

For more on the Book of Daniel

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1. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 6:5

וכן המצריים כל אחד ואחד מאותן המצירים והמריעים לישראל אילו לא רצה להרע להם הרשות בידו, שלא גזר על איש ידוע אלא הודיעו שסוף זרעו עתיד להשתעבד בארץ לא להם...

And so too the Egyptians, each of those who pained and harmed Israel, had he wished not to harm them, he would have had the freedom for this. [Gd] did not decree upon a particular person, but only informed [Avraham] that his children would, in the end, be enslaved in a foreign land...

2. Melachim II 25:7

וְאֵת בְּנֵי צְדַקְיָהוּ שְׁחָטוּ לְעֵינָיו וְאֵת עֵינֵי צְדַקְיָהוּ עָנַר וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ בְּנִחְשָׁתִים וַיְבִאֵהוּ בָבֶל:

And they slaughtered the sons of Tzidkiyahu before his eyes, and they blinded the eyes of Tzidkiyahu, and they bound him in chains and they brought him to Babylon.

3. Daniel 2:5

עָנָה מֶלֶכָא וְאָמַר לְכַשְׁדָּאֵי מַלְתָּא מְנִי אַנְדָּא הֵן לָא תְהוּדְעוּנְנִי חֵלְמָא וּפְשָׁרָהּ הַדְמִין תַּתְעַבְדוּן וּבְתִיכּוֹן נְגְלִי יִתְשַׁמוּן:

The king declared to the Chaldeans: The word has gone forth from me! If you do not tell me the dream and its meaning, you shall be torn into pieces, and your homes will be turned into ruins.

The Story

4. Daniel 3:31-4:34 (JPS 1917 translation, c/o hareidi.org)

'Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; peace be multiplied to you. It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders that G-d Most High has wrought toward me. How great are His signs! and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.

¹I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid; and imaginings upon my bed and the visions of my head frightened me. Therefore made I 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. Then came in the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers; and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known to me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and I told the dream before him: O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no secret causes you trouble, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. Thus were the visions of my head upon my bed: I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached to heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was food for all; the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the branches thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven. He cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from its branches. Nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even in a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given to him; and let seven times pass over him. The matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the lowest of men. This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen; and you, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, forasmuch as 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 gods is in you.'

¹⁶Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while, and his thoughts frightened him. The king spoke and said: 'Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation, frighten you.' Belteshazzar answered and said: 'My lord, the dream be to them that hate you, and the interpretation thereof to your adversaries. The tree that you saw, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached to the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was food for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation; it is you, O king, that are grown and become strong; for your greatness is grown, and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from heaven, and saying: Hew down the tree, and destroy it; nevertheless leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even in a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him — this is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass as oxen, and shall be wet 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 whomsoever He will. And whereas it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be sure to you, after that you shall have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by almsgiving, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.'

²⁶All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking upon the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, and said: 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for a royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven: 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from you. And you shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass as 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 whomsoever He will.' The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. 'And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes to heaven, and mine understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that lives for ever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation; And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He does according to His will in the host of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say to Him: What doest You? At the same time mine understanding returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and my splendour returned to me; and my ministers and my lords sought to me; and I was established in my kingdom, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.'

5. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 5

והיה אמתת זה שגברה בו על דרך הפלא פתאום מרה שחורה בשיעור מופלג שהוא מעצמו היה מואס בני אדם ובורח מהם ושוכן במדברות והיה מואס מאכלי המלכים והיכליהם מטות זהב וכסף ובוחר ללכת יחידי מתנכר לרגלו בשדה כל היום וכל הלילה עד שחשך זיוו ותוארו ושערו וצפרניו גדלו מאד והיה מאכלו עשב השדה כמו הבעלי חיים כי כן יאכלו הולכי מדברות בהיותם יחידים מתבודדים. וגם לבו שהיה מקודם לב חכם בחליו ותגבורת השחורה בו מלב האנשים נשתנת לפי שלא היה לבו ומחשבותיו כבן אדם ולא כ"ש כמלך אבל היה לבו בקרבו כלב חיה אחת נמשך לתאותו בלתי חושש לא אל השכל העיוני ולא אל השכל המעשי.

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.

6. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 5

התשובה האמיתית בזה היא שני"ג כאשר הכיר בעונשו וידע חטאתו אשר חטא שם על לבו לעשות תשובה שלמה והוא ראה שהיה עונו בחלול ד' בחשבו לבטל הגזירה ולשדד יכלתו ושעל כן באה עליו הצרה הזאת ושהיה דרך התשובה שלמה על עון חלול ד' לקדש שמו ברבים... ולי עוד בזה סבה שנית והיא שני"ג לפי שראה עצמו מגורש מבני אדם ויצא קול בכל מלכותו שנגזר עליו מן השמים העדר מלכותו ובטול ממשלתו לפי שנמשל כבהמות נדמה, לכן חשש אולי בקצוות ארץ ממשלתו יקומו אנשים בני בליעל לפרוק מעליהם עול סובלו ויהיו מורדים במלכותו ויקומו עבדים מתפרצים מאדוניהם באמרם המלך נ"ג כבר מת או בטל מן העולם נשבר מטה עוזו נגדע מקל תפארתו. הנה בעבור זה כדי לישב לבבות בני אדם האומות והלשונות וכל איש על מקומו יבא בשלום ולא ירים את ידו ואת רגלו נגד מלכותו כתב לכל העמים והלשונות ספור הענין איך היה להודיעם איך היה ענינו מום עובר ושעדין הוא בגבורתו וחזקו ורוב דעתו

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.

Why not kill him?

7. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 4

בהיות האדם אמצעי בין השכלים הנבדלים ובין הבעלי חיים הבלתי מדברים כפי השכלתו, כאשר התגאה ויצא ממחיצתו ואמר אדמה לעליון היה מענשו שלא לבד יבצר ממנו מה שביקש והוא לעלות למדרגת עליונים אבל גם מה שהיה לו ראשונה שהיה במדרגה ממוצעת לא ישאר בו

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.

8. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 5

והוא חשב בלבו לבטל הגזירה העליונה ההיא ולסדר עניני מלכיות הארץ באופן שיהיו נכנעים ומשועבדים לו ולזרעו לעולם... ומפני הגאווה ההוללת הזאת נגזר עליו לטרדו מבני אדם וללכת כעיר פרא בין החיות...

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...

9. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 5

והראו לו שהאדם עץ השדה ושהוא היה כאותו אילן הגדול והגבוה והיפה אבל צומח הווה נפסד בהכרח

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.

10. Abarbanel, Maayan 6, Tamar 5

ולא נעדר ממלכותו בהחלט כפי רשעתו כפי שאמר 'עיקר שרשוהי בארעא שבוקו', לסבות: ראשונה לפי שלא תתבטל גזירת הקל יתברך שגזרה מלכות נ"ג כל ימי חייו ובנו ובן בנו שבעים שנה כמו שאמר ירמיהו 'ועבדו אותו ואת בנו ואת בן בנו עד בא עת ארצו'. והסבה השנית היא שהחזיר הקב"ה דעתו ומלכותו כדי שיתפרסם לבני אדם גבורותיו ואם היה מת או נעדר ממלכותו כדרך כל הארץ לא היה נמשך ממנו שבח הקל יתברך ופרסום גבורותיו

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.

11. Sand, Strang, Milberg, *Dying cancer patients' experiences of powerlessness and helplessness*, Supportive Care in Cancer 16:7 (July 2008) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18026998/>

Impending death, symptoms, loss of control and autonomy, ignorance, isolation and uncertainty constituted the basis for powerlessness and helplessness, but each factor was reinforced by the occurrence of suddenness, high intensity and/or lengthiness. In total, 65% reported definite experiences of powerlessness and helplessness. These feelings also held a deeper meaning, involving aspects such as existential loneliness and hopelessness...

12. Midrash Aggadah to Shemot 14:28

לא נשאר בהם עד אחד. זה פרעה שנשאר מהם ולא מת, כדי לספר גדולתו של הקב"ה, כמו שנא' "ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיך" (שמות ט זט)...

"None remained from them, up to one." This is Pharaoh, who remained from them and did not die, to inform of Gd's greatness, as Shemot 9:16 says, "But for this purpose I have established you [to show you My honour, and to tell of My name throughout the land]."

13. Ibn Ezra to Daniel 4:3

יספר כל המעשה שעבר ונכתב ככה בעבור כבוד דניאל שכתב המלך ככה לכל מדינות מלכותו ותפארת גדולה היתה לישראל
It 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.

Review Questions

- 1> What were some of Nevuchadnezzar's terrible deeds?
- 2> What image represented Nevuchadnezzar in his dream?
- 3> What are three standard approaches explaining why Gd did this to Nevuchadnezzar?
- 4> How might Nevuchadnezzar's illness have been like death?
- 5> What can we learn from this insight into illness?