

The Statesman Learns from Our Creator's Long-Range Work in the Life of the Most Powerful Ruler

It is fascinating to study the way our Creator God, over the course of many decades, brought the most powerful ruler in history to submit to Him. King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon ruled the whole known world for 43 years, from 605 BC - 562 BC. Looking at God's working in his life, is most instructive. The Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar had imported from Judah to Babylon were a significant tool that God used in this education of Nebuchadnezzar. Looking at the way that God patiently led Nebuchadnezzar to recognize Him as the one true God over all nations is instructive. God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to go through a few challenges – trials if you would.

Early in King Nebuchadnezzar's reign – in the second year of his 43-year reign, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream that he didn't understand. He sensed that it was a message for him, although he did not know from whom, or what the message meant. For such a powerful man, this was troubling. Nebuchadnezzar sought advice from everyone in his court to understand the significance of the dream. Furthermore, he refused to reveal the contents of the dream to the advisors from whom he sought interpretation, making it impossible for them to help him. Finally, Daniel explained the dream and its significance to Nebuchadnezzar after God had revealed it to him:

No wise man, medium, diviner-priest, or astrologer is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days. Your dream and the visions that came into your mind as you lay in bed were these: Your Majesty, while you were in your bed, thoughts came to your mind about what will happen in the future. The revealer of mysteries (namely, Jehovah whom you do not yet know) has let you know what will happen (Daniel 2:27-29).

This provided Daniel an opportunity to teach King Nebuchadnezzar about God. Daniel then proceeded to describe the dream and its meaning. As a result:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell down, paid homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present an offering and incense to him. The king said to Daniel, "Your God is indeed God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, since you were able to reveal this mystery." Then the king promoted Daniel ... Daniel remained at the king's court (Daniel 2:46-49).

And yet, the impact upon Nebuchadnezzar appears to have been temporary. Years later, about the 19th year of his of his 43-year reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a 90-foot tall statue of himself built, to which everyone was required to bow down. This was a serious conflict for Daniel's companions and friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow down.

Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship

the gold statue I have set up? Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, and he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes, were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Since the king's command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire (Daniel 3:13-23).

When Nebuchadnezzar realized that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had amazingly survived the fire:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" "Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king. He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king's advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent His angel and rescued His servants who trusted in Him. They violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this." (Daniel 3:24-29)

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar, in approximately the 34th or 35th year of his 43-year reign, issued an open letter sent to all of humanity – all under his reign as he ruled the whole known world, testifying to what God had done in warning him, then intervening in his life and finally restoring him to his position. He begins his letter, writing in the third person:

King Nebuchadnezzar, To those of every people, nation, and language, who live in all the earth: May your prosperity increase. I am pleased to tell you about the miracles and

wonders the Most High God has done for me. How great are His miracles, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation (Daniel 4:1-3).

Nebuchadnezzar then describes a further attempt by God, finally and dramatically, to lead him to recognize God's existence and His sovereignty:

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. I had a dream, and it frightened me; while in my bed, the images and visions in my mind alarmed me. So I issued a decree to bring all the wise men of Babylon to me in order that they might make the dream's interpretation known to me. When the diviner-priests, mediums, Chaldeans, and astrologers came in, I told them the dream, but they could not make its interpretation known to me. Finally Daniel, ...—and the spirit of the holy gods is in him—came before me. I told him the dream: Daniel, head of the diviners, because I know that you have a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery puzzles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I saw, and its interpretation. In the visions of my mind as I was lying in bed, I saw this: There was a tree in the middle of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew large and strong; its top reached to the sky, and it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit was abundant, and on it was food for all. Wild animals found shelter under it, the birds of the air lived in its branches, and every creature was fed from it. As I was lying in my bed, I also saw in the visions of my mind an observer, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He called out loudly: Cut down the tree and chop off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it, and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump with its roots in the ground, and with a band of iron and bronze around it, in the tender grass of the field. Let him be drenched with dew from the sky and share the plants of the earth with the animals. Let his mind be changed from that of a man, and let him be given the mind of an animal for seven years. This word is by decree of the observers; the matter is a command from the holy ones. This is so the living will know that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men. He gives it to anyone He wants and sets over it the lowliest of men. This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Daniel, tell me the interpretation, because none of the wise men of my kingdom can make the interpretation known to me. But you can, because you have the spirit of the holy gods (Daniel 4:4-18).

Nebuchadnezzar, by this time, knew that Daniel was the only one through whom the God of the universe could speak to him.

Then Daniel... was stunned for a moment, and his thoughts alarmed him. Daniel answered, "My lord, may the dream apply to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your enemies! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, whose top reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant—and on it was food for all, under it the wild animals lived, and in its branches the birds of the air lived—that tree is you, the king. For you have become great and strong: your greatness has grown and even reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the ends of the earth. "The king saw an observer, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump with its roots in the ground

and with a band of iron and bronze around it, in the tender grass of the field. Let him be drenched with dew from the sky, and share food with the wild animals for seven years.’ This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the sentence of the Most High that has been passed against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals. You will feed on grass like cattle and be drenched with dew from the sky for seven years, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men, and He gives it to anyone He wants. As for the command to leave the tree’s stump with its roots, your kingdom will be restored to you as soon as you acknowledge that Heaven rules (Daniel 4:19-26).

Notice God’s patience with Nebuchadnezzar, giving him advanced warning and time to submit to God. Also, notice the compassion of Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar:

Therefore, may my advice seem good to you my king. Separate yourself from your sins by doing what is right, and from your injustices by showing mercy to the needy. Perhaps there will be an extension of your prosperity (Daniel 4:27).

Nebuchadnezzar did not heed God’s warning and Daniel’s advice. Nebuchadnezzar describes what God inflicted upon him:

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of 12 months, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, the king exclaimed, “Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built by my vast power to be a royal residence and to display my majestic glory?” While the words were still in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared that the kingdom has departed from you. You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals, and you will feed on grass like cattle for seven years, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men, and He gives it to anyone He wants.” At that moment the sentence against Nebuchadnezzar was executed. He was driven away from people. He ate grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with dew from the sky, until his hair grew like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. But at the end of those days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven, and my sanity returned to me. Then I praised the Most High and honored and glorified Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does what He wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can hold back His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” At that time my sanity returned to me, and my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, I was reestablished over my kingdom, and even more greatness came to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of heaven, because all His works are true and His ways are just. And He is able to humble those who walk in pride (Daniel 4:28-37).

What is striking is the absence of bitterness at losing seven years of his life over his stubborn resistance to God, and the positive response to God’s discipline.

Application to the Life of the Statesmen:

Can I recognize the things God has done in my life to cause me to recognize Him and His drawing me to submit to Him?

Am I willing to quickly give in to God when He clearly works in my life and shows His power and His love on my behalf?