

# Nebuchadnezzar—Lessons in God’s Grace

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 14, 2023



In Adam, God created one human race. When Adam sinned he changed himself and therefore all his offspring (the entire human race) are born infected with sin (Psalms 51:5). God promised him and Eve that He would send a Messiah to save humankind from eternal death (Genesis 3:15). Why? Because “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, [so] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV84).

“God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11 NIV84) but “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4 NIV84). God has demonstrated this reality over and over again throughout history, but Scripture provides especially poignant evidence of God’s love for all human beings and His desire to save all human beings through its story of the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar.

By the time Nebuchadnezzar was born and came to power, God had already selected the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be His helpers, the people who would be the guardians of Scripture, His representatives and evangelists, and the branch of the human family through whom the promised Messiah would come. It was God’s purpose for the Israelites to take the truth about Him to the world so that all human beings may be saved. This is why Satan targeted the Jewish nation so severely; he wanted to disrupt them from doing their mission. The evil one wanted to stop God’s plan of salvation. This battle between God working to bring the Messiah to save humanity and Satan fighting to stop the arrival of the Messiah by destroying the branch of the human family through whom He would come is

the story of the Old Testament.

At the time of Nebuchadnezzar's life recorded in Daniel, God's rebellious helpers (the Israelites) were a subjugated people under the rule of Babylon. There were still a few faithful followers of Yahweh captive in that pagan capital, and God worked through their faithfulness to reach Nebuchadnezzar for His kingdom.

But God started working in Nebuchadnezzar's life earlier—by first calling the pagan king to be His instrument in disciplining rebellious Israel:

Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 25 8, 9 NIV84; see also 27:6 and 43:10).

God called Nebuchadnezzar to fulfill His purposes before Nebuchadnezzar even knew who God was.

When the Jewish captives arrived in Babylon, God's purpose in reaching all people was advanced through the faithfulness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (They were given the Babylonian names Belteshazzar, Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego.)

These four friends of God determined not to give any worship, value, credit, or support to the false gods of Babylon but to remain faithful to Yahweh in how they governed themselves and, thus, allow their lives to be useful to God in revealing the truth. They initially did this by refusing to eat the foods offered to the pagan gods and when the "king talked with them, ... he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (Daniel 1:18-20 NIV84).

God was planting seeds in the pagan king's heart—"*something is different about these four.*" Yet, while Nebuchadnezzar recognized the stark differences in the Hebrews, he did not connect their stellar abilities with the God of heaven at that time. More truths needed to be revealed.

## **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

Sometime later, God sent the king a dream about the future—the dream of the multi-metal statue, a dream that Nebuchadnezzar did not remember. The king was troubled and ordered his wisemen to tell him what he had dreamed and then its interpretation. The king declared that if the wisemen could not do both, he would have them all killed (Daniel 2:1-6).

When Daniel and his friends heard about the king's edict, they prayed to God, who then revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. The faithful Hebrew then relayed the dream and its meaning to the king. You can read all the details in Daniel 2:24-45, but the revelation had a profound effect on the king:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God

is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery” (Daniel 2:46, 47 NIV84).

Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar placed Daniel and his friends into positions of leadership in Babylon.

Despite being captives to a hostile foreign power, Daniel and his friends, by staying faithful to God, enabled God to work through them to reveal truth to this pagan king.

However, Satan recognized the impact truth was having on Nebuchadnezzar and, realizing that his influence was now being challenged by these faithful friends of God, he sought to destroy them and their witness. He then tempted the king to deny the truth of the dream, to set up an image of gold, and to require every official in Babylon to worship it—and whoever refused would be thrown into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-6).

Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego chose to stay faithful to Yahweh and refused to bow down to the idol. Even when the king gave them a second chance, and even though they did not know what God *would* do, only what God *could* do, they placed their full trust in God, saying:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up (Daniel 3:16-18 NIV84).

The king became furious and threw the three Hebrews into the fiery furnace, but Jesus chose to intervene and walked with them in the flames, protecting them from any harm. When the king called them out of the fire, he saw that only the ropes that bound their hands had been burned away and that not even the smell of smoke was upon them.

The king was stunned and realized that Daniel’s God is different from the gods he had come to know, and he openly acknowledged this fact. But while the king now knew that Daniel’s God is powerful; he didn’t yet know that God is good, righteous, and trustworthy. He still saw the true God through the lies of how pagan gods function. Therefore, the king demonstrated how his mind was still infected with the false methods of Satan in his response:

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way” (Daniel 3:28, 29 NIV84).

The king responded with imperialism, with force, with coercion of conscience, in his attempt to exalt the God of heaven. While he had replaced the golden image with the Creator God, his methods of

evangelizing remained the same as when he set up the pagan idol—using the methods of Satan and the evil world, restriction of liberty, and coercion of conscience: “Speak against the God of these three and be brutally killed!” Such methods, even while promoting the truth, do not win friends but incites rebellion and creates enemies.

God was working to reach this pagan king, but true conversion, true salvation, is more than simply acknowledging that God is the one and only true God; it also requires the heart to be changed to operate upon the methods and principles of God, to be united with God in motive, desire, and love—to be one, to be at-one, with God (John 17:3, 20-23). God’s design laws for life still needed to be written upon Nebuchadnezzar’s heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). Without this, the king might have rightfully acknowledged God, but he was still not reborn to be part of God’s heavenly family.

## **The Next Step**

Nebuchadnezzar’s false picture of God and the infection of sin in his heart, was revealed in how his fear, selfishness, and pride manifested even after all these miraculous events.

Nonetheless, God continued to love this pagan king, as He loves all people, so He intervened again by sending the king another dream about the future, which Daniel again interpreted for him (Daniel 4).

In this dream, the king was told that because of his arrogance, God would, as a therapeutic intervention, discipline him for seven years by humbling him, but that when he learned the lesson of truth, of where all his blessings had truly come, and humbled himself, he would be restored to sanity and his position of authority. This occurred just as God foretold in the dream.

Notice how, when Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his previous position, he again acknowledged the God of heaven as God—but now with a completely different mindset, motive, and method:

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 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 4:34-37 NIV84).

Prior to Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion of heart, he responded with imperialism, with power, might, coercion. He did acknowledge the God of heaven as a powerful being, but not as a righteous being and, thus, Nebuchadnezzar promoted falsehoods about God by creating a religious edict that would be enforced by external punishment. (Saul of Tarsus, prior to Damascus Road, did the same thing—believed in the true God but promoted his false beliefs about God with coercive methods, thus fighting against God. And God planted the seeds of truth in Saul’s heart through His faithful friend Stephen, but unlike the three worthies in the fiery furnace, God allowed Stephen to be martyred. God’s love was actively seeking to save souls in both situations through the faithful loyalty of His friends. In

one place, God miraculously intervened to save their temporal lives, in the other, He did not.)

However, in his third experience, Nebuchadnezzar, while also acknowledging God as the powerful God of heaven, now acknowledged God as righteous, as a being worthy of trust, and he did not impose laws to force others to worship. Instead, he gave his testimony, presenting the truth while leaving others free to decide for themselves.

I encourage you to not rest satisfied with knowing about the God of heaven, but to surrender completely to Him, to know in your inmost being His methods, principles, character, and design laws for life. For all the truly converted people of God live like Jesus, presenting the truth in love while leaving others free!