

Was Nebuchadnezzar merely a mad megalomaniac with a massive ego to demand subservience by worshipping a newly erected golden idol? Or is there more to this Biblical character? It is certainly true that he was in rage and fury, but like others with anger management problems, it is possible to change. Was he not in contact with the prophet Daniel as we have already seen and influenced by his teaching and world view? Perhaps we should consider this ruler in a different light, not just dismiss him as a foolish write off. He was no Caligula, that mad Roman emperor, who rapidly proved his own inadequacies and was murdered by his subjects when his reign of terror spilled over. Romans 13v1-6 should remind us that the higher powers, such as Kings, are ordained by God. If they are incompetent, they will quickly be replaced. Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 years, no ruler even a despot can successfully rule for so long if he lacked any real ability to get things done.

The King knew that religion was a powerful tool to direct and influence others. That he invented a new religion and demanded obedience to his precepts was an extreme way of exposing the fallacy of false religion. He was the power on earth, or so he thought, not the so called gods, or ethereal beings of popular imagination. Men had to obey him, not the multitude of superstitions which they inherited from the corrupt practitioners of pseudo-religious absurdities.

The statue was immense. Sixty cubits is the same height of the future temple pillars, see Ezekiel 40v14. It was not made of solid gold, such riches spent in this way would strain even so powerful a King as he was, so gold plated or coloured, seems much more in keeping with what we are told. It would have towered above the intimidated populace! He certainly knew how to make a point. Everyone who was anyone (except Daniel) was required to be there.

The next rung down from him supported his approach as they benefitted from his iron hand. They were not blindly following his every whim, but were calculating in their support, just like the dictator of North Korea today, feeds his toads who put his edicts into practise. Like begats like, after its kind. Violent oppressive people surround themselves with similar character types. Nebuchadnezzar included Daniel in his associates, why did he do this if the prophet was the antithesis to all he stood for? We are influenced by the company we keep, what company did Nebuchadnezzar keep?

Why was Daniel not listed amongst the offenders? He would surely have been just as unwilling as his three friends to bow down to this pagan idol. Was he kept away by the King deliberately because he knew what he would do if confronted with the order to bow to an idol? Why then pick a fight with Daniel's companions, what did the King hope to gain? Was he rolling back on his acceptance that the interpreter of his dream was not what he claimed to be? Was he pushing the boundaries by targeting his friends rather than the great counsellor directly?

It is an example of the covert influencing of others. Daniel influenced these three friends. Throughout the chapter their Hebrew names are used, reminding the reader of their origins, rather than their new status as Chaldee administrators. They all shared a common fate in

captivity but were resolute in their adherence to the law of Moses even in a strange and uncircumcised environment. They remained true to their faith even in the midst of this life-threatening adversity. Daniel's conflict was being fought through proxies. There was to be no compromise in these spiritual warriors. You can almost imagine the conversations that were had, "our faith is more important to us than even life itself, those such as us are prepared to die for our faith in the true God". The King seemed to be provoked to put such amazing claims to the test. Other religious people used religion to feather their won nests, how different these four advocates for Truth. This stance angered the King who doubted the substance of their position. He was to learn differently. The various incidents in this war track the changes that were taking place within his conscience.

Nebuchadnezzar was also able to inspire others to his cause. The men who were ordered to deliver the three friends into the fiery furnace were mighty warriors. This was a war, a war against false religion, and a challenge to any religion. At the conclusion of this conflict, of which this was just another battle, Nebuchadnezzar would not be able to escape the ramifications of the Truth. These men, his warriors all died so intense was the heat! As in a battle of another kind they faced death and died for their liege. True spiritual warriors are also prepared to die for their King, even as Jesus was prepared to die for his friends.

They were not alone, as the miraculous appearance of the fourth man walking free in the midst of such great heat. God intervened and sent an angel, "one like the gods or a god" not One like the son of Man, which the KJV renders it, unlike other translations. A figure of striking vista who was observable from outside the furnace, was there some form of glass door to retain the heat allowing such a view? This world has similarities to our own. This was not Jesus as some argue as he had yet to be born and was an idea, a plan, a concept, an intention, still yet only in the mind of God.

The furnace was heated seven times more than it was wont, this is not a temperature calculation but a statement of endeavour. Seven times more men attached to the task, seven times more fuel was utilised to increase that heat. Iron melts at 1538c which was clearly achievable at that time. The temperature at the outside of the sun is 5500c.

Unlike Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar permitted divine intervention to fully change his approach. He was more rational than other dictators and saw with clarity that despite all his efforts to the contrary, he could not disprove the power and ability of this God of Israel. Step by step God was manipulating this man away from the pseudo-atheism he adhered to, towards the brightness of acceptance of the truth of His providential presence on behalf of His faithful servants. He still had more to learn.

He recognised that there were the servants of "*the most high God*". He understood that "*there is no other God who can deliver after this sort*". He therefore imposed a harsh sentence upon any who spoke adversely against this. They would not only be killed but the sentence was also against their property so their families would suffer as well. In contrast with the negative punishment, the King elevated again the three friends in the province of Babylon. They served a gentile King who only just before had threatened to have them burnt alive. By their faithful actions they had "*changed the King's word*".

That this chapter was written in Chaldee and not Hebrew underlines that this incident is meant for the consumption of more than Jews but gentiles also. We who are gentiles according to the flesh should be able to assimilate these lessons so we can direct ourselves into better paths and like that angry King humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

A Voice from the Altar

Russel Noonan