

## Grass-Eating 101

Written by Bob Stone

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Try to guess this verse. It's widely quoted by Christians and non-Christians alike, and seen as a universal truth by anyone who has observed the rise and fall of people. It describes a condition that always leads to destruction—to a fall. The last word of the verse, in fact, is "fall." It's often quoted in a five-word abbreviated version of the actual verse—"Pride comes before a fall."

The whole verse is found in Prov. 16:18—"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Many people who quote this verse don't know it's from the Bible. All they know is that their lives and the examples of others have taught them it is true. A painful example of this reality is found in the rise and fall of the television ministry of Jim Bakker. The P.T.L. ministry was the focus of front page and television newscasts for over a year, and the two principle leaders, Jim Bakker and Richard Dortch, sentenced to prison. Both have since been released, with Jim Bakker serving the longest term.

I had a chance to hear Richard Dortch speak some time ago, and sensed genuine sorrow and repentance. He had been the executive director of P.T.L. Ministries only a few years before it all fell apart, but was still convicted and sentenced to eight years at Eglin Federal Prison Camp. He served 21 months and 8 days before being released. When I read his second book, *Fatal Conceit*, I was particularly struck by his many references to pride and its destructive nature. I got the impression from reading this book that a necessary step in his recovery was writing to a wider audience of people who may have been affected by his actions. It seems to have been a healing catharsis to write out his story, his failure and his restoration.

He's not the only one who has used his writing as an aid for himself and others. Consider the writing of King Nebuchadnezzar as he tells his story. In Daniel 4, we see his fall from power and how God's judgment brought him back. This story requires only a little comment and explanation; we'll apply it at the end. It stands as one of God's most dramatic and shocking judgments found in Scripture. I'm calling it "Grass Eating 101."

Chapter 4 of Daniel records the culmination of King Nebuchadnezzar's spiritual biography.

- *Chapter 1*—Intro to 4 Hebrew children
- *Chapter 2*—Dream interpreted by Daniel
- *Chapter 3*—Deliverance from fiery furnace of 3 young Jewish men
- *Chapter 4*—Shows God using drastic means to bring a proud king to worship the true God—the most high God.

The events of chapter 4 probably take place about 30 years after chapter 3.

Daniel 4:1-8

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation. I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my 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. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

### **The King's Proclamation and Praise: vv 1-3**

King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

This is actually a conclusion. Chronologically, these opening words belong at the end of the chapter, because they are the result of what happened in it. So the book begins at the end of the story—vv. 1-3—speaking of his restoration to sanity and the throne.

Notice how different this proclamation is from the previous one he had made, in Daniel 2.

### The King's Dream—vv. 4-27.

Nebuchadnezzar says his dream was in the context of contented and prosperous circumstances in both private and official life. God spoke through a frightening dream, in the midst of his contented and prosperous state. The king then sought an explanation from the wise men (vv 7-8), but they were unable to produce one. The situation called for someone with the Spirit of God in him—v. 8b. This is true even today—the Spirit of God must be present in us for spiritual insight and understanding.

9] I said, "Beltshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.  
10] These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. 11] The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. 12] Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.13] "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, [ Or watchman; also in verses 17 and 23 ] a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14] He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15] But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. 15b] "' Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. 16] Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. 17] "' 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 the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'18] "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Beltshazzar, 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 holy gods is in you."

19] Then Daniel (also called Beltshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Beltshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Beltshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! 20] The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, 21] with

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beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air—22] you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. 23] "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.' [ Eze. 31:3-4 ]

24] "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: 25] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. 26] The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. 27] Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."28] All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

29] Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30] he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" 31] The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."33] Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. 34] At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35] All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" 36] At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 37] Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in

pride he is able to humble.

As Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the picture became distressingly clear—a picture of nearly complete destruction. The part of the interpretation recorded in verse 15, stating that the stump and its roots were not to be uprooted, gave hope that the tree would be revived. "Iron and bronze" meant a strong band or fence was to be placed around the stump in order to protect it from total destruction.

Daniel predicted that the king would be "be given the mind of an animal." This is a psychological phenomenon known as Lycanthropy (lit. wolf men.) Lycanthropy originally referred to the delusion of believing oneself to be a wolflike creature; in fact, the werewolf superstition was inspired by the malady/condition. Today it has come to be a general designation, regardless of the type of animal. There are cases in this century—where people have believed themselves to be wolves, dogs, birds, cats, rabbits, tigers.

In 1946, R.K. Harrison observed a patient in a British mental institution with an illness virtually identical to that described in the book of Daniel. The patient wandered about the grounds of the institution eating grass as if he were a cow. His drink consisted of water. Harrison stated that "the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the fingernails"—Miller, Stephen R., *New American Commentary: Daniel*, Broadman Pub., 1994, p. 134.

As the angel delivered the message (v. 23), he interpreted the dream in part. He showed the tree represented a person and revealed where and who this person would live with, i.e., animals. He would be exposed to the elements... "drenched with dew" (v. 16)

Verse 17 reveals that the angels announced the heavenly decision regarding Nebuchadnezzar's fate. Its purpose was to declare that God is sovereign over the affairs of men and rules supremely. He is the final authority and oversees the appointment of national rulers—Dan. 2:2; Rom. 13:1.

Daniel was distressed, even stunned at the severity of the judgment, but was encouraged by the king to give the interpretation and not be alarmed—v. 19b. Little did he know its impact.

- Mussolini once asserted he worshipped "no god save his own sovereign will."
- At the height of his military career, Napoleon was asked if God was on France's side. He cynically replied, "God is on the side with the heaviest artillery." Then came Waterloo. Napoleon not only lost that battle, but his empire as well. Years later in exile on the Island of St. Helena, the broken military genius humbly acknowledged, "Man proposes; God disposes."
  - Prov. 21:31 tells us, "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord."

Verse 22 (...you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth... ) sounds a lot like Nathan's rebuke of King David in 2 Sam. 12:7 ("You are the man...")

) Daniel challenges Nebuchadnezzar in v. 27 to "renounce" ("break off, redeem") his sins and wickedness. This could have been immediate solution to his problem; it didn't have to take seven years! The discipline was to last until the king learned what God was teaching them. Likewise, our discipline can last until we learn the lesson God is teaching us.

Judging by the severity and length of the judgment, I think we can see the king was resistant to the lesson. Notice in v. 26 the idea of being "chopped down to size." The king was told his kingdom would be restored when he acknowledged that heaven rules. This is ultimately what God is after in our lives as well.

### **The Fulfillment of the Dream —vv. 28-36.**

Nebuchadnezzar was given one year to renounce his sin and do what was right—v. 28. Instead he revealed his prideful heart—vv. 29-30.

Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Humanly speaking, there was reason to take pride in [Babylon, one of history's preeminent cities](#). Over 20 years later, Alexander the Great was so impressed with it, that he planned to make it his empire's headquarters. Job satisfaction is legitimate, but v. 30 revealed his pride, arrogance and defiance of God.

Verse 33 gives a vivid description of what happened.

"In the twinkling of an eye, Nebuchadnezzar became a raving maniac. With wild shrieks he rushed from the room and down the staircase as the crown of gold toppled from his head. Across the tiled floor of the throne room he raced, tearing from his body his regal robes and scattering them as he went. Through the doors and down the corridors he ran bellowing like a wounded bull while the palace retainers stood by in consternation. By the time he issued from the great door of the palace he was very little encumbered with garments of any kind, only his tunic and short trousers remaining, and these he also discarded as he continued his mad flight down Palace Way. Nebuchadnezzar, the proud and dignified monarch of the greatest empires of ancient times, was running down the street of his capital city, stripped, stark naked"—Campbell, Donald K., Daniel: Decoder of Dreams, Victor Books, 1979, p. 51.

Approximately seven years went by, and then Nebuchadnezzar was restored to sanity. Three steps were involved in his recovery—v. 34.

1. He raised his eyes to heaven rather than continue looking downward to earth —v. 34a.
2. His sanity was restored—v. 34b, indicating the upward look was silent acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. He showed his dependence and humility, a necessary element for being restored.
3. He used his restored reason to bless, praise and honor God—v. 34c.

This is always a sign of humility and mental health for the Christian. The opposite is also true!

He continues in his praise:

- "Everyone must see themselves in the light of His majesty"—v. 35a.
- "We must all see His power and control"—v. 35b.
- "We have no power to control Him"—v. 35c

As Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his throne, his honor was returned and his praise of God continued—v. 37. The summary concludes his biography. "And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

## Conclusion

The lessons both Nebuchadnezzar the restored king, and the King of Kings want us to see are obvious:

**Lesson #1: God alone is sovereign and supreme in the affairs of even the most powerful men, and man's place before Him is always that of humility.** What a foolish thing to take credit for another person's work, and how especially foolish we are to take credit for God's work in our lives. Our appropriate response is to bow before His throne in grateful acknowledgment of His gifts and grace. If we choose not to acknowledge this, we reveal our pride.

**Lesson #2: God hates pride, and He will deal with it.** He will bring you down, or never let you up to a point of success in the first place. We don't always know why we are down. Sometimes it's a test, to help us grow. Sometimes it's for the sake of others, or because of others. Sometimes it's because of our own prideful action or prideful prosperity. If your reason for being low is because of behavior that is inappropriate and destructive, the solution for your problem is the same as the king's—

*look up* to heaven. Admit He is in control, and submit to His control. It doesn't help to blame someone else, e.g., family, propensities, sickness, Satan, evil in the world. Help comes by looking up!

If you are acting in an animalistic manner; not living like the one God has made you to be, the solution for your problem is the same—*look up*, or you will soon be looking down. Do

## Grass-Eating 101

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you know what I'm talking about when I say, "animal-like behavior?" Is your head down? Are you focused on your appetites? Are you motivated by instinct? Are you scavenging/looking constantly for food, or sex, or some relief/escape? Are you migrating/moving?

If you are living far below the potential God has designed for you, the solution is not to despair, to accept your behavior, or to find others who will agree with you. The solution is to *look up* to heaven: to honor, to glorify Him; to acknowledge that whatever He does is just and right; to walk humbly before your God. It will be obvious if we are motivated by pride and natural instincts, by listening to ourselves talk and praise. Who do you give credit to for the good happening in your life? (If it isn't God, be prepared for a little "Grass Eating 101.") How do you praise God? If it's difficult or nonexistent, you are revealing your pride. The proud, the arrogant, the ungrateful don't praise God. The humble, those who have eaten their share of grass, find it easy to praise God.

**Lesson #3: It's a good thing to tell others what God has done for you.** If you find it difficult to share it publicly, or with a friend or a small group, write it out. Nebuchadnezzar did. It is a good experience to tell your story because it encourages and warns others, just like Nebuchadnezzar's story does for us.

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### An Illustration:

A woman visiting in Switzerland came to a sheepfold on one of her daily walks. Venturing in, she saw the shepherd seated on the ground with his flock around him. Nearby, on a pile of straw, lay a single sheep which seemed to be suffering. Looking closely, the woman saw that its leg was broken. Her sympathy went out to the suffering sheep and she looked up inquiringly to the shepherd, asking how it happened.

"I broke it myself," said the shepherd sadly, and then explained. "Of all the sheep in my flock, this was the most wayward. It would not obey my voice and would not follow when I was leading the flock. On more than one occasion it wandered to the edge of a perilous cliff. And not only was it disobedient itself, but it was leading other sheep astray. Based on my experience with this kind of sheep, I knew I had no choice, so I broke its leg. The next day I took food and it tried to bite me. After letting it lie alone for a couple of days, I went back and it not only eagerly took the food, but licked my hand and showed every sign of submission and affection. And now, let me say this. When this sheep

is well, it will be the model sheep of my entire flock. No sheep will hear my voice so quickly nor follow so closely. Instead of leading others away, it will be an example of devotion and obedience. In short, a complete change will come into the life of this wayward sheep. It will have learned obedience through its sufferings."—Campbell, Donald K., *Daniel: Decoder of Dreams*, Victor Books, 1979, p. 49.

### Notes on Babylon:

Babylon was a rectangularly shaped city surrounded by a broad and deep water-filled moat and then by an intricate system of double walls. 42] The first double-wall system encompassed the main city. Its inner wall was 21 ft. thick and reinforced with defense towards at 60 ft. intervals while the outer wall was 11 ft. in width and also had watchtowers. Later Nebuchadnezzar added another defensive double-wall system (an outer wall 25 ft. thick and an inner wall 23 ft. thick) east of the Euphrates that ran the incredible distance of 17 miles and was wide enough at the top for chariots to pass. 43] The height of the walls is not known, but the Ishtar Gate was 40 ft. high, and the walls would have approximated this size. A 40 ft. wall would have been a formidable barrier for enemy soldiers. 8 gates provided access to the city, the most celebrated of which was the Ishtar Gate on the north side. This was a massive double tower rising to a height of 40 ft. and decorated with dragons of Marduk and bulls of Hadad.

According to Whitcomb, there were "557 [of these] animals in bright colors against a glazed blue background." 44] Wiseman relates that the Ishtar Gate "led to the sacred procession way [one thousand yards long] leading south to the citadel to Esagila, the temple of Marduk, and the adjacent ziggurat Etemenanki." 45] This huge 7 level ziggurat towered 288 ft. into the air. 46] A bridge 400 ft. long spanned the Euphrates River and connected the east and west parts of the city. 47] 43 temples are said to have been present within Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had at least 3 palaces at Babylon, the principal residence being located in the southern citadel covering about 350 by 200 yards. This palace included a beautifully decorated throne room (described in the next chapter). Babylon also boasted the famous "hanging gardens," which the ancient Greeks considered one of the 7 wonders of the world. According to the Babylonian historian Berosus, Nebuchadnezzar constructed these for his wife Amytis, who had left the mountains of her native Media for the alluvial plains of Babylonia. 48] Her husband, in effect, built a mountain in the city to remind his wife of her homeland. "These were elevated gardens, high enough to be seen beyond the city walls. They boasted many different kinds of plants and palm trees. Ingenious hoists had been contrived by which to raise water to the high terraces from the Euphrates River."

49] From the roof of his palace, the king gazed out upon all of this grandeur, and his

heart became filled with pride. Nebuchadnezzar boasted that it was he who "built" this "great Babylon," and statements by Berosus, cuneiform inscriptions, and other discoveries at Babylon combine in their testimony that Nebuchadnezzar carried out extensive building operations. "Most of the bricks taken out of Babylon in the archaeological excavations bear the name and inscription of Nebuchadnezzar stamped thereon. One of the records of Nebuchadnezzar sounds almost like the boast which Daniel recorded... (Dan. 4:30); it reads, 'The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever.'" 50] —Miller, Stephen R., *New American Commentary: Daniel*, Broadman Pub., 1994, pp. 140-141.