

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Powerful Change to a King

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation....All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this 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? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. 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. (Daniel 4:1-3, 28-37)

While the book of Daniel reads like Daniel's personal diary, typically framed in the first person as Daniel's own writing, this entire chapter appears to be copied from Nebuchadnezzar's diary. He, not Daniel, is the author of the words. So far in our study of Daniel Nebuchadnezzar has been the sitting monarch over Babylon. Repeatedly we have witnessed his reactions to one unusual event after another. He calls first for his superstitious magicians to explain his dreams and other experiences. They consistently fail. Repeatedly Daniel appears and gives the king the explanation he needs. He is grateful, but soon he forgets Daniel and his friends, returning back to his old habits and counselors.

It seems that the experience we now study leaves Nebuchadnezzar a permanently changed man. At the close of the prior revelations, the king decrees blessings to his subjects for honoring Daniel's God under threat of death for any who refuse. At the close of this episode, the king's heart is humbled. We see no threat of death against any who refuse to obey his decree. Daniel's God has brought this arrogant king face to face with His reality. No human can ever rise up against God and prosper in the long-term

perspective. God will always have the last word. The wicked shake their fist at God when they realize to some extent that their evil designs have been spoiled. On those occasions when God in kind providence does intervene and frustrate the evil designs of wicked men, God's faithful children humbly praise Him and honor Him for benevolent grace. In this experience through a period of likely several years we witness Nebuchadnezzar time after time reacting with harsh dictatorial decrees. However, after the experience we now study, we witness the king showing a different reaction, vastly different.

How long did Nebuchadnezzar remain in his humbled state in the pasture? Twice in this chapter the duration of his time in the zoo is described as "...seven times...." It is thus possible if not altogether likely that the Nebuchadnezzar spent seven years in this un-human state. Now that is an attention-getter. However, the king's attitude toward God upon his restoration reveals more than a philosophical change. I suggest that he returned from the pasture to the palace a truly changed man, changed by God's grace into a child of the King,

far more significant to him now than being king of a world empire.

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.... No longer do we see a pagan monarch concerned that his kingdom will last beyond God's prediction (only the head only of the whole image in his dream from the second chapter versus his arrogant desire in the third chapter to depict himself and his kingdom as endless, the whole image, all ninety feet of it, of gold). Now we see a king whose earthly kingdom seems of relatively little value to him when contrasted with God and His everlasting kingdom. We see this formerly arrogant pagan king now describing his new heart with such words as "...blessed the most High...praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation."

One of my favorite passages from the book of Daniel appears in Nebuchadnezzar's confession.

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

God does as He wills, not as pagan monarchs will. The seventy years of Babylonian exile did not occur because Judah's God was less powerful than Babylon's gods. It occurred because God's people, Judah, had consistently rebelled against their God and against His commandments. The seventy years of exile was Judah's punishment, not Babylon's victory.

Nebuchadnezzar ends his theme of praise to God as nobly as he began it.

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.

Do you sense a different attitude in Nebuchadnezzar now from what you saw in the king's earlier interactions with Daniel—and with Daniel's God? He is not sending out god-like decrees that threaten death against any of his citizens who do not obey his orders. He appears bowed in adoring and humble worship of our God.

How do we explain this pervasive change in Nebuchadnezzar's attitude toward God? I suggest that only one explanation can satisfy the

question. Men and circumstances may touch us superficially, albeit dramatically, but only God's grace can invade the deepest recesses of our being and transform us from the inside out. Only divine grace can recreate an arrogant pagan king into a worshipping child at mercy's door.

In the New Testament we see a similar transformation. God immediately and powerfully met a persecuting religious zealot whose greatest joy was capturing, humiliating (killing if he thought it necessary), and imprisoning Christians, and on an isolated road outside Damascus struck him to the ground. The man who went down on the Damascus Road was a different man from the man who stood up and went into the city. Divine grace alone, not man's philosophical prowess, can explain such changes. In neither case do we see God pleading with the proud sinful man to accept the divine terms of armistice and make his peace with an angry God. In both cases we see a loving God invade the sinner's life with life-giving—and life-changing—grace that effectively transforms the individual into a "new man."

Christian history witnesses a steady flow of just such miraculous changes. For example, a despicable slave trader forsakes his ship's commission and becomes one of England's most beloved preachers, John Newton.

Such inexplicable power that Scripture consistently describes in the work of regeneration or new birth, is compared in the Bible with God's creative work that formed the material universe. (first two chapters of Genesis) God didn't plead with or negotiate the terms of origin with a single atom that He created in the beginning. With the first verse of the Bible we see God creating time ("In the beginning..."), space ("...the heavens..."), and matter ("...the earth..."). In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we see this comparison explicitly set forth as an analogy of the new birth. The sudden and unexpected change in a person's life cannot be adequately, or Biblically, explained by the simple pretense that God gives us the opportunity to wipe the chalkboard of our life clean and start over. The person whom Scripture describes as being "...dead in trespasses and sins..." also not an isolated New Testament analogy of our former state apart from divine grace, lacks any ability to start over, to erase his life's chalkboard, or to turn over a new leaf in life. For the dead person, only resurrection can remedy the problem. So is the case with every person, be he a pagan king or a persecuting religious zealot, apart from God's intervening and saving grace.

Praise God for the testimony of a pagan king to the victory of divine grace in the salvation of sinners. Other than Nebuchadnezzar's closing confession we know nothing of his future life. Daniel begins the next chapter with a new ruler.

We do have an extensive record of Paul's life after his Damascus Road experience. No human can contribute to or cause his/her new birth. However, Scripture continually teaches us how to live as children of God after that miraculous change that God works in us at the new birth. What are you and I doing today to join Nebuchadnezzar in his song of praise?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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