

Nebuchadnezzar – The Servant of the Lord

The second portion of our Old Testament readings for today describes king Nebuchadnezzar in very interesting terms:

“... and now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant**; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him ...” (Jer. 27:6).

Babylon’s king, therefore, is styled by Yahweh: “my servant”. That is to say, he was to perform a particular work in service to the God of Israel. This is further described earlier, in chapter 25:

“Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith Yahweh, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant**, and will bring them **against this land**, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations” (Jer. 25:9).

Nebuchadnezzar’s work then, was to go against certain nations, including Israel, to carry out the judgments of Yahweh against them. But the nature of this Divine commission was not lost on him. Although it was through the unseen hand of Providence, and Angelic manipulation that this mission would take place, the king knew that he was performing the Will of Israel’s God. Hence we read in chapter 39 of this prophecy:

“Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon **gave charge concerning Jeremiah** to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee” (Jer. 39:11-12).

So the King of Babylon was aware of the prophet Jeremiah, and gave charge concerning him. But we read the words of Nebuzar-adan to Jeremiah in the next chapter:

“And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, Yahweh thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. **Now Yahweh hath brought it, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against Yahweh**, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you” (Jer. 40:2-3).

This demonstrates that when the Babylonians came against Israel, their king knew that he was but a tool in the hand of the Lord, executing His Wrath upon His disobedient people – possibly through the prophet Daniel?

TIMING

There is an interesting point that comes out from the timing of things. Daniel chapter 2 recounts the metal man that was shown to Nebuchadnezzar by Yahweh in a vision, expressive of the empires which would follow that of Babylon. But verse 1 informs us that this took place in the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah 25:1 informs us that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar was the 4th year of Judah’s king Jehoiakim. Then Jeremiah 36 describes a particular thing that took place in the 5th year of Jehoiakim. This means that the events described in Daniel 2, took place in the same year as the events of Jeremiah 36 – and in these things we have a tremendous contrast.

Jeremiah chapter 36 describes how Jeremiah’s prophecy was read before king Jehoiakim – who promptly sought to suppress and destroy it:

“... And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the earth. Yet were they not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these things” (Jer. 36:21-24).

As we say, this rejection of the Word of God took place in the same year as the events of Daniel chapter 2, when the king of Babylon honoured Israel’s God:

“the king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is , that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret” (Dan. 2:47).

The contrast could hardly be greater: when the king of Judah was destroying the Word, the King of Babylon was receiving it, and honouring the God who had revealed a certain thing to him!

DANIEL CHAPTER 2

Whilst we will not consider the detail of this prophecy here, the circumstances of its revelation provide us with an insight as to the way in which the God of Israel has chosen to reveal things to His prophets. A certain thing was revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, and he desired to find out what that dream signified. So, he gave the challenge to the wisest men of his kingdom to interpret the dream – but to make sure that they were not just making things up, he set a test for them: not only were they to give the interpretation, they had to tell him what the dream was: “if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof” (Dan. 2:9).

Upon hearing the words of this decree, the wise men confessed their inability to do as the king asked, saying that it was impossible to do. Then we read that: “for this cause the king was angry, and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain” (Dan. 2:12-13).

In these words, we have a pattern. The wise men of this world could not reveal the hidden secret – and none of the princes knew it either. They were, therefore, sentenced to certain destruction and there was nothing they could do to remedy the situation. Daniel, however, was the wisest man in the king’s court, and trusted in the power of his God to save. It is written that: “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it” (Prov. 16:14). Daniel pacified the king with the promise that he would show the king the dream and interpretation. He trusted in the power of his God, who “revealeth the deep and secret things” (vs 22), and prayed with his three brethren for the revelation to be made.

There are similarities between this, and the revelation of the Gospel message. Just as the wisest men of Babylon did not know the “secret,” it is written concerning the revelation of the Gospel: “... we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery ... which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). And just as Daniel trusted in the God which revealed deep and secret things, it is said concerning the Gospel mystery: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). And just as the wisest men of Babylon were shown to be impotent, “it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent ... hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Cor. 1:20). So it was that the great king Nebuchadnezzar

came to recognise that “your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets” (Dan. 2:47).

DANIEL CHAPTER 3

The main thrust of the prophecy in chapter 2, was to demonstrate that the successive kingdoms of men that would supersede that of Babylon. But Nebuchadnezzar defiantly set up his own image – which was all of gold, not just the head. In effect, this was a rejection of the message formerly revealed to him, and a declaration that his kingdom would, in fact, last for ever. Daniel chapter 3 describes how he set up the golden image, and called upon all his subjects to worship it. Everyone did so, and prostrated themselves before the image - except three faithful Jews (Dan. 3:7). Whilst everyone around them were falling down to worship the idol, these three men stood tall - hence it would be immediately obvious that they were refusing to bow in worship. They refused to conform to the ways of the world - and so should we. When all around us are bowing before the altar of Mammon, we must be “separate” and refuse to conform: “be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

We are told by Paul to be ye transformed by “the renewing of your mind.” (Rom. 12:2). We need to adopt a new mindset, devoted to the things of the Truth. As Paul commends the Colossians, they had: “ ... put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). Instead of conforming to this world, we need to conform to the image of Christ (see Rom. 8:29), having our minds being renewed in knowledge of the things of the Word. Being diligent Bible Students, we can embrace the Truth, renew our mindset, and come out from the world of darkness. Not only are we in the bodily image of our Creator (Gen.1:27), we need to mentally conform to his ways also, and be like Him morally. Then we will be partakers of the Divine Nature when Messiah comes again (2Pet.1:4), escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust.

DANIEL CHAPTER 4

This chapter describes the self-exultation, and subsequent humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar. Again, a particular thing was revealed to him in a dream, and the purpose of it is stated: “to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17).

In this dream, the king saw his empire being likened to a tree: “the tree grew, and was strong, and the **height thereof reached unto heaven ...**” (Dan. 4:11). Notice, the language used here, which seems to allude back to the foundation of Babylon, and the erection of a tower:

“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, **whose top may reach unto heaven;** and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

The overriding purpose of both structures was for self-elevation, and the making of a name. And whereas at Babel men were scattered, and the language confounded, in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, men of various languages came together to bow before the idol: “... when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and fall kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up” “ (Dan. 3:7)

By contrast, it is written that: “the name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov. 18:10). This is the only name that should be elevated: the Name of God himself.

Interestingly, this chapter of Proverbs continues to say: "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility" (Prov. 18:12). This matches the circumstance of Nebuchadnezzar, whose haughtiness brought destruction, yet whose repentance and humility brought about the restoration of his kingdom.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 gives the writer's request:

"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts: even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity" (Ecc. 3:18-19)

In his 7 year bought of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar was brought to this realisation, and again recognised the greatness of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

In his attempt at self-elevation, the king had said "is not this the great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the **kingdom** by the might of my **power**, and for the honour of my **majesty**?" (Dan. 4:30). Notice the highlighted words: they come together again in the Master's model prayer for his disciples to give: "thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen" (Mat. 9:6). Notice the context here is to do with the elevation of God, and not man.

In his humbled state, the king changed his words:

"I blessed the Most High, and I praised and hounoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation ... and he doeth **according to his will in the army of heaven**, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (vs 35).

Whereas he began by seeking his own aggrandisement, he ended by recognising the greatness of "the Most High" God, whose will is done in heaven and earth. So Messiah taught his disciples to pray: "thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mat. 6:10). The overriding principle is that God's kingdom will endure for ever, and not the Babylonian. It is Yahweh who is to be honoured, and not the idols of this world. So the record concludes the record concerning the king:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:37).

In the character of Nebuchadnezzar, we see a man selected by Yahweh to be His Servant in carrying out His Will in judgment against Israel. Although he knew that this was his situation and gave charge concerning Jeremiah, he became lifted up in his own conceits. But he was brought to a state of contrition and humility, and the record concludes by speaking of his new humble mind-set, and the exaltation of Israel's God. Whether or not Nebuchadnezzar will be in the Almighty's coming kingdom we cannot say, but in his example, we have the warning and admonition: "nevertheless man being in honour abideth not; He is like the beasts that perish" (Psa. 49:12). But fort those who humble themselves and trust in the power of God to save, they will be part of a kingdom that will truly last for ever!

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