

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND DANIEL

### ***I.***

#### ***Introduction***

Nebuchadnezzar is a well-known figure of human history. He created New Babylonian Empire, but his empire ceased to exist thousands of years ago. The greatest pride of his heart - the city of Babylon - turned into a heap of rubbles long time ago.

Daniel, on the other hand, was a righteous man, a faithful servant and prophet of God. Inspired by God, he wrote the book of Daniel, which we have here till today. It is a book of miracles, a book of examples of excellent godliness and courage, a book of prophecies of God's kingdom and a book containing the message of encouragement that is relevant at all times.

### ***II.***

#### ***What role Nebuchadnezzar played in God's plans?***

##### ***a) First of all, Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled God's prophecies***

Let's read from the Bible one of the prophecies against Judah, pronounced by Jeremiah in 605 BC: Jeremiah 25:1-9 The northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed 116 years earlier because of idolatry of the Israelites. The greatest king of Judah, Hezekiah, who in his time turned the people of Judah back to God, had been dead for about 80 years. The people of Judah were back to idolatry, and Jeremiah prophesied of the destruction and desolation of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, a few facts from secular history. In 612 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Assyrian capital Niniveh. Later he invaded western countries including Judah, and in 606 BC took first Jewish captives, among them Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:1,6; Jeremiah 25:1; 2 Kings 24:1; Daniel; 2:1; 2 Kings 24:12). In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egyptian army at Carchemish. The same year he became the sole ruler of the Babylonian kingdom and ruled for 43 years, until 562 BC.

Now, let's read about the fulfillments of Jeremiah's prophecy: - 2. Kings 24:11-14, 2. Kings 25:1-5, 8-11. The Bible history is in harmony with secular history.

Nebuchadnezzar was a great warrior, and God used him to fulfill the prophecies and carry out His judgments against the Jews and other nations for their sins. However, Nebuchadnezzar's actions had an impact on the lives of not only the wicked, but also of godly people like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

To a person living in the time of Nebuchadnezzar it could appear as if the pagan gods of Nebuchadnezzar triumphed over the true God of the Jews, who was not able to protect His people, but the contrary was the truth. The true God had all things under His control. He was the one who punished the Jews and other nations for their idolatry and other sins, and Nebuchadnezzar was just an instrument of His wrath.

Although, God destroyed the wicked, He saved His faithful ones from Judah, like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah – Jeremiah 24:1-10.

We can observe the same pattern throughout the Bible, e.g.:

- Sodom and Gomorrah - God destroyed the evil people, but saved righteous Lot and some of his family members,
- The world in the time of Noah - God destroyed the evil people, but saved righteous Noah and his family,
- Israelites in the desert - God destroyed the evil Israelites, but saved righteous like Joshua and Caleb, etc.

People rebel against God and God punishes them, sometimes by the utter destruction of their society, but He takes care of those who are faithful to Him.

Even today we live in the midst of immoral societies that rebel against God. Will God tolerate it? I do not believe so. Who or what will be the instrument of his wrath the next time? We do not know. We do not have another Jeremiah to tell us the details, but we still have God's Word telling us the principles. These principles teach us that regardless of what comes, we can have a hope of eternal salvation of our souls if we are faithful and obedient to God like Daniel and his 3 friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

***b) Secondly, Nebuchadnezzar got an opportunity to meet God's faithful people***

Daniel was a youth in the first group of captives that was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. He was either from a royal or noble family. - Daniel 1:1-7 Daniel was a righteous man. - Ezekiel 14:13-14

Daniel and his friends refused to defile themselves with foods appointed to them by king Nebuchadnezzar himself, which probably came from idol sacrifices. - Daniel 1:8, 11-12

They feared God first, and God took special care of them in order that they would bear witness to His name in Nebuchadnezzar's heathen court. - Daniel 1:17-20

For instance, Daniel announced to Nebuchadnezzar his dream, its origin with the true God, as well as its interpretation, about 4 earthly kingdoms and about God's eternal kingdom that will be established in the days of the kings of the 4<sup>th</sup> earthly kingdom. - Daniel 2:26-28, 36-40, 44 BTW, those four earthly kingdoms were Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman. God's eternal kingdom was established in the 1st century AD, in the time of the Roman Empire on the day of Pentecost, when the apostle Peter preached the gospel that Jesus rose from the dead and is our Lord and Christ (Acts 2) and 3 000 of Jews who obeyed gospel became part of God's kingdom, because their relationship with God was restored through Jesus.

God used the young captive Daniel as His instrument to give to the world ruler Nebuchadnezzar evidence that there is one true God, who is different from his idols. For no man is able to tell another man's dream on his own, and Nebuchadnezzar understood it and recognized existence of God of Daniel. - Daniel 2:46-47 Yet as we shall see later, Nebuchadnezzar did not grasp the idea that only this true God, not idols, must be worshiped and served.

There are many people in our time who do not know the true God. Their minds are full of all kinds of human religions or philosophies that prevent them from seeing clearly the truth. We can be like Daniel - the willing instruments of God, if we let God use us to show them that there is one true God. We do this not by the interpretation of their dreams of course, but by challenging their thinking with the authority of God's word proved by the greatest of all miracles - the resurrection of Jesus

Christ.

### **III.** ***Nebuchadnezzar had great sins***

#### ***a) First of all, Nebuchadnezzar was an idol worshiper and tyrant***

Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan. He worshiped idols of many gods, especially of the chief god Merodach or Bel (i.e. Lord). The great temple of Merodach in the city of Babylon rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar was the most renowned sanctuary in all the Euphrates valley. I read that it contained a golden image of Bel and a golden table which together weighed cca 50 000 pounds (cca 22 tons). Truly Babylon was a “city of gold“ as Isaiah said in Isaiah 14:4 (KJV, ASV, NKJV), where he prophesied its destruction. I read that the city had 53 temples and 180 altars to fertility goddess Ishtar.

Nebuchadnezzar was a very zealous idol worshiper and promoter of idolatry throughout his empire even after his first-hand experience with the true God. - Daniel 3:1, 4-6

Nebuchadnezzar was trying to enforce the supremacy of his gods on his subjects under the threat of the death penalty. The threat of death is always an effective argument of any tyrant that would persuade most of people to do whatever the tyrant wishes, regardless of their religious convictions. Daniel 3:7

Yet the true God humbled this tyrant and his idols by the faith and courage of three men who feared God rather than man. - Daniel 3:14-18, 24-25, 28-29

What I like the best about these 3 young men is their unshakable faith that God was able to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace, but if not, it would not change their decision to serve the true God. That is a great example of courage for us who serve the same God!

#### ***b) Secondly, Nebuchadnezzar was a proud and haughty man***

Nebuchadnezzar loved building projects. He made Babylon into one of the wonders of the ancient world to reflect his own magnificence and majesty. Here is some information about city of Babylon:

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The city of Babylon was located on the east and west banks of the Euphrates river. The town on the east bank of the Euphrates river was protected by two lines of walls. The inner line was made up of two parallel walls 21 feet (6,5 m) and 12 feet (3,72 m) thick with a space between them 24 feet (7,2 m) wide serving as a roadway. These walls ran for about 3 1/2 miles (6 km) along the north, east and south sides of the town, with the river guarding the west side. Similar walls enclosed the suburb on the west bank of the Euphrates river. Outside the inner walls a moat some 262 feet (80 m) broad gave added protection. The outer walls were even bigger 23, 25 and 11 feet (7,12 m 7,8 m, 3,3 m) thick, with another great moat beyond. Ancient historians said that walls were extended even bellow the ground so that enemies could not tunnel under. There were towers on the walls. Both banks of Euphrates river were guarded by brick walls all the way, with gates and ferry boats. One bridge was built on stone piers. It was 1/2 mile (804,5 m) long with drawbridges which were removed at night. A tunnel was built under the river. In the days of ancient warfare the city was simply impregnable.

Nebuchadnezzar's palace was a magnificent building. The south walls of the Throne room were 20 feet (cca 6 m) thick, the north side of the palace was protected by 3 walls. Just north of them were more walls 50 feet (cca 15) thick. A little further on still more massive walls. And about a mile further out was the inner wall of the city.

Anyone entering the inner part of the town passed through impressive gateways in the walls. By far the most splendid was the Ishtar gate controlling the Processional Street. Processional Street was the great royal and sacred road, entered at the north, gradually ascended, passed into the palace grounds at the northeast corner, through Ishtar gate, and high over the center of the city, gradually descending to the southeast corner of the Tower Babylon wall, where it turned directly West to the river bridge. On both sides were highly defensive walls 20 feet (cca 6 m) thick, adorn with brilliant, many-colored glazed reliefs of lions.

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If you go to Pergamon Museum in Berlin, you should be able to see the reconstructed and very impressive Ishtar gate and parts of the walls from the Processional Street with reliefs of lions and get a little glimpse of what Isaiah means by his description of Babylon: Isaiah 13:19

Nebuchadnezzar was a very proud king, proud of himself, his might, his majesty, his Babylonian empire and most of all he was proud of his capital city - Babylon. He credited himself for his successes. He did not learn the lesson of humbleness given to him by God through Daniel and his friends. God warned Nebuchadnezzar in a dream interpreted by Daniel about the upcoming judgment, but Nebuchadnezzar failed to pay heed to God's word. - Daniel 4:18-25

Many people in today's world pride themselves with their achievements and consider themselves to be the sole origins and authors of their success. Besides their basic ingratitude to God for all the talents they received from Him, they fail to understand that man's life is not in the abundance of the things which he possesses (Luke 12:15) and that one day their soul shall be required of them (Luke 12:20) to give an account to God (Romans 14:12)

#### ***IV.***

#### ***God's judgment falls upon Nebuchadnezzar***

Nebuchadnezzar had good reasons to believe in the true God - his dreams, his victories, his experiences with God's faithful people, but he disregarded all this. He respected Daniel and in some extent his God, but served idols. He continued in his pride and boasting. Therefore, God punished him with mental disease. - Daniel 4:26-37

#### ***V.***

#### ***Conclusions and applications***

Nebuchadnezzar finally learned the lesson of humbleness. He praised, exalted and honored the only true God and he may be among the saved ones. If God did not tolerate the sins of Nebuchadnezzar and punished this powerful king, there is no reason to believe that He would treat anyone else differently.

Babylonian Empire in less than 25 years after Nebuchadnezzar's death ceased to exist due to the attack of Persians and Medes. City of Babylon, the pride of his heart, gradually turned into the heap of ruins and desolated place, as it was prophesied by Isaiah, but if Nebuchadnezzar worshiped and served God, then he won eternal life for his soul, that nobody can ruin or take away from him.

Daniel and his friends were willing instruments of God. God used them to give us excellent examples of faith, courage, humbleness and obedience to God in the sinful world face to face the danger of death posed by Satan through the sins of men. They are great examples for us today.

We too, are the instruments of God if we let God to use our talents, possessions, time, simply everything He blessed us with, to demonstrate with our life, our words and our acts that He is the only true God, to those who do not know Him.

If we prove our faith and courage in our service to the true God some other people may believe in God as well. God sent us to plant seed, that is His Word into hearts of people who do not know Him or to water seed someone else planted. God is the one who gives the increase. He gave the increase in case of Nebuchadnezzar who humbled himself and honored the only true God. This new Nebuchadnezzar is the evidence for us that any human heart, even heart of the powerful ruler, has potential to change and that every person is worthy of our efforts to proclaim him/her true God and His Word.

## *VI.* *Invitation*

There was another time in human history when it could appear to human mind that the true God was defeated. It was when His Son was crucified. One could ask: “How can this man dying on the cross save anyone else when he cannot save himself?” Once again, God had all things under His control. Jesus rose up from the dead. He was victorious over death and everyone who obeys His gospel will have share in His victory and glory. Are you out of Christ? Do you want to have this share in Jesus' victory and glory? Do not hesitate. Make your life right with God today!

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