

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric photograph. It shows a dense forest of evergreen trees silhouetted against a grey, overcast sky. In the foreground, a body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, is shrouded in mist. A bright, horizontal light source, likely the sun or moon, is positioned just above the water's surface, creating a shimmering, golden reflection that stretches across the water. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

Nebuchadnezzar

The King Who Lost His Mind

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Overview

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, THE KING WHO LOST HIS MIND

Nebuchadnezzar's story is told in 2 Kings 24; 2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36; Jeremiah 21-52; Daniel 1-4.

Nebuchadnezzar was one world leader who decided he could get more cooperation from the people he conquered by letting them keep their gods.

Their lands he took, their riches he robbed, their lives he controlled, but their idols he allowed them to worship, sometimes even worshipping them himself. Nebuchadnezzar's plan worked well, with one glaring exception.

When he conquered the little nation of Judah, he met a God who demanded *exclusive* worship—not just his share among many gods. In a sense, Nebuchadnezzar had always been able to rule the gods. This new God was different; this God dared to claim that he had made Nebuchadnezzar all that he was.

One of the great conquerors in history was himself conquered by his Creator.

The Bible allows us to note the ways in which God worked on Nebuchadnezzar.

God allowed him victories, but he was accomplishing God's purposes. God allowed him to deport the best young Jewish leaders as his palace servants, while placing close to him a young man named Daniel, who would change the king's life.

God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to attempt to kill three of his servants to teach the king that he did not really have power over life and death.

God warned him of the dangers in his pride, and then allowed Nebuchadnezzar to live through seven years of insanity before restoring him to the throne. God showed the king who was really in control!

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon

Jeremiah 21:2

"Please ask the Lord to help us. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has begun his attack on Judah. Perhaps the Lord will be gracious and do a mighty miracle as he has done in the past. Perhaps he will force Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw his armies."

Empire of Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar's administration

The Captivity of Daniel and His Companions

Daniel 1:1-7

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, took Jerusalem, and carried whom and what he pleased away.

From this first captivity, most think the seventy years are to be dated. It is the interest of princes to employ wise men; and it is their wisdom to find out and train up such.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that these chosen youths should be taught. All their Hebrew names had something of God in them; but to make them forget the God of their fathers, the Guide of their youth, the heathen gave them names that savored of idolatry. It is painful to reflect how often public education tends to corrupt the principles and morals.

Their Refusal to Eat the King's Meat

Daniel 1:8-16

The interest we think we make for ourselves, we must acknowledge to be God's gift.

Daniel was still firm to his religion. Whatever they called him, he still held fast the spirit of an Israelite. These youths scrupled concerning the meat, lest it should be sinful.

When God's people are in Babylon they need take special care that they partake not of her sins.

It is much to the praise of young people, not to covet or seek the delights of sense. Those who would excel in wisdom and piety, must learn betimes to keep the body under. Daniel avoided defiling himself with sin; and we should more fear that than any outward trouble.

It is easier to keep temptation at a distance, than to resist it when near. And we cannot better improve our interest in any with whom we have found favour, than to use it to keep us from sin. People will not believe the benefit of avoiding excess, and of a spare diet, nor how much they contribute to the health of the body, unless they try.

Conscientious temperance will always do more, even for the comfort of this life, than sinful indulgence.

Their Improvement in Wisdom

Daniel 1:17-21

Daniel and his fellows kept to their religion; and God rewarded them with eminence in learning. Pious young persons should endeavour to do better than their fellows in useful things; not for the praise of man, but for the honour of the gospel, and that they may be qualified for usefulness.

And it is well for a country, and for the honour of a prince, when he is able to judge who are best fitted to serve him, and prefers them on that account.

Let young men steadily attend to this chapter; and let all remember that God will honour those who honour him, but those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel 2:1-13

The greatest men are most open to cares and troubles of mind, which disturb their repose in the night, while the sleep of the labouring man is sweet and sound. We know not the uneasiness of many who live in great pomp, and, as others vainly think, in pleasure also.

The king said that his learned men must tell him the dream itself, or they should all be put to death as deceivers. Men are more eager to ask as to future events, than to learn the way of salvation or the path of duty; yet foreknowledge of future events increases anxiety and trouble.

Those who deceived, by pretending to do what they could not do, were sentenced to death, for not being able to do what they did not pretend to.

It Is Revealed to Daniel

Daniel 2:14-23

Daniel humbly prayed that God would discover to him the king's dream, and the meaning of it. Praying friends are valuable friends; and it well becomes the greatest and best men to desire the prayers of others. Let us show that we value our friends, and their prayers.

They were particular in prayer. And whatever we pray for, we can expect nothing but as the gift of God's mercies.

God gives us leave in prayer to tell our wants and burdens. Their plea with God was, the peril they were in. The mercy Daniel and his fellows prayed for, was bestowed.

The fervent prayers of righteous men avail much. Daniel was thankful to God for making known that to him, which saved the lives of himself and his fellows.

How much more should we be thankful to God, for making known the great salvation of the soul to those who are not among the worldly wise and prudent!

He Obtains Admission to the King

Daniel 2:24-30

Daniel takes away the king's opinion of his magicians and soothsayers.

The insufficiency of creatures should drive us to the all-sufficiency of the Creator. There is one who can do that for us, and make known that to us, which none on earth can, particularly the work of redemption, and the secret designs of God's love to us therein.

Daniel confirmed the king in his opinion, that the dream was of great consequence, relating to the affairs and changes of this lower world.

Let those whom God has highly favoured and honoured, lay aside all opinion of their own wisdom and worthiness, that the Lord alone may be praised for the good they have and do.

The Dream and the Interpretation

Daniel 2:31-45

This image represented the kingdoms of the earth that should successively rule the nations, and influence the affairs of the Jewish church.

1. The head of gold signified the Chaldean empire, then in being.
2. The breast and arms of silver signified the empire of the Medes and Persians.

3. The belly and thighs of brass signified the Grecian empire, founded by Alexander.

4. The legs and feet of iron signified the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire branched into ten kingdoms, as the toes of these feet.

Some were weak as clay, others strong as iron. Endeavours have often been used to unite them, for strengthening the empire, but in vain.

The stone cut out without hands, represented the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, which should be set up in the kingdoms of the world, upon the ruins of Satan's kingdom in them.

This was the Stone which the builders refused, because it was not cut out by their hands, but it is become the head stone of the corner. Of the increase of Christ's government and peace there shall be no end.

The Lord shall reign, not only to the end of time, but when time and days shall be no more.

As far as events have gone, the fulfilling this prophetic vision has been most exact and undeniable; future ages shall witness this Stone destroying the image, and filling the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image

Daniel 3:1-7

In the height of the image, about thirty yards, probably is included a pedestal, and most likely it was only covered with plates of gold, not a solid mass of that precious metal. Pride and bigotry cause men to require their subjects to follow their religion, whether right or wrong, and when worldly interest allures, and punishment overawes, few refuse.

This is easy to the careless, the sensual, and the infidel, who are the greatest number; and most will go their ways. There is nothing so bad which the careless world will not be drawn to by a concert of music, or driven to by a fiery furnace. By such methods, false worship has been set up and maintained.

Shadrach and His Companions Refuse to Worship the image.

Daniel 3:8-18

True devotion calms the spirit, quiets and softens it, but superstition and devotion to false gods inflame men's passions.

The matter is put into a little compass, Turn, or burn. Proud men are still ready to say, as Nebuchadnezzar, Who is the Lord, that I should fear his power?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not hesitate whether they should comply or not. Life or death were not to be considered. Those that would avoid sin, must not parley with temptation when that to which we are allured or affrighted is manifestly evil.

Stand not to pause about it, but say, as Christ did, get thee behind me, Satan. They did not contrive an evasive answer, when a direct answer was expected.

Those who make their duty their main care, need not be anxious or fearful concerning the event. The faithful servants of God find him able to control and overrule all the powers armed against them.

Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst. If He be for us, we need not fear what man can do unto us. God will deliver us, either from death or in death. They must obey God rather than man; they must rather suffer than sin; and must not do evil that good may come.

Therefore none of these things moved them. The saving them from sinful compliance, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace, as the saving them out of the fiery furnace was in the kingdom of nature.

Fear of man and love of the world, especially want of faith, make men yield to temptation, while a firm persuasion of the truth will deliver them from denying Christ, or being ashamed of him.

We are to be meek in our replies, but we must be decided that we will obey God rather than man.

They Are Cast into a Furnace, but Are Miraculously Preserved

Daniel 3:19-27

Let Nebuchadnezzar heat his furnace as hot as he can, a few minutes will finish the torment of those cast into it; but hell-fire tortures, and yet does not kill.

Those who worshipped the beast and his image, have no rest, no pause, no moment free from pain, Rev 14:10, 11. Now was fulfilled in the letter that great promise, Isa 43:2,

When thou walk through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. Leaving it to that God who preserved them in the fire, to bring them out, they walked up and down in the midst, supported and encouraged by the presence of the Son of God.

Those who suffer for Christ, have his presence in their sufferings, even in the fiery furnace, and in the valley of the shadow of death. Nebuchadnezzar owns them for servants of the most high God; a God able to deliver them out of his hand. It is our God only is the consuming fire, Hebrews 12:29.

Could we but see into the eternal world, we should behold the persecuted believer safe from the malice of his foes, while they are exposed to the wrath of God, and tormented in unquenchable fires.

Nebuchadnezzar Gives Glory to Jehovah (3:28-30)

What God did for these his servants, would help to keep the Jews to their religion while in captivity, and to cure them of idolatry. The miracle brought deep convictions on Nebuchadnezzar.

But no abiding change then took place in his conduct. He who preserved these pious Jews in the fiery furnace, is able to uphold us in the hour of temptation, and to keep us from falling into sin.

Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges the Power of Jehovah

Daniel 4:1-18

The beginning and end of this chapter lead us to hope, that Nebuchadnezzar was a monument of the power of Divine grace, and of the riches of Divine mercy.

After he was recovered from his madness, he told to distant places, and wrote down for future ages, how God had justly humbled and graciously restored him.

When a sinner comes to himself, he will promote the welfare of others, by making known the wondrous mercy of God. Nebuchadnezzar, before he related the Divine judgments upon him for his pride, told the warnings he had in a dream or vision.

The meaning was explained to him. The person signified, was to be put down from honour, and to be deprived of the use of his reason seven years. This is surely the sorest of all temporal judgments.

Whatever outward affliction God is pleased to lay upon us, we have cause to bear it patiently, and to be thankful that he continues the use of our reason, and the peace of our consciences.

Yet if the Lord should see fit by such means to keep a sinner from multiplying crimes, or a believer from dishonoring his name, even the dreadful prevention would be far preferable to the evil conduct. God has determined it, as a righteous Judge, and the angels in heaven applaud.

Not that the great God needs the counsel or concurrence of the angels, but it denotes the solemnity of this sentence.

The demand is by the word of the holy ones, God's suffering people: when the oppressed cry to God, he will hear. Let us diligently seek blessings which can never be taken from us, and especially beware of pride and forgetfulness of God.

Daniel Interprets His Dream (4:19-27)

Daniel was struck with amazement and terror at so heavy a judgment coming upon so great a prince, and gives advice with tenderness and respect.

It is necessary, in repentance that we not only cease to do evil, but learn to do good. Though it might not wholly prevent the judgment, yet the trouble may be longer before it comes, or shorter when it does come.

And everlasting misery will be escaped by all who repent and turn to God.

The Fulfilment of It

Daniel 4:28-37

Pride and self-conceit are sins that beset great men. They are apt to take that glory to themselves which is due to God only.

While the proud word was in the king's mouth, the powerful word came from God. His understanding and his memory were gone, and all the powers of the rational soul were broken.

How careful we ought to be, not to do anything which may provoke God to put us out of our senses! God resists the proud.

Nebuchadnezzar would be more than a man, but God justly makes him less than a man. We may learn to believe concerning God, that the most high God lives forever, and that his kingdom is like himself, everlasting, and universal.

His power cannot be resisted. When men are brought to honour God, by confession of sin and acknowledging his sovereignty, then, and not till then, they may expect that God will honour them; not only restore them to the dignity they lost by the sin of the first Adam, but add excellent majesty to them, from the righteousness and grace of the Second Adam.

Afflictions shall last no longer than till they have done the work for which they were sent.

There can be no reasonable doubt that Nebuchadnezzar was a true penitent, and an accepted believer. It is thought that he did not live more than a year after his restoration. Thus the Lord knows how to abase those that walk in pride, but gives grace and consolation to the humble, broken-hearted sinner who calls upon Him.

Conquests of Jerusalem

Jehoiakim Subdued by Nebuchadnezzar

2 Kings 24:1-7

If Jehoiakim had served the Lord, he had not been servant to Nebuchadnezzar. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition had been no worse; but, rebelling against Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble. See what nations need have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. Threatenings will be fulfilled as certainly as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not.

Jerusalem Besieged, Zedekiah Taken

2 Kings 25:1-7

Jerusalem was so fortified, that it could not be taken till famine rendered the besieged unable to resist. In the prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah, we find more of this event; here it suffices to say, that the impiety and misery of the besieged were very great.

At length the city was taken by storm. The king, his family, and his great men escaped in the night, by secret passages. But those deceive themselves who think to escape God's judgments, as much as those who think to brave them. By what befell Zedekiah, two prophecies, which seemed to contradict each other, were both fulfilled.

The Temple Burnt, the People Carried Into Captivity

2 Kings 25:8-21

The city and temple were burnt, and, it is probable, the ark in it. By this, God showed how little he cares for the outward pomp of his worship, when the life and power of religion are neglected.

The walls of Jerusalem were thrown down, and the people carried captive to Babylon. The vessels of the temple were carried away.

When the things signified were sinned away, what should the signs stand there for? It was righteous with God to deprive those of the benefit of his worship, who had preferred false worships before it; those that would have many altars, now shall have none.

As the Lord spared not the angels that sinned, as he doomed the whole race of fallen men to the grave, and all unbelievers to hell, and as he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, we need not wonder at any miseries he may bring upon guilty nations, churches, or persons.

An instrument of God's judgments

Jeremiah 27:8

So you must submit to Babylon's king and serve him; put your neck under Babylon's yoke! I will punish any nation that refuses to be his slave, says the Lord. I will send war, famine, and disease upon that nation until Babylon has conquered it.

Prophecies concerning

Jeremiah 21:7-10

And then, says the Lord, even after King Zedekiah, his officials, and everyone else in the city have survived war, famine, and disease, I will hand them over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He will slaughter them all without mercy, pity, or compassion.'

"Tell all the people, 'this is what the Lord says: Take your choice of life or death!

Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, famine, or disease, but those who go out and surrender to the Babylonians will live.

For I have decided to bring disaster and not good upon this city, says the Lord. It will be captured by the king of Babylon, and he will reduce it to ashes.'

Babylon will conquer Israel.

Jeremiah 22:25

I will hand you over to those who seek to kill you, of whom you are so desperately afraid—to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the mighty Babylonian army.

Life Application

These lessons are clear to us today because of our place in history. When our attention shifts to our own lives, we find ourselves unable to see how God is working. But we do have the advantage of God's Word as our guide for today's challenges. We are commanded to obey God; we are also commanded to trust him. Trusting him covers those times when we are not sure about the outcome. God has entrusted us with this day; have we trusted him with our lives?

Key verse:

“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” (Daniel 4:37).

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

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