

I Connect 1/10/2021

Praises and Concerns

Daniel Chapter 3

Commentary: Chapters 3 and 6 show God's people subject to particular risks because of their high positions in secular society. Nebuchadnezzar does not target the "Jews"; only the Chaldeans do so; we presume envy on their part.

Gold statue

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up in the Dura Valley in the province of Babylon.

Comment: 90 feet high is equal to a 9-story building. It is hard to imagine how they built this statue.

2 King Nebuchadnezzar then ordered the chief administrators, ministers, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to assemble and come for the dedication of the statue that he had set up.

3 So the chief administrators, ministers, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They stood in front of the statue the king had set up.

Commentary: Nebuchanezzar's decree will give a formal symbolic unity to his expanding empire, by gathering provincial officials to the capitol city for the dedication of the statue.

4 The herald proclaimed loudly: "Peoples, nations, and languages! This is what you must do:

5 When you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument, you must bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Commentary: The variety of instruments listed are from all regions and provinces and are those favored by various groups, reflecting the diversity of acknowledgement of Nebuchadnezzar's position and power. The religious nature of the statue is implicit in the king's words.

6 Anyone who will not bow down and worship will be immediately thrown into a furnace of flaming fire."

7 So because of this order, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument, all the peoples, nations, and languages bowed down and worshipped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Comment: Do you think the king came up with this idea by himself?

Why do you think he did this?

Imaging the ego he had to have to want to do this.

Plot against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

8 At that moment some Chaldeans came forward, seizing a chance to attack the Jews.

9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Long live the king!"

10 Your Majesty, you gave a command that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument should bow down and worship the gold statue.

11 Anyone who wouldn't bow and worship would be thrown into a furnace of flaming fire.

12 Now there are some Jews, ones you appointed to administer the province of Babylon—specifically, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who have ignored your command. They don't serve your gods, and they don't worship the gold statue you've set up."

13 In a violent rage Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were brought before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar said to them: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I've set up?"

15 If you are now ready to do so, bow down and worship the gold statue I've made when you hear the sound of horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument. But if you won't worship it, you will be thrown straight into the furnace of flaming fire. Then what god will rescue you from my power?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar: "We don't need to answer your question.

17 If our God—the one we serve—is able to rescue us from the furnace of flaming fire and from your power, Your Majesty, then let him rescue us.

18 But if he doesn't, know this for certain, Your Majesty: we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you've set up."

Comment: *Where is Daniel, and why is he not included with the other three?*

Would we stand up for our beliefs under threats of physical harm or other penalties?

Would we have confidence that God would support us?

If not, how can we gain this confidence so that we would stand up for our beliefs in the face of threats?

I.e., what do our beliefs mean to us?

Inside the furnace

19 Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and his face twisted beyond recognition because of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In response he commanded that the furnace be heated to seven times its normal heat.

20 He told some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of flaming fire.

21 So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound, still dressed in all their clothes, and thrown into the furnace of flaming fire. (

22 Now the king's command had been rash, and the furnace was heated to such an extreme that the fire's flame killed the very men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to it.)

23 So these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell, bound, into the furnace of flaming fire.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in shock and said to his associates, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" They answered the king, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

25 He replied, "Look! I see four men, unbound, walking around inside the fire, and they aren't hurt! And the fourth one looks like one of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar went near the opening of the furnace of flaming fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.

27 The chief administrators, ministers, governors, and the king's associates crowded around to look at them. The fire hadn't done anything to them: their hair wasn't singed; their garments looked the same as before; they didn't even smell like fire!

Comment: Do you think this story is true?

Do you think it is a story solely to make a point?

Nebuchadnezzar praises God

28 Nebuchadnezzar declared: "May the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be praised! He sent his messenger to rescue his servants who trusted him. They ignored the king's order, sacrificing their bodies, because they wouldn't serve or worship any god but their God.

29 I now issue a decree to every people, nation, and language: whoever speaks disrespectfully about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God will be torn limb from limb and their house made a trash heap, because there is no other god who can rescue like this."

30 Then the king made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prosperous in the province of Babylon.

Commentary: Note that the king still appears to simply add God to the other gods that he worships. And violence is still an acceptable method to enforce his rule.

Chapter 4

Nebuchadnezzar's testimony

1 King Nebuchadnezzar's message to all the peoples, nations, and languages inhabiting the entire earth: "I wish you much peace.

2 I'm delighted to share the signs and miracles that the Most High God has worked in my life.

3 His signs are superb! His miracles so powerful! His kingdom is everlasting. His rule is for all time.

4 "While I, Nebuchadnezzar, was safe in my house, content in my palace,

5 I had a terrifying dream. My thoughts while I was lying in bed and the vision in my mind overwhelmed me.

6 I ordered all Babylon's sages to come before me, so they might tell me the dream's meaning.

7 So the dream interpreters, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners came. I told them the dream, but they couldn't interpret it for me.

8 Daniel, who is called Belteshazzar after the name of my god, was the last to come before me. In him is the breath of the holy gods! I told Daniel the dream:

Comment: The king refers to "the most High God" but still includes Him with his other gods.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

9 "Belteshazzar, chief of the dream interpreters, I know the breath of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Tell me the meaning of the visions I had in my dream.

10 In my mind, as I lay in bed, I saw a vision: At the center of the earth was a towering tree.

11 The tree grew in size and strength; it was as high as the sky; it could be seen from every corner of the earth.

12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant; it had enough food for everyone. Wild animals took shade under it; birds nested in its branches. All living things lived off that tree.

13 "In my mind, as I lay in bed, I saw another vision: A holy watcher came down from heaven.

14 He proclaimed loudly: 'Cut down the tree and shear off its branches! Strip its leaves and scatter its fruit! The creatures should flee from its shelter; the birds should take flight from its branches.

15 But leave its deepest root in the earth, bound with iron and bronze in the field grass. Dew from heaven is to wash it, and it must live with the animals in the earth's vegetation.

16 Its human mind is to be changed: it will be given the mind of an animal. Seven periods of time will pass over it.

17 This sentence is by the watchers' decree; this decision is the holy ones' word so that all who live might know that the Most High dominates human kingship. The Most High gives kingship to anyone he wants and sets over it the lowest of people.'

18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. So now Belteshazzar, tell me the meaning because all the sages in my kingdom were unable to interpret it for me. But you are able to do it because the breath of the holy gods is in you."

Daniel interprets the visions

19 Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, was shocked for a bit. What he thought about frightened him. The king declared, "Don't let the dream and its meaning scare you, Belteshazzar." Then Belteshazzar answered, "Sir, I wish the dream to be for those who hate you and its meaning to be for your enemies!"

Comment: *Imagine Daniel's fear of telling the king the interpretation that foretells bad events for the king. Daniel speaks truth to power, confident in God's power, but he does disclose that he is on the king's side.*

20 The tree you saw that grew in size and strength, that was as high as the sky, that could be seen from every corner of the earth,

21 with its beautiful leaves and its abundant fruit, and that had enough food for everyone, with wild animals living under it and birds nesting in its branches—

22 Your Majesty, that tree is you! You have grown large and become powerful. Your greatness is as high as the sky; your rule extends to the edge of the earth!

23 "Your Majesty, the holy watcher you saw coming down from heaven, who said, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave its deepest root in the earth, bound with iron and bronze in the field grass, dew from heaven is to wash it, and it must live with the wild animals until seven periods of time pass over it'—

Comment: Seven periods could be in years or decades.

24 Your Majesty, this is the dream's meaning: It is the sentence of the Most High, delivered to my master the king.

25 You will be driven away from other humans and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle and will be washed by dew from heaven. Seven periods of time will pass over you, until you acknowledge that the Most High dominates human kingship, giving it to anyone he wants.

26 And when he said to leave the deepest root of the tree—that means your kingship will again be yours, once you acknowledge that heaven rules all.

27 Therefore, Your Majesty, please accept my advice: remove your sins by doing what is right; remove your wrongdoing by showing mercy to the poor. Then your safety will be long lasting."

Commentary: The dream is about the king's sin of pride as well as about his ease, indolence and neglect of human need.

Visions come true

28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

29 Twelve months later, he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon.

30 The king declared, "Isn't this Babylon, the magnificent city that I built as the royal house by my own mighty strength and for my own majestic glory?"

31 These words hadn't even left the king's mouth when a voice came from heaven: "You, King Nebuchadnezzar, are now informed: Kingship is taken away from you.

32 You will be driven away from other humans and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you acknowledge that the Most High dominates human kingship, giving it to anyone he wants."

33 Nebuchadnezzar's sentence was immediately carried out. He was driven away from other humans and ate grass like cattle. Dew from heaven washed his body until he grew hair like eagles' feathers and claws like a bird.

Nebuchadnezzar is restored

34 "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes to heaven. My reason returned to me, and I praised the Most High. I worshipped and glorified the one who lives forever because his rule is everlasting; his kingdom is for all time.

35 All of earth's inhabitants are nothing in comparison. The Most High does whatever he wants with heaven's forces and with earth's inhabitants. No one can contain his power or say to him, 'What do you think you are doing?'

36 So at that moment my reason returned to me. My honor and splendor came back to me for the glory of my kingdom. My associates and my princes wanted to be with me again. Not only was I reinstated over my kingdom, I received more power than ever before.

37 "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, worship, magnify, and glorify the king of heaven. All his works are truth, all his paths are justice, and he is able to humble all who walk in pride."

Commentary: *This extravagant humiliation is needed because there is so much good in the king, and because arrogant confidence in oneself can be deeply entrenched. God has one law for both king and people. We see that living the life God wants us to live does not entail the loss of anything essential to God's will for us.*

Comment: Humility is:

Firstly, being humble before God, and

Secondly, not seeing ourselves as better than others (or others as better than ourselves).

Chapter 5

Commentary: There were 4 kings after Nebuchadnezzar and before Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon who co-reigned with his father, Nabonidus. Belshazzar's reference to his father below has created controversy, explained by some that the word "father" was a general reference to fathers of the past, similar to referring to sons of Abraham. The party described below occurred while the city was besieged.

Belshazzar's party

1 King Belshazzar threw a huge party for a thousand of his princes, and he drank a lot of wine in front of them.

2 While he was under the wine's influence, Belshazzar commanded that the gold and silver equipment that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem's temple be brought to the party so that the king, his princes, his consorts, and his secondary wives could drink wine out of them.

3 So the gold equipment that had been carried out of the temple, God's house in Jerusalem, was brought in; and the king, his princes, his consorts, and his secondary wives drank out of it.

4 They drank a lot of wine; and they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Commentary: The king flaunts Babylon supremacy, now badly eroded, and flouts all respect for the conquered people and their religion.

Writing on the wall

5 Right then the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the king's palace wall in the light of the lamp. The king saw the hand that wrote.

Commentary: Just as telling of an ominous dream was thought to corral its negative power, so having the writing read and explained publicly might mitigate evil influence.

6 The king's mood changed immediately, and he was deeply disturbed. He felt weak, and his knees were shaking.

7 The king yelled, calling for the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the diviners. The king told these sages of Babylon: "Anyone who can read this writing and tell me its meaning will wear royal robes, will have a gold chain around his neck, and will rule the kingdom as third in command."

8 Then all the king's sages arrived, but they couldn't read the writing or interpret it for the king.

9 At that point King Belshazzar was really frightened. All the color drained from his face, and his princes were also very worried.

10 Upon hearing the commotion coming from the king and his princes, the queen entered the banqueting hall and declared, "Long live the king! Don't be so disturbed. Don't be so frightened.

11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the breath of holy gods in him! When your father was alive, this man was shown to possess illumination, insight, and wisdom like the very wisdom of the gods. Your father King Nebuchadnezzar appointed this man as chief over the dream interpreters, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners. Yes, your father did this

12 because this man—Daniel, the one the king named Belteshazzar—possesses an extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and insight into the meaning of dreams. He can explain ambiguities and resolve mysteries. Now in light of all that, summon Daniel! He will explain the meaning of this thing."

13 So Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to him, "So you are Daniel, the Daniel from the exiles that my father the king brought from Judah?

14 I have heard that the breath of the gods is in you and that you possess illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom.

15 Now, the sages and the dream interpreters were brought before me to read this writing and interpret it for me, but they couldn't explain its meaning.

16 But I've heard that you can explain meanings and solve mysteries. So if you can read this writing and interpret it for me, you will wear royal robes, have a gold chain around your neck, and will rule the kingdom as third in command."

Comment: Even today, this experience would spook us.

Note that the king does not seem to know who Daniel is. So Daniel's position in the kingdom might have been downgraded over time, which would explain why he had not come to the attention of the king.

Daniel interprets the writing

17 Daniel answered the king: "Keep your gifts. Give the rewards to someone else. But I will still read the writing to the king and interpret it for him.

18 Listen, Your Majesty: The Most High God gave kingship, power, glory, and majesty to your father Nebuchadnezzar.

19 Because of the power God gave Nebuchadnezzar, all peoples, nations, and languages were terrified of him. He did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted: killing or sparing, exalting or humbling.

20 But when he became arrogant, acting in stubborn pride, he was pulled off his royal throne and the glory was taken from him.

21 He was driven away from other humans, and his mind became like an animal's. He lived with wild donkeys, he ate grass like cattle, and dew from heaven washed his body until he realized that the Most High God dominates human kingship and sets over it anyone he wants.

22 "But you who are his son, Belshazzar, you haven't submitted, even though you've known all this.

23 Instead, you've set yourself up against the Lord of heaven! The equipment of God's house was brought to you; and you, your princes, your consorts, and your secondary wives drank wine out of it, all the

while praising the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods who can't see, hear, or know anything. But you didn't glorify the true God who holds your very breath in his hand and who owns every road you take.

24 "That's why this hand was sent from God and why this message was written down.

25 This is what was written down: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.

Commentary: These words mean “numbered”, “weighed”, and “divided” but have double meanings. “Parsins” is plural and alludes to Persians about to take over Babylon. The words are also weights used in buying and selling and refer to Babylonian kings from the most weighty to the least. It is underground political humor as if one described one’s recent rulers as Fiver, fiver, dime, pennies.”

26 "This is the meaning of the word MENE: God has numbered the days of your rule. It's over!

27 TEKEL means that you've been weighed on the scales, and you don't measure up.

28 PERES means your kingship is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

29 Then Belshazzar commanded that Daniel be dressed in a purple robe, have a gold chain around his neck, and be officially appointed as third in command in the kingdom.

Comment: Once again, the one who offers disastrous news to a king is rewarded. There must have been an acceptance at that time of both negative and positive dreams, so the interpreter was not at risk for bringing bad news to the king.

30 That very same night, Belshazzar the Chaldean King was killed.

31 Darius the Mede received the kingdom at the age of 62.

Commentary: “Darius” may refer to a non-Babylonian vice-regent who ruled Mesopotamia on behalf of Cyrus around 539 BCE, not Darius I, who ruled 522-486 BCE.