Present Truth, March 8, 1900

The Gospel of the Kingdom: Studies in the Book of Daniel

The King of Babylon Exalts Himself Above God

(Daniel 2:1-18)

A PERIOD of more than twenty years separates Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, as recorded in the second chapter, from his setting up of the image, as given in the third chapter. In the dream and the interpretation the God of heaven had revealed to him the truth concerning the history of the world, with special reference to what should be " in the latter days," and had thus shown him that all earthly kingdoms, including his own, would pass away one after the other, and that the kingdom of God was the only one which would "stand for ever." Nebuchadnezzar seemed to accept the message thus delivered to him, and acknowledged God as " a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets." But the course of years had added to the glory and the power of the kingdom of Babylon, and the king evidently first doubted, then disbelieved the predictions of the Hebrew captive, and then determined to express in the most positive and public manner his own ideas concerning the kingdom question.

"NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S GREAT IMAGE."

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits : he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon."

No dimensions are given of the image which the king saw in his dream It is simply stated that it was "a great image." Evidently Nebuchadnezzar desired that the image which he set up should make the same impression upon the minds of the people that the one in the dream did upon him, and so he made it ninety feet in height. The very measurements are suggestive of the interpretation to be given to his act. The image is six cubits broad, ten times six cubits high, and six kinds of instruments are specified (verse 5) as being used to summon to its worship. The triple six marks the number of the beast (Revelation 13:18), against whose worship there is such a fearful warning proclaimed throughout all the world (Rev. xiv. 9-11). This is "that man of sin . . . who *opposes* and *exalts himself* above all that is called God. or that is worshipped." In setting up this image Nebuchadnezzar was expressing his own idea in direct opposition to what the God of heaven had revealed to him. He was exalting himself above God. In the dream he saw an image whose head only was of gold, while the other parts were of inferior metals, signifying that other kingdoms would succeed Babylon; but now he made an image all of gold, to express his confidence that Babylon would endure, and that the history of the world from that time would simply be the history of Babylon. Although Nebuchadnezzar did not so intend it, and did not himself understand the full significance of his act, yet he was teaching a great truth. Kingdoms known in history by different names have succeeded each other, just according to Daniel's interpretation of the dream, and Babylon of the Chaldees has long since passed away, but the real Babylon is still here and will remain until " she shall be utterly burned with fire." This will appear more closely in our later studies.

A GRAND ASSEMBLY.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the councilors, 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 the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the councilors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falls not down and worships 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."

A careful reading of the record shows that Nebuchadnezzar purposed that this image and its dedication should be his answer to the dream and its interpretation. Daniel had declared that other kings should follow Nebuchadnezzar, and that " in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed ; " Nebuchadnezzar now showed his view of the matter. The contrast was between what " the God of heaven " sets up, and what " Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up." The question at issue was, Who is right, God or Nebuchadnezzar? Who is the " everlasting King"? What kingdom shall stand, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Babylon ? The same questions are before the people of the whole earth to-day, and the final decision is soon to be made, "for the hour of His Judgment is come."

All the world was represented at the dedication of this image. It was a worldwide proclamation of the greatness and power of Babylon ; and the command that all the people should " fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up," was issued in order to compel all the world to acknowledge this greatness and power as supreme. The dedication of the image was really a deification of the kingdom of Babylon, the State, as represented in Nebuchadnezzar, under whose rule Babylon had attained to such a pinnacle of greatness. The refusal to worship the image would thus be regarded as high treason against the State or kingdom of Babylon, and was to be punished by death in "a burning fiery furnace." No opportunity was given to the people to exercise any choice in the matter. In Babylon the people are not allowed either conscience or free will. Their religion is prescribed to them by the State, and consists simply in the acknowledgment of the greatness of the State, and the right of the State as represented by the king to have undisputed control over both the bodies and the souls of men. The right of the individual man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, apart from the dictation of the State, is wholly ignored, and the king assumes to become the keeper of the consciences of the people.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PERSECUTION.

Thus it has always been in all false religions. Substituting the visible for the invisible, the worldly for the heavenly, the human for the Divine, they must depend upon the compelling power of the flesh instead of the drawing power of the Spirit, and upon the threat of pains and penalties enforced by the State instead of the love that gives itself, in order to secure and hold their followers. This is the philosophy of all tyranny and persecution. When it is once granted that the State has any right to prescribe to the people what or how they shall worship, or whether they shall worship at all, then the punishment of those who refuse to obey these commands of the State is not called persecution at all, but simply a just provision for the enforcement of the laws. So it was in Babylon of the Chaldees, and so it is in the Babylon of to-day.

The command of the king, accompanied by the threat of death in case of disobedience, had its intended effect, and "all the people . . . fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up." We are facing the same issues today, and another world-wide effort will be made to compel all the people under the threat of death to accept man in the place of God, and the commandments of men in the place of the commandments of God; and there is only one way of escape, for "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Rev. xiii 8 And this power of the Gospel of life to deliver from the fear of any earthly power was known and proclaimed that day " in the province of Babylon."

LOYALTY TO THE TRUTH.

"Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falls not down and worships, 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, 0 king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

The refusal of these men to obey the command of the king was a most flagrant offence, as the Chaldeans viewed the case. Their nation had been conquered by the king of Babylon, and they were captives ; but at the request of Daniel, and in recognition of his service rendered to the king, they had been "set over the affairs of the province." And yet in spite of all this, they refused obedience to the royal decree. Although raised to the dignity of administering the laws of the realm, they themselves disregarded the law in the presence of "all the rulers of the provinces." And to disregard this particular law on this particular occasion was certainly to show public contempt for the person of the king, and was a most aggravated case of high treason. This is the method of reasoning adopted by all those who deify the State, and who claim for it supreme authority both in temporal and spiritual matters. It is the law, and it must be obeyed. The argument is that every loyal citizen will regard the law of the land, and that to disregard it willfully is to show a spirit of disloyalty, which ought to be punished as practically treason against the State. And this method of reasoning will justify all the persecutions from the time of Nebuchadnezzar until now. It is not persecution to enforce a just law, even though it may bring severe punishment upon the offenders.

A TEST QUESTION.

" 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 unto them, "Is it true, 0 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not you serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sack-but, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the image which I have made, well; but if you worship not, 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?"

The king proposed to deal fairly with these men. It was hardly thought possible that they would persist in their obstinate refusal to obey duly constituted authority, and especially when the certainty of the

penalty was held before them. Of course there was no suggestion of a change of the law, for was not the king of Babylon the king of all the earth? And had he not conquered *all* the Jews? And shall he now be conquered by only three of them? If the God of the Jews is stronger than the king of Babylon, why did He not deliver Jerusalem? Nebuchadnezzar was yet to learn of the power of the kingdom of God within, when one is "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man," and experiences the indwelling of "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." But God had committed this Gospel to these three men to proclaim in Babylon, by their loyalty to the principles of His kingdom even in the face of death ; and this attempt of king Nebuchadnezzar himself to dissuade them from their loyalty to their King only served to give the greater force to this second message from the God of heaven to the king of Babylon.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

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

There is only one answer to be returned to one who seeks to turn a true child of the kingdom from his loyalty to his God, whether it be the king on his throne or the humblest peasant; and that answer is so simple that it can be made at once. The motto is, "Faithful unto death." These men had heard the voice which fills every loyal heart with hope and courage: "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation." Isa. 51:7-8.

Nebuchadnezzar might do what he would with their bodies, if he was willing to assume that responsibility, but so long as they had the control of them they would yield them to be instruments of righteousness, and not prostrate them in worship before any other being than the King of heaven. Their answer was the same as was given in the wilderness when the same temptation was pressed by "the god of this world" upon the Son of man; "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." As faithful and true witnesses they said with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

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