All this befell King Nevuchadnezzar.

10. Rashi to Daniel 4:24 (based on Midrash Tanchuma Mishpatim 4)

What moved Daniel to give this good advice to Nevuchadnezzar? He saw the Jews, poor, lowly in their exile, going from door to door, and he advised Nevuchadnezzar to aid them. He said, "These paupers you exiled are hungry; support them!" And so Nevuchadnezzar did, opening his stores and supporting them for twelve months.

11. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 4

Were the decree for his arrogance, then if he would serve lowlier people, the needy, then the decree would vanish.

12. Talmud, Bava Batra 4a

Why was Daniel punished? Because he advised Nevuchadnezzar...

13. Rabbi Yaakov Medan, *Daniel: Galut v'Hitgalut* pg. 101

Perhaps this was Daniel's sin; he did not entirely clarify his words to Nevuchadnezzar, and he planted within Nevuchadnezzar the feeling that the tzedakah he would distribute to the needy would pacify Divine wrath at his arrogance. Can one who sins with arrogance then bribe the One who neither shows favour nor accepts bribes?

#### 4:26-34      The fulfillment

14. Daniel 4:26-34 (adapted from JPS 1985)

Twelve months later, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace at Babylon, the king exclaimed, "There is great Babylon, which I have built by my vast power to be a royal residence for the glory of my majesty!"

The words were still on the king's lips, when a voice fell from heaven, "It has been decreed for you, O King Nevuchadnezzar: The kingdom has passed out of your hands. You are being driven away from men, and your habitation is to be with the beasts of the field. You are to be fed grass like cattle, and seven seasons will pass over you until you come to know that the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man and He gives it to whom He wishes."

There and then the sentence was carried out upon Nevuchadnezzar. He was driven away from men, he ate grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like eagle's [feathers] and his nails like [the talons of] birds.

"When the time had passed, I, Nevuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason was restored to me. I blessed the Most High, and praised and glorified the Ever-Living One, Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion And whose kingdom endures throughout the generations. All the inhabitants of the earth are of no account. He does as He wishes with the host of heaven, And with the inhabitants of the earth. There is none to stay His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' There and then my reason was restored to me, and my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My companions and nobles sought me out, and I was reestablished over my kingdom, and added greatness was given me.

So now I, Nevuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of Heaven, all of whose works are just and whose ways are right, and who is able to humble those who behave arrogantly."

15. Midrash Tanchuma Mishpatim 4

The wicked one opened his stores and distributed to the people for twelve months. After twelve months, the wicked one forgot the dream. He began to stroll atop his palace, where he heard the cries of the poor masses before his [still open] stores. He asked his servants, "What is this sound I hear?" They said, "The paupers you exiled are demanding their support." A stingy eye entered him, and the king replied (4:27), "This is great Babylon, which I built to house a palace, with my strength and my glory!" He said, "Without my stores, how could I build up this entire land?" He decreed that the aid be halted, as the text continues, "The word was still in the king's mouth, etc."

Gd said to him, "Wicked one! What caused your peace all twelve months? It was the tzedakah you practiced!" And if this happens to the nations [for stinginess], how much more so for Israel.

16. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 5

In truth: miraculously, suddenly, extraordinary quantities of black bile overcame him, such that he rejected human society and fled from it, dwelling in the wilderness, rejecting royal food and palaces, sofas of gold and silver. He elected to

travel alone all day and all night, estranged, in the fields, to the point that his radiance and appearance darkened, his hair and nails grew very long, and his food was the grass of the field as the food of beasts, and as solitary wanderers in the wilderness eat.

His heart, which had once been wise, was changed from the heart of human beings through his illness and the growth of darkness in him. His heart and thoughts were not those of people, certainly not those of a king. His heart was like that of a beast in him, drawn to his desires, without any concern for intellectual or pragmatic thought.

Because everyone saw him, he was not thought to be dead, but only ill or anti-social and rejecting association with human beings, and so his servants did not rebel against him, and no one reigned in his stead.

#### 17. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 5

He was not removed from his empire entirely, as would have suited his wickedness – as it said, 'Leave the essence of his roots in the ground' – for [two] reasons. First, due to the Divine decree that the monarchy of Nevuchadnezzar, his lifetime and those of his son and grandson, would be seventy years, as Yirmiyahu said, "And they will serve him, his son and his grandson, until the time for his land comes." And the second reason is that Gd restored his mind and reign so that Divine might could be publicized. Had Nevuchadnezzar died or disappeared from his empire in the way of the land, praise of Gd and publicity of His might would not have resulted.

#### Is this punishment for his barbarity?

#### 18. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 4

Man is intermediate, his intellect situated between the lofty intellects and the mute creatures. When he became arrogant and he left his space, saying (Isaiah 14:14), "I will be like the higher beings," his punishment was not only that his goal of ascending to the levels of the higher ones was kept from him, but also that the intermediate state he had originally occupied no longer remained to him.

#### 19. Talmud, Yoma 9b

Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of three things: Idolatry, immorality and bloodshed. Idolatry as it is written... But in the second Temple, when they were involved in Torah, mitzvot and acts of generosity, why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred...

#### 20. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, Meromei Sadeh to Yoma 9b

But this bloodshed was not with criminal intent, but intent for a mitzvah. They thought each other Sadducees and heretics and traitors, such that the law mandated sending them to their demise. What caused them to think this? Baseless hatred.

#### 21. Abarbanel Maayan 6, Tamar 5

The truth is that Nevuchadnezzar, when he recognized his punishment and knew his sin, turned his heart to repent. He saw that his sin was in desecrating Gd's Name by thinking to cancel the [Divine decree] and thwart His will, and that this was why the trouble had come upon him. He realized that the way to repent fully for the sin of desecrating Gd's Name would be to sanctify His Name publicly...

A second reason also appears correct, that Nevuchadnezzar saw himself exiled from the company of man, and word had circulated throughout his empire that the loss of his reign and end of his power had been decreed upon him, for he had become as a beast. He worried that in the outlying areas of his empire, evil men would rise up to cast off the burden of his yoke, and they would rebel against his reign. Slaves would rise up against their master, saying, 'King Nevuchadnezzar is already dead or lost from the world, the rod of his might is broken, the staff of his splendour is cut off.' Therefore, to settle the hearts of men, nations and tongues, each person coming to his place in peace, and no one raising a hand or foot against his reign, he wrote to every nation and tongue of what had happened, to inform them that his fate had been a passing blemish, that he retained his might and intellect.