



ANTI-CHRIST

PART IX

JUDAH IN BABYLON

For a time after being taken by Nebuchadnezzar, Judah remained in the Land as a vassal state to Babylonia. Upon the death of Jehoiachin the son of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Jehoiakim's brother, Mattaniah, as king, and renamed him Zedekiah. Zedekiah was also anti-Christ as were most of the kings of Judah before him. But he knew Jeremiah spoke for YHWH, and for a time protected him.

Rather than repenting of its idolatry and calling upon YHWH God to deliver the nation, Judah looked to Egypt to deliver it from Nebuchadnezzar. So God sent Jeremiah to prophesy that Egypt would not be able to protect Judah and that the nation would indeed go into captivity for its rebellion. As a result, Jeremiah's life was sought by the anti-Christ elements among his own people.

At first it looked as if Jeremiah's prophecy would fail when the Babylonian army left Jerusalem upon hearing of the Egyptian army's advance. So Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go into the territory of Benjamin, and was accused of defecting to the Babylonians. Irijah, the captain of the ward in Benjamin took Jeremiah captive and brought him to the princes of Judah. Being angry with Jeremiah, they had him thrown into prison. But Zedekiah called for him and asked if Jeremiah had a word from YHWH. Jeremiah's answer was, "There is, for He said you shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah not to have him thrown back into the prison. Zedekiah granted his plea and allowed him to stay in the court of the prison and be given daily bread (Jeremiah 37:1-21).

But this further enraged the anti-Christ spirit in Jeremiah's enemies. They went to Zedekiah and demanded that Jeremiah again be thrown into prison. Zedekiah relented, saying that it was not in his power to stop them. So they cast Jeremiah into the dungeon of Hammelech's son Malchiah, that was in the court of the prison.

This dungeon was full of mud, and Jeremiah sank into it, left to starve to death. But Ebed-melech, one of the Ethiopian eunuchs in the king's house, went to Zedekiah and pleaded for Jer-

emiah's life. Zedekiah again relented and had Ebed-melech take thirty men to rescue Jeremiah.

Zedekiah again called Jeremiah to inquire of YHWH concerning Judah, whereupon Jeremiah warned him that unless he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar, he and his whole household, as well as Jerusalem, would be destroyed.

Jeremiah was left in the court of the prison where he remained until Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar's army (Jeremiah 38:1-28)

Zedekiah did not heed Jeremiah's words, and Jerusalem was destroyed as Jeremiah prophesied.

After Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt's pharaoh Necho around 605 B.C., as prophesied by Jeremiah, he began to take Judah captive. When the first captives were taken, God told Jeremiah to prophesy to the people that the entire nation would go into captivity, and exactly how long the captivity would last:

Therefore, YHWH of hosts says this: "Because you have not heeded My words, look, I will send and take all the tribes of the north," says YHWH, "and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a derision, and perpetually desolate.

Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

"And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are finished, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation for their iniquity," says YHWH, "and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetually desolate.

"And I will bring upon that land all My words that I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book that Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations.

For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and according to the works of their own hands." (Jeremiah 25:8-14)

The last legitimate Hebrew king to reign was Jehoiachin who succeeded his father Jehoiakim. The account of Jehoiachin's reign is brief:

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of YHWH, according to all that his father had done.

At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants besieged it.

And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers, and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his [Nebuchadnezzar's] reign.

And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of YHWH, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold that Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of YHWH, as YHWH had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest sort of the people of the land.

And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land; he carried them into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war—even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his [Jehoiachin's] uncle king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

And he did that which was evil in the sight of YHWH, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of YHWH it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. (2 Kings 24:8-20)

Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, though impelled by the anti-Christ spirit, was at the behest of God, whose judgment upon Judah would not be denied. The captivity was completed after Zedekiah's rebellion.

With Judah's captivity came an end to the kings of Israel. Anti-Christ had succeeded in subverting Israel and Judah sufficiently that God's judgment would no longer be stayed. As an

enemy of God's people, Nebuchadnezzar was anti-Christ. Yet YHWH called Nebuchadnezzar His servant, and Judah was to obey him or suffer God's displeasure even further.

Even before the captivity was complete, and while Jehoiakim was still king of Judah, events that would reveal the hatred of anti-Christ against God's people were taking shape in Babylon among the first captives. These events involved four Hebrew men whose faith would be an inspiration to Jews and Christians for generations, even to this present day.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility to serve in the king's palace. Those selected were to be handsome, without defect, and intelligent—able to learn the Babylonian language and to be schooled in every discipline. Among these men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Their names were changed by the chief official to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively. These names were purposely given to erase the Hebrew meanings and instill Babylonian meanings to these men's character.

Daniel ("God is Judge") was changed to Belteshazzar ("Preserve, O Bel, his life"). Bel was the chief god of Babylon.

Hananiah ("Gift of the Lord") was changed to Shadrach ("Command of Aku"). Aku was Babylon's moon god.

Mishael ("Who is as God is") was changed to Meshach ("Who is as Aku").

Azariah ("Whom YHWH helps") was changed to Abednego ("Servant of Nego"), or Nebo, the god of science and literature.

No doubt these faithful men were displeased with their new names, but in obedience to YHWH's command that all Judah be subject to Nebuchadnezzar, they did not resist taking them.

It is somewhat incongruous that believers today know Daniel's Hebrew name because of his prophecies and history written as part of Scripture, but they know the other three men by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These are the anti-Christ names by which these faithful men are referred in Sunday school classes.

Is this not a small victory for anti-Christ?

Would not Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah prefer to be remembered by their Hebrew names?

It may be argued that Daniel more often referred to them by their Babylonian names. But these times were all in reference to how the Babylonians referred to them. In all other instances, which were prior to their names being changed by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel calls them by their Hebrew names.

All four men found great favor with Nebuchadnezzar who found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom (Daniel 1:20). YHWH was with them in power, and would use them to demonstrate His power to Nebuchadnezzar and all his people. The first dramatic instance in which YHWH did so involved a dream that He gave to Nebuchadnezzar. Scripture says this dream occurred during Nebuchadnezzar's second year of reigning, but it's likely that this is the second year of his sole reign which he had beforehand shared with his father, Nabopolassar.

And in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, with which his spirit was troubled, and his sleep broke from him.

Then the king commanded to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans, to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

And the king said to them, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream."

Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Syriac: "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."

The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The thing has left me. If you will not make known to me the dream with its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if you reveal the dream and its interpretation you shall receive gifts and rewards and great honor from me. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."

They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will reveal its interpretation."

The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain the time, because you see the thing has left me. But if you will not make known to me the dream, there is but one decree for you, for you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me until the time is changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I will know that you can reveal its interpretation to me."

The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, "There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter. Therefore there is no king, lord, or ruler that asked such things from any magician, or astrologer or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requires, and there is no one else who can show it before the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain, and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. (Daniel 2:1-13)

Nebuchadnezzar did not forget what he had dreamt. He was testing his wise men and, perhaps, was already displeased with them for some reason. Kings knew that they were not as in control of things as they would like. Even though they may have loved their king, people have always looked to religious men to guide them. And kings often resented the counsel of those they knew controlled the thoughts of the people through their sorceries. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was looking for a good excuse to do away with these men. By giving them an impossible task he could justify ridding his kingdom of them.

Whatever Nebuchadnezzar's thoughts were, it appears as if anti-Christ was willing to sacrifice his own minions in order to destroy God's chosen wise men. That is the difference between serving the true God and serving false gods. The true God does not destroy His own people unless they become so rebellious and apostate that He has to make an example of them. False gods (devils under Satan's command) will destroy even those faithful to them if it will serve to help them in their war against YHWH.

In this case the devils' sacrifices abounded to God's glory, and their consternation.

Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon. He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree so hasty from the king?"

Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.

Then Daniel went in and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would reveal the interpretation to the king.

Then Daniel went to his house and made the thing known To His Companions, Hananiah, Mishael, And Azariah so that they would desire mercies from the God of Heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his fellows would not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven. Daniel answered and said, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His, and He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings, and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who know understanding; He reveals the deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.

"I thank You, and praise You, O You God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and power, and has now made known to me what we desired of You, for You have now made known to us the king's matter."

Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and said this to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will reveal to the king the interpretation." (Daniel 2:14-24)

This is a good lesson for us. Daniel did not plead for his own life and the lives of his Hebrew brothers only, but for all the wise men of Babylon. These were servants of devils, yet Daniel did not desire that they be put to death. How does this mesh with God's commands to Israel and Judah to kill the prophets of Baal?

God's commands to purge His people from such evil was reserved for the Land He had given to Israel and Judah. He never commanded them to destroy others outside the Land. While in Babylon, Judah was subject to the king and the laws of that nation. God took pity even upon his adversaries in the natural realm.

Today God's people are living as strangers and pilgrims in the nations of the world. Jesus' command to love our enemies extends to the most vile. We are not commanded to take the nations for Christ, or to impose Christian rule over the nations. Our testimony is to have an impact on individual lives to show them the love and mercy of the true God. It would be wonderful if such lives extended sufficiently that a just and righteous nation would result. But man's nature being what it is, the world will remain at enmity against God, and will grow more evil as the end of this age approaches. Our concern must be for the souls of those who are trapped in the Devil's snare. We can learn from Daniel how the grace and mercy of God operates even in the most ungodly of nations.

Daniel understood God's design even at that early time in history. He did not want the wise men of Babylon destroyed for something over which they had no power.

Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel in before the king, and said this to him: "I have found a man among the captives of Judah who will make known the interpretation to the king."

The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen, and its interpretation?"

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the sooth-sayers, cannot reveal to the king the secret that the king has demanded. But there is a God in Heaven who reveals secrets, and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, are these.

"As for you, O king, your thoughts upon your bed came into your mind, what should come to pass hereafter, and He who reveals secrets makes known to you what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that you might know the thoughts of your heart." (Daniel 2:25-30)

Daniel proceeded to describe the image that Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream: a statue of a man whose head was pure gold, its chest and arms were made of silver, its torso and thighs were bronze, its legs were iron, and its ten toes were a mixture of iron and clay. The statue was struck on its feet by a large rock that grew into a mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:31-35).

After exhibiting his great humility Daniel gave the interpretation which spoke of various kingdoms that would arise after Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon: Medo-Persia (silver chest and arms); Greece (Bronze torso and thighs); Rome (Legs of Iron); The Last Empire (Mixture of Iron & Clay).

This last empire is believed to be the revived Roman Empire in the last days, melding the ten provinces into which Rome was divided after the age of the emperors. It will be the final and greatest of anti-Christ's empires, and will most likely encompass Western Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa—the entire territory over which the Roman Empire extended during its greatest period. To accomplish this, it appears as if the "Christian" West will have to make an alliance with the Islamic Middle East. But the alliance will not last because anti-Christ (the Muslim peacemaker) will turn on the False Prophet from "Christian" Europe and destroy him. The center of the conflict will be Jerusalem, which is laid claim to by the world's three monotheistic religions: Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism.

This, of course, is another study, but it serves our current purpose in order to better understand the nature of Daniel's in-

terpretation. Because of Daniel's ability to recite and then interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he was paid great honor, given many gifts, and was made ruler over the entire province of Babylon. He was also placed in charge of all the wise men. At Daniel's request his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were appointed administrators over Babylon while Daniel remained in the royal court.

All this took place while Jehoiakim was still on the throne in Judah, but it sets the stage for the anti-Christ's attempts to destroy Daniel and his companions, as well as all Judah and the remnant of Israel that had been taken captive to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar himself was anti-Christ. His destruction of Judah was without mercy. And although we see him honoring Daniel and his companions, it wasn't because he had any fondness for Israel or even for these men except to the extent that they pleased him. Had Daniel not been able to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and then interpret it, Daniel and his companions would have perished with the rest of Babylon's wise men.

We see, then, God's hand in sending Nebuchadnezzar the dream: it was to set God's oracles in the place of authority within anti-Christ's camp in order to maintain Judah and the remnant of Israel until the day of their release. This would prevent even more terrible destruction upon the captives at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's royal administrators.

Jeremiah's prophecies of God's coming destruction upon Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon is a strong indictment against their ungodliness and mistreatment of God's people (Jeremiah 50:1-51:58).

In spite of Nebuchadnezzar's sometimes benevolence and even acknowledging of YHWH as the true God, he remained in anti-Christ's camp throughout his reign. When it came to the anti-Christ's attempts to destroy Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Nebuchadnezzar was double-minded at best.

The spirit of anti-Christ is entrenched in false worship. It was this spirit that prompted Nebuchadnezzar to erect a statue of himself and to order all in his realm to bow before it, thus leading to a confrontation between the anti-Christ wise men of Babylon and the faithful men of God:

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits, and its width six cubits.¹ He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together at the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up, and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

1 Approximately 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.

Then a herald cried aloud, "To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up, and whoever does not fall down and worship shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Then, at that time, certain Chaldeans came near and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live for ever! You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image, and whoever does not fall down and worship, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

"There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, have not regarded you. They do not serve your gods, nor do they worship the golden image which you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Do you not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image that I have set up?"

"Now if you are ready that at the time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the image which I have made, well. But if you do not worship, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not concerned to answer you in this matter. If it is so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the manner of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Therefore he spoke, and commanded that they should at once heat the furnace seven times more than was usual for it to be heated.

And he commanded the strongest men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their coats, their robes, and their turbans, and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Thus, because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up quickly, and spoke, and said to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

He answered and said, "Look! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no harm, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spoke, and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the most high God! Come out, and come here."

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the midst of the fire.

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His Angel, and delivered His servants who trusted in Him and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, so that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God."

"Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other God that can deliver in this way."

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. (Daniel 3:1-30)

The dramatic deliverance of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would be the first of many such dramatic displays of God's power over the anti-Christ idolaters. Still, Nebuchadnezzar's heart was not essentially changed. While recognizing the supreme power of YHWH, he nevertheless continued to trust in his own gods. Like all false gods of every nation, Babylon's gods allowed for personal pride and licentious living. This brought YHWH's judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar in a most remarkable manner.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that terrified him, and which he related to his subjects:

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and prospering in my palace. I saw a dream that made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions in my head troubled me. Therefore I made a decree to bring in front of me all the wise men of Babylon so that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream.

"Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told the dream to them, but they did not make known to me its interpretation.

"But at last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. And I told him the dream, saying, 'O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no secret troubles you, tell me the visions in my dream that I have seen, and their interpretation.'

"Thus were the visions of my head in my bed: I saw, and look, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached to the heavens, and the sight of it to the end of all the earth. Its leaves were fair, and its fruit plenteous, and in it was food for all. The animals of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the sky lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed by it.

"I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, look, a watcher and a holy one came down from Heaven. He cried aloud and said this: 'Cut down the tree, and cut off his branches; shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the animals get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of the heavens, and let his portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from man's, and let an animal's heart be given to him, and let seven times pass over him.'

"This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the intent that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets up over it the lowest of men." (Daniel 4:4-17)

The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream frightened Daniel causing him to be reluctant to tell it to Nebuchadnezzar. The king was to be driven from his palace and from among men to live as an animal for seven years until he repented of his pride and acknowledged that even he must be subject to the true God of Heaven. Daniel appealed to him to repent immediately in hope that YHWH would stay His judgment. But the anti-Christ spirit was strong in Nebuchadnezzar, and it fed his pride even more:

All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar: At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spoke and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the strength of my power and for the honor of my majesty?"

While the word was in the king's mouth there fell a voice from Heaven, saying, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: 'The kingdom is departed from you, and they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the animals 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 will."

The thing was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar that same hour, and he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the heavens, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. (Daniel 4:28-33)

Nebuchadnezzar's sanity returned at the end of the seven years, and he praised the true God of Heaven. Then the members of his royal entourage sought him out and restored him to his throne.

This is the last we hear of Nebuchadnezzar. History records that when he died in 562 B.C. he was succeeded by his son Amel-Marduk who reigned only two years and was assassinated by his brother Nergal-sharezer or Neriglissar. Nerga-sharezer reigned from 560-554 B.C. and was succeeded briefly by Labashi-Marduk who, as a young boy, was murdered in a conspiracy to place a usurper on the throne. That usurper was Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar, one of the most anti-Christ of the Babylonian kings. Yet although they were anti-Christ in their spirits, each allowed Daniel and his companions to continue among the wise men in the royal palace .

It was during Belshazzar's first year, 552 B.C., that Daniel had his vision of four beasts that represented the four kingdoms that would follow Babylon and usher in the Kingdom of Christ (Daniel 7).

During Belshazzar's third year Daniel had another vision, this one concerning the conflict between a ram and a goat, representing the kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece respectively (Daniel 8).

This conflict is briefly alluded to by the pre-incarnate Word of God who later appeared to Daniel for the purpose of revealing to him the 70 "weeks" of years that would be the history of Israel until the coming of the Messiah's Kingdom (Daniel 10:5-13).

Each of the succeeding kingdoms would be anti-Christ's steps to ultimate power in the last days. The next step from Belshazzar's Babylonian Empire would be that of the Medeo-Persians. Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the palace wall was given on the last day of Belshazzar's reign—the day that Darius the Mede invaded his palace and slew him.

Darius appointed 120 men as princes to rule in his kingdom, one of whom was Daniel. Because of Daniel's exceptional abilities, guided by the Spirit of God, Darius planned to place him over the entire kingdom. Anti-Christ took this occasion to inspire jealousy within the other princes. They tried to find some way to discredit Daniel but were unable to find any cause against him. So they, like the wise men in Nebuchadnezzar's palace before them, conspired to set him up for destruction:

Then these emirs and princes assembled together to the king, and said this to him, "King Darius, live forever! All the emirs of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, except from you, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

"Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing so that it not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not change."

Therefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did before.

Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Then they came near, and spoke before the king concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man that asks a petition of any God or man within thirty days, except from you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"

The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not change."

Then they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, does not regard you, O king, nor the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Then the king, when he heard these words, was very displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him. And he worked until sundown to deliver him.

Then these men assembled to the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."

And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords so that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace and passed the night fasting. Neither were instruments of music brought before him, and his sleep escaped him.

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went quickly to the den of lions. And when he came to the den he cried out with a lamentable voice to Daniel. And the king spoke and said to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God! Is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?"

Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God has sent His Angel, and has shut the lions' mouths so that they have not hurt me, inasmuch as before Him innocence was found in me. And also before you, O king, I have done no harm."

Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of harm was found upon him because he believed in his God.

And the king commanded, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—them, their children, and their wives. And the lions

had the mastery of them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they came to the bottom of the den.

Then king Darius wrote to all people, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, "Peace be multiplied to you.

"I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, and His kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end.

"He who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions delivers, and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in the heavens and in earth."

So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Daniel 6:6-28)

It is an indictment against Israel that a pagan king such as Darius believed more strongly in YHWH than did Israel's kings, to the extent that he proclaimed not only that YHWH could deliver Daniel, but that He would deliver him (vs. 16).

Darius also called YHWH the living God (vs. 20), thus delineating between YHWH and the pagan gods of Medo-Persia, that were lifeless idols made by the hands of men.

With every attempt by the anti-Christ spirit to destroy God's servants as he no doubt did in many unrecorded incidents, God's power was manifested in such a way that even pagan kings had to admit that YHWH ruled over man's kingdoms. Yet there is no evidence that any of these kings, though showing favor to Daniel and other faithful Israelites, had any lasting change of heart.

No doubt Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar, admired and even may have loved Daniel. Was the only reason Daniel found favor with him because, like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius saw value for himself in Daniel's abilities?

I confess I have some compassion for these kings. At least they were able to recognize the truth when confronted with it. Perhaps they were too weak to confront others with that truth, but is that not like many Christians today? It is easy to acknowledge truth when truth serves us; it isn't so easy to acknowledge truth when to do so may result in persecution or even merely displeasure from others.

Many Christians think they can be friends with the world, but the only reason the world accepts us is because of what the world perceives it can receive from us, much as Nebuchadnezzar perceived what he could receive from Daniel and his companions. The Gospel is still a stumbling block to those who perish; it is not easily received.

That's not to say that worldly people cannot be converted to Christ through our association with them. It is our Lord's desire that we continue in this world for that purpose. But we must be careful not to be conformed to the world in order to enjoy the pleasures of the world and the favor of men. If while we serve the true God we are able to befriend those who do not know Him, we should do so. But like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, our first allegiance is to YHWH God.❖