

Nebuchadnezzar: King in God's Design

Long, long ago, and far, far away, there was a prince named Nebuchadnezzar who lived in the kingdom of Babylon. One day while he was leading his army in battle, there came word to him that his father had died and could he please come home quickly and reign in his stead. On the way home, he stopped at Jerusalem in the country of Israel and conquered it as well.

Then the king had a marvelous idea! He called for Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to look around in Judah for some young men who could serve the king back at home in Babylon. These men must be intelligent and well-favored so they could learn the language of the Chaldees and be a credit to the king in the beginning days of his reign.

This was all done. Among the group of young men chosen were Daniel, Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah, (names which you don't need to remember because in Babylon they received new names anyway: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo). The king wanted only the best to be given his servants, so they were to share food with the king. But right away this did not please the boys who wanted to eat food like they had eaten back home, which was pleasing to the God of the people of Israel. They asked to have beans.

"Beans?" cried the servant. "I can't feed you beans! The king said you are to eat the same kind of food he does...meat! wine! fruit!"

"Just give us a ten-day trial and then you compare us with the other boys. You'll see." So it was. And surely enough, after ten days, one could see that those who ate beans were better nourished than the other fellows. The servant took away the king's meat and wine and gave them beans and water. God watched while his servants bore their silent witness before all.

After a period of time, they appeared before King Nebuchadnezzar for his opinion. He found them ten times as wise as all the magicians that he had. Daniel was the leader of the group all during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

The Dream

It was later, in the second year of his reign, that the king had some very unusual dreams...but as soon as he awoke, he had forgotten them. He was concerned. So he called for his wise men...and sorcerers, and astrologers, and Chaldeans, to get from them the interpretation of his dream...which he couldn't remember. They thought it rather odd and unreasonable of the king to make such a request of them, especially, since he said,

"I'LL CHOP YOU UP INTO LITTLE PIECES AND BURN YOUR HOUSES IF YOU DON'T HELP ME UNDERSTAND MY DREAM!" But he added, "I'll give you gifts, rewards, and great honor if you do tell the dream and its interpretation."

The wise men replied that all that they needed was to know the dream.

"WHAT KIND OF WISE MEN ARE YOU? YOU CAN'T EVEN TELL ME WHAT I DREAMED. HOW CAN I EXPECT THE INTERPRETATION TO BE RIGHT?" The king was very angry now, besides being afraid. "YOU'VE BEEN LYING TO ME ALL THE TIME!"

"..b-but s-sir... no wise man anywhere could do what you ask. Only the gods know what your dream was, and they're not here." The king gave orders for all the wise men to be killed. The soldiers searched for Daniel and his three wise men to be killed. Wisely and deliberately Daniel asked Arioch, "Why is his majesty in such a hurry?" Arioch told Daniel what had happened; Daniel asked permission to speak to the king. This was carried out. From Nebuchadnezzar he learned the order, and knew that the God he served could answer the questions he asked. Following a brief talk in the royal presence, he returned home and asked his friends from Israel to help beseege the Heavenly throne.

That night, God appeared to Daniel in a vision, telling him the dream and what it meant. When morning came, Daniel thanked his God and reported to Arioch, who quickly made arrangements for him to see the king. Daniel went in to the king, who had revealed to him the dream and its interpretation.

Daniel's Interpretation

"O king, God was letting you see the things of later times. Now, he didn't tell me about it before, but only so I could help you recall what you had seen, he told me, too; there was a large image, beautiful and awesome. Beginning with the head, each part represented a kingdom, with the head of gold as yours. Then there were silver, bronze, and last of all, the feet of clay. In the time of this last kingdom, the nation will not hold together, just as iron and clay don't.

You watched this magnificent image being shaped from a mountain, without hands. At the end, all of it was broken up, leaving only a new kingdom, built by God Himself, which will last forever. Now all of this was told you by God, and will surely happen and not fail."

Nebuchadnezzar was overwhelmed, and he fairly smothered Daniel with gifts and honors, as well as promoting him to be the ruler over Babylon, and his friends to other posts of honor. But he first gave honor while prostrated to the true God of Israel, who is God of the whole earth.

The Old Nebuchadnezzar

Our next view of the king comes when he constructs an image. Pride had obviously taken a toll, and he built a whole image of gold, like the head in his dream. Perhaps he considered: "I must be pretty admirable--I'm the part of the image that was gold. Wouldn't it be fine to make a whole image that stands for my kingdom--for me? I could set it up in the plains of Dura and have my subjects come and see it.