

THE LORD REIGNS

In the Old Testament book of Daniel there is an extraordinary story about Nebuchadnezzar, ancient King of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar lived six centuries before the birth of Christ. Much of what we know about this ancient King is told in the book of Daniel. Can we learn anything from Nebuchadnezzar?

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Daniel was a Jewish young man who, as a boy, was brought to Babylon as a hostage along with three other young men from Jerusalem. These Jewish young men were probably relatives of the King of Judah, and they were taken captive to Babylon to serve as hostages. This was common practice among ancient conquerors. They would take young people away from their homeland but they would be treated like sons of the conqueror. The hostages would be treated well and educated in government. Later they would become the conqueror's advisors on behalf of their homeland and other matters of state. The conquering king's benevolence was supposed to help keep the homeland happy and submissive, continuing to pay their annual tribute to the foreign King.

With God's blessings, Daniel became an influential advisor to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. In fact, Daniel became well-known among the King's advisors as a man who could interpret dreams, dreams that forecast the future.

Nebuchadnezzar had some strange dreams. One of his dreams we can read about in the book of Daniel, chapter 4. Although this dream and its story are recorded in the book of Daniel, the dream and its story are recited by Nebuchadnezzar himself. That's right! Nebuchadnezzar himself narrates what happened!

Nebuchadnezzar also wrote down his purpose for recounting the story of what happened to him. His message reads: "King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! (2) It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. (3) How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation." (Daniel 4:1-3 ESV.) Nebuchadnezzar went on to say: "(5) I saw a dream that made me afraid." "(6) So I made a decree that all the wise men of

Babylon should be brought before me that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.” (Daniel 4:4-9 ESV.) Well, the King brought before him “the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers” and he told them the dream. But those men could not interpret the dream. At last Daniel came in before Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel’s Babylonian name was Belteshazzar. When Daniel heard the dream his body language told Nebuchadnezzar that the interpretation was not good. But Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and reassured Daniel to hold back nothing; not to be afraid to give the interpretation. The King had seen a tall, beautiful tree. The nations gathered under the tree and were well-fed with its fruit. But then someone from heaven ordered the tree to be cut down, leaving only a stump. The person that the tree represented was ordered to become like an animal, and would even feed on the grass of the field. “Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth,” the dream commanded. “Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him.”

Daniel began his interpretation by saying, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!" Well, the king knew immediately that the interpretation would not be good, but he encouraged Daniel to continue. “This is the interpretation, O king”, Daniel said, “It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, (25) that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. (26) And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.” (Daniel 4:24-26 ESV.) After giving the bad news, Daniel offered counsel to the powerful King. “O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” (Daniel 4:27 ESV.) What great advice! In effect, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar to repent and to practice righteousness and mercy.

Well, evidently, Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel’s advice for a short while, because it was 12 months later that the King was walking on the roof of his magnificent palace and said to himself: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my

mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (31) While [those proudful] words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, (32) 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 periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (Daniel 4:30-32 ESV.) And so it happened: Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal. He left his palace for a wilderness where he was alone. His hair grew long as an eagle's feathers, and his fingernails and toenails became long like an animal's. Nebuchadnezzar was out of his right mind! But yet, later, Nebuchadnezzar himself finished the story this way: "At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; (35) all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (36) At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. (37) Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble." (Daniel 4:34-37 ESV.)

Friend, is this ancient king teaching you anything? The Creator of this world reigns over the nations. We men and women can lift ourselves up with pride. We can boast about our achievements. We can turn our backs on the One who has made us and the universe in which we live. We can believe that there is no God, no Creator. We can foolishly believe that this world is the result of a big bang! We can live life as we please. We can refuse to believe the Babylonian, Nebuchadnezzar! But we will do well to take the advice of Daniel, "break off your sins by practicing righteousness; [break off] your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity." (Daniel 4:27 ESV.)

The Bible is very clear about who rules the universe. "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in

the splendor of holiness; (30) tremble before him, all the earth; (31) Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!" (1 Chronicles 16:29-31 ESV.)

The apostle Peter told a crowd of people gathered for the feast of Pentecost: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18.) Jesus' apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11 ESV.)

The old prophet Hosea saw into the future to a time when people would "say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us." Hosea was referring to the same day that the apostle John saw in the future when "The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. (15) Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, (16) calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:14-17 ESV.)

Friend, will you be among those who seek a place to hide from the King of all nations? There is coming a great day of wrath. You can do something about the future right now. You can change your destiny today by obeying the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Jesus Christ is that King. Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man." Jesus predicted "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (32) Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. (34) Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:31-34 ESV.)

Friend, will you be separated to the right, or to the left when that great day comes?