

Nebuchadnezzar Changed

I am Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king of all time. I do not make the claim lightly. Maps of my day placed my Babylon at the center of the world. Even the LORD who made the earth called me his servant, when he charged me with punishing his disobedient people. Later I had a dream that turned out to be a vision of all future kingdoms. I was the head of gold, which would be followed by inferior rulers. At least that is the way I saw it before my thinking was revised.

I served Marduk as did my father, Nabopolassar, and was given great success by that god, conquering Assyria and Egypt as well as all the smaller kingdoms. Before destroying the city of Jerusalem and its temple, I acquired the best of the royal youths to serve my administration. That is where I started to have a different view of their strange god, who used punishment more than rewards.

A ringleader of these advisors-in-training objected to the royal diet. My administrator was wise enough to put it to the test and, incredibly, they were noticeably superior in appearance and performance after just 10 days. That was only a glimpse into the power I was eventually to see.

I had a very troubling dream, and it occurred to me that I could test the reliability of the interpretation by asking my magi to first describe the dream, then the interpretation. My regular team claimed that it was impossible and none of them even mentioned asking Marduk. Of course, I ordered their execution. When the word got to Daniel, the spokesman for the captives from Jerusalem, he asked for an appointment to see me. Incredibly he said that although no human could answer my challenge, the God he served could.

Daniel proceeded to perfectly describe the dream of a giant image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. There was more, but I stopped listening when he said, "You are the head of gold." I bowed down and offered incense to this youthful manifestation of a clearly superior god. I was glad we captured him from the land of Judah and relieved that we had not executed him.

My next building project was a giant statue, all gold, of course. I meant it to symbolize an unending dynasty for me. Worship of the image would be

important to make it happen, so I spread the message throughout the empire and prepared a motivator for those who might be inclined to ignore it: death in a fiery furnace if you do not bow down and worship.

Incredibly, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused, despite a clear understanding of the consequences. It saddened me because these three had shown great promise. A team of my best soldiers threw them into the blazing fiery furnace – and perished in the process! But the three were unharmed. In fact, they were joined by a fourth, apparently a god. And when the three came back out, they did not even smell of smoke. This was spiritual power of a magnitude unknown before. I declared that if any man spoke against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, he would be torn into pieces and his house reduced to rubble. People can worship whomever they want but we dare not get on the bad side of this particular God.

It was sometime later when I had another dream. I told the magi what it was. They did not interpret it, probably dared not because it sounded like bad news. But Daniel did not hesitate. He stated that although he could hope that the message was for my enemies, there was judgment coming. In the dream, I was like a great tree that covered, influenced and nourished the whole earth but was to be cut down and reduced to a bound stump for seven periods of time... unless I turned from my sinful ways.

A year later, I was boasting, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" While the words were still in my mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox; and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will."

My last conscious memory, which I was only able to recall after my mind had returned, was falling from the arrogant perfection of royal splendor into a dim sensation of hunger and fear mixed with pain and confusion. I spent seven years vaguely aware of life, as a grass-eating, dumb beast, existence without thought, consciousness without comprehension. Those who told me about it

later described my body and limbs as thickly covered with disgustingly matted hair, my nails as gruesome claws.

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. 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?" 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. 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.

Do you notice what it took before I was willing to acknowledge the truth? If the interpretation of the first dream did not do it, then the fiery furnace should have made it perfectly clear. I refused to admit that God is God and that whatever I have accomplished is only because of ability given to me by him. If anything was truly good, it is only because of his will and power.

Back to the part of the first dream that I did not comprehend at the time, "While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth."

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

Do you acknowledge the King of Heaven? If not, what will it take to convince you?

Jeremiah 27, 28, 29, Daniel