

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Daniel

Lesson 5: From Pride to Humility

What does it mean to “come out of Babylon”? Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way. He had been (in today’s vernacular) full of himself, taking credit for everything good he had ever done, giving no acknowledgement to Jehovah or even Babylonian gods. Thus, God showed him what it means to “come out of Babylon.” It means that all human glory is put in the dust. If Nebuchadnezzar knew the 1888 message, he would have known what God does with human pride. The message of righteousness by faith allows no room for pride in anything we have done.

In His great mercy, God patiently worked with Nebuchadnezzar to bring him back to an understanding of truth. He even warned him in a dream what would happen if Nebuchadnezzar ignored the warning. The use of a tree to symbolize a powerful nation must have meant something to the proud king. The story of the Tree of Life had been handed down by legend in old Babylon, as had the story of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Ezekiel had foretold the great fall of the king of Egypt, and now Nebuchadnezzar would be the instrument used by the Lord for cutting him down, “to the end that none of all the trees by the waters [including the kings of Egypt and Babylon] exalt themselves for their height” (Ezek. 31:14). Nebuchadnezzar should have learned a lesson from this humbling experience of another tree that had been cut down in the past. But so much like you and me, the king has been slow to learn his kindergarten lessons in the school of faith. But you’ve never had a teacher in school more patient than the Lord is in His “school.”

We should remember that God had tried to get Nebuchadnezzar to realize that his kingdom, Babylon, would not last forever. We know this didn’t appeal to the king back in Daniel chapter 2. In spite of the Daniel 2 image being five distinctly separate kingdoms, Nebuchadnezzar revised God’s image to represent only the kingdom of Babylon. He should have remembered this image when he received the powerful dream of warning.

We don’t have to be the ruler of a great nation to receive warnings from God that we need to humble ourselves. It is important to remember that humility is not the same as humiliation. The latter is what happened to Jesus at his trial and crucifixion at the hands of wicked people. Jesus didn’t deserve to be humiliated, but when He prayed in Gethsemane He humbled Himself. He told His Father that if possible, to take “the cup” away, but if that was not possible, He would submit to the will of the Father. That is probably the world’s best example of dignified and voluntary humility.

It is noteworthy that Daniel 4:17 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar’s sentence was issued and pronounced by a “watcher, a holy one” who had descended from heaven to give the

king his warning. It is comforting to know that angelic beings are watching what happens on this earth. Presumably, these angels had lived through Lucifer's crisis of pride in heaven, and the angels knew that nothing good could come of the course Nebuchadnezzar was pursuing. Their concern prompted the warning. Even though warnings and correction might be unpleasant at the time, we can choose to be grateful for heaven's interest in us.

The use of a tree is an interesting choice of imagery. God used two trees in the Garden of Eden to symbolize His government. The tree of life was the only tree He wanted Adam and Eve to experience. But divine love required that they be allowed a choice. Thus, He placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden. Sin entered the world by means of a tree, and God put His Son, the second Adam, on a tree, in the form of a cross, to redeem mankind from the curse of sin. When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, they brought the curse of sin into the world. The sign of the curse of creation was that the ground would produce "thorns and thistles" (Gen. 3:18). By wearing a crown of thorns at His crucifixion, Jesus, the second Adam, took upon Himself the curse of creation, to undo it for the purpose of restoring the blessing.

Heaven's use of the image of a tree shows us that God withholds nothing good from us. It was unnecessary for us to experience evil to understand it isn't good, but Satan perverted God's loving kindness so Eve thought she was missing out. It was on this point that she failed to believe God and His system of government.

The important lesson to learn from Nebuchadnezzar's experience is that no matter how confident we are in ourselves, when things get rough, the only thing that will sustain us is Christ through His Holy Spirit living in us. Our own efforts will always fail.

"If you would stand through the time of trouble, you must know Christ, and appropriate the gift of his righteousness which he imputes to the repentant sinner. Human wisdom will not avail to devise a plan of salvation. Human philosophy is vain, the fruits of the loftiest powers of man are worthless, aside from the great plan of the divine Teacher. No glory is to redound to man; all human help and glory lies in the dust; for the truth as it is in Jesus is the only available agent by which man may be saved. Man is privileged to connect with Christ, and then the divine and the human combine; and in this union the hope of man must rest alone; for it is as the Spirit of God touches the soul that the powers of the soul are quickened, and man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. He was manifested to bring life and immortality to light. ...

"Read the book of Daniel. Call up, point by point, the history of the kingdoms there represented. Behold statesmen, councils, powerful armies, and see how God wrought to abase the pride of men, and lay human glory in the dust. The light that Daniel received directly from God was given especially for these last days. The visions he saw by the banks of the Ulai and the Hiddekel, the great rivers of Shinar, are now in process of fulfillment, and all the events foretold will soon come to pass. [1]

“What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.” [2]

“Those whom heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness. The apostle Peter became a faithful minister of Christ, and he was greatly honored with divine light and power; he had an active part in the upbuilding of Christ’s church; but Peter never forgot the fearful experience of his humiliation; his sin was forgiven; yet well he knew that for the weakness of character which had caused his fall only the grace of Christ could avail. He found in himself nothing in which to glory.” [3]

—Arlene Hill

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 112, 113.

[2] Ellen G. White, *ibid.*, p. 456.

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 111.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jewX-6w38E>

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