

THEISM

God Rules in The Kingdom of Men

God controls events of human history to accomplish of his purposes. God's rule over human happenings is demonstrated many times in the Bible. One of the clearest examples is recorded in the first four chapters of the book of Daniel. Daniel and three of his friends were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In Babylon they are trained to be special servants of the king. When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and apparently forgot it, he demanded that his wise men tell him what he dreamed and give its interpretation, on penalty of death if they didn't. When Daniel heard about this situation, he and his friends prayed to God to learn about the dream and its interpretation. When God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel, Daniel thanked God by saying, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. . . . He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. . . . I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known . . . the king's demand" (Daniel 2:20-23, NKJV).

The dream was about a man with a head of gold, his chest and arms of silver, his thighs of bronze, his legs of iron, and his feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Daniel told the king that God had revealed to him the dream and its interpretation. He declared that different parts of the man represented various kingdoms. The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar. His was the greatest kingdom. After him would come lesser kingdoms, represented by the inferior medals, until the coming of the greatest – an everlasting kingdom – represented by a stone, uncut by human hands. The stone would strike the image and broke it in pieces. It would then became a great mountain and fill the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar was grateful to Daniel for telling him his dream and its interpretation. He declared, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret" (Daniel 2:47). The king then promoted Daniel to be ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. Moreover, Daniel's three friends were placed in positions of power in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was a most powerful king. He was also very conceited. He built an image of gold, ninety feet tall. Why he built it is not declared in scripture. However, it may be because the dream, wherein he was represented as possessing a kingdom portrayed with a head of gold, motivated him to exalt himself in that way. He called for everyone to fall down before the image and worship it. But Daniel's three friends refused. Nebuchadnezzar threatened them, saying that they would be put into a furnace of fire if they didn't prostrate themselves before it. They still refused, saying that God would deliver them, but even if he didn't, they would not worship the image. Nebuchadnezzar, full of fury, had them put into the fiery furnace. Afterward, however, when he looked into the furnace, he was greatly surprised. There was a fourth person, one like a son of the gods, walking among them and none of them were burned. When Nebuchadnezzar called for them to come out of the furnace, he discovered that they were not singed, nor did they have even the smell of fire on them. Therefore he said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him . . . that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this." (Daniel 3:28-29) He then promoted them in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar thus came not only to recognize, but also to appreciate the Most High God. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar was still filled with great pride.

In his own words, Nebuchadnezzar told how he came to be humbled by God. He had another dream which none but Daniel could interpret. The dream was about a great, strong, and high tree with lovely leaves and abundant fruit. In it the birds lodged, under it animals found shade, and from it all flesh was fed. But a voice from heaven commanded the tree to be cut down. Even so, the stump and roots were to be left, bound with iron and bronze in the grass of the field. Before being told the meaning of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar recognized that “This decision is . . . in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

When told the dream, Daniel was disturbed because he knew it was against the King. The tree represented the king. Although the king was great, he would be cut down but not destroyed. His heart would become like that of an animal and he would eat grass for seven “times” (probably seven years). However, Nebuchadnezzar was assured that the kingdom would be his after he came to realize that Heaven rules. Daniel then advised the king, “break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Daniel 4:20).

The dream began to be fulfilled a year later while Nebuchadnezzar was walking in his palace. He said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). It was then that a voice from heaven said, “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Daniel 4:31-32). And so it was.

Nebuchadnezzar ate grass like an ox, his body was wet with the dew of heaven, his hair grew like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like bird’s claws. At the end of the time, Nebuchadnezzar’s understanding returned to him, as did his kingdom, honor, splendor, counselors and nobles. He then blessed the Most High, saying, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, . . . He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:34-35). He then praised and honored the King of Heaven, saying that his works are true and his ways just. Moreover, he said, “those who walk in pride, He is able to put down” (Daniel 4:37).

God rules. He sent dreams to Nebuchadnezzar. Through Daniel, God made their interpretations known. In this way God caused Daniel to become ruler over all Babylon and his friends to be elevated to rulership positions. God changed Nebuchadnezzar’s heart and made him to be a believer in the Most High God. He also humbled and then restored Nebuchadnezzar to his kingdom. He thereby caused His name to be heralded by the King throughout all Babylon (Daniel 4:1-3). Nebuchadnezzar came to know that God ruled. Yet he probably did not understand the extent or purposes of God’s rule. He may not have realized that in all these things God was preserving the Israelites in their captivity.

When we see disturbing conditions in our world (just as the Israelites saw and were disturbed by the fall of Jerusalem and the overthrow of their nation by the Babylonians) we should realize that God “reigns over the nations, God sits on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:8; See also Jeremiah 18:7-10). He still rules in the kingdom of men. And while we may not know the extent of God’s rule, we should realize that God is working out his own purposes through contemporary human events.