

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

PART FOUR – TELLING A KING THE PAINFUL TRUTH

The miraculous escape of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the royal furnace had deeply affected King Nebuchadnezzar. No longer were his people required to worship him in the form of his golden statue but instead they were to respect the God of heaven. Many times in history the sacrificial faith of believers has been used by the Holy Spirit to turn the lives of others whether kings or commoners towards Him. Conviction however is not necessarily conversion. As far as Nebuchadnezzar was concerned the work of bringing him to Christ had started but was not yet complete.

The first part of chapter four is a first hand testimony from the king as to how his conversion finally came about. What he needed to settle was just who was the king in his life, Nebuchadnezzar or God? The process took time but it began with another dream which deeply disturbed him. This time he did not expect his advisors to explain a dream they had not heard. He told them exactly what he had seen and waited for answers. His usual circle of experts were at a loss. As before Daniel waited for everyone else to try to address the king's question first and only presented himself when the rest admitted defeat. The king had renamed Daniel Belteshazzar which meant 'Bel, (a Babylonian god) protect his life'. Daniel had refused to take on this Babylonian identity and insisted on remaining himself. The king was by now very well aware of Daniel's simple secret, the God who lived in him, as our secret is 'Christ in us'.(Col.1:27) He was not asking for Daniel's explanation of his dream but God's.

The king described his fearful dream of a vast tree which could be seen throughout his world. Its shade protected all living things and its fruit nourished them. The order was given from heaven to chop the tree down so that it would no longer be useful to anyone. Only a stump would remain. At the same time the dream spoke of the fate of a man who would live with the animals, eating their grass and behaving like one of them for seven long years. The purpose of this was to teach the man that the world has only one ruler, the God of heaven, and that to rule well on earth we need to be servants not bosses.(Lk.22:24-27)

The meaning of the dream was probably all too clear to the royal advisors but no-one but Daniel dared tell the king that it described him. Finally Daniel spelled it out, explaining first that he wished the message was about the king's enemies not him. He showed how the tree and the man were Nebuchadnezzar but that in the end there was good news. When the king's heart changed, his kingdom would be restored to him. In the light of this he urged Nebuchadnezzar to repent of his sin right now. He explained that for those who hold power the real evidence of a change of heart is in how we treat the neediest in our society.(Lk.3:11; 18:22)

The king got the message but nothing changed and another twelve months passed. The Lord gives us time to let His word have its effect – but not forever. The scene moves on to a year later when the king was reviewing his kingdom and his achievements and congratulating himself. God now did what He had said and took Nebuchadnezzar's

sanity from him so that he became a crazy, homeless person, living like the animals, with long hair and nails like an eagle's. He would have resembled the demoniacs of the New Testament.(Lk.8:26-39) In the same way the crazy king would have been a familiar sight to the people of Daniel's day and a warning to all of them of the terrible consequence of arrogance.

No-one while still on earth is beyond the love and forgiveness of God. We can be incredibly stubborn but God is extraordinarily patient. After 7 long years, the king finally responded to God with a simple acknowledgement of who alone was King of the earth and of his life. Immediately his sanity was restored and remarkably the leaders of Babylon wanted Nebuchadnezzar back as their ruler. The rest of his reign was so much better than the early part. The people had a humble king not a proud one. The needy in his kingdom would have been well cared for.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER FOUR

Q.1 The king has another dream. What is God trying to tell him now? What is his response this time? What has he realised about Daniel?

Q.2 What qualities does Daniel show in explaining the dream to Nebuchadnezzar? Does God give us a special understanding of what is going on in someone else's life? If so why and how?

Q.3 Does the dream work out as Daniel had said it would? Suppose it had not been fulfilled, what would this have told us about Daniel's relationship with God? What ordinary everyday application is there of this story? What effect did all this have upon the king?