

God Rules in the Kingdom of Men

By Rev. D. H. Kuiper

(Historical Note: This article was originally written during the Watergate era.)

As citizens of this land we have witnessed in the past few months events unprecedented in 200 years of our nation's history. Eight months ago the vice-president resigned from office under a heavy cloud of criminal charges and indictments. Last month the president himself resigned his office under an equally heavy cloud of charges and suspicion. How is it that this man was driven from the most powerful office in the entire world? Oh, we are not going to try to examine the evidence in connection with Watergate. We are not going to judge the innocence or guilt of the late president. We do want to call your attention to a passage of the Word of God that speaks with amazing clarity to a situation that was strikingly similar to that of our day. Will you read the entire fourth chapter of Daniel? It is especially to the verses 24 and 25 that I call your attention: "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

Just as the removal of Nebuchadnezzar from office for a time was a sign for the Jews in captivity that God remembered them in their plight, so in these recent events also, we must see the hand of God. God was behind these resignations and the events that led to them; and Christ is coming in and through these events, and He has done these things, as He does all things, for the good and salvation of His people.

The dream that God sent Nebuchadnezzar earlier, and the marvelous deliverance of Daniel's three friends out of the fiery furnace, although they had greatly impressed the king, had left him unconverted and in his former state of pride and arrogance. The Babylonian king is one who says, "Lord, Lord" but who does not enter into the kingdom of heaven because he does not do the will of the Father which is in heaven. Therefore, God sends him another warning.

A WARNING DREAM: The dream which Nebuchadnezzar received, which troubled him so greatly, can be divided into three parts. First, he saw a tree growing in the midst of the earth, a strong tree, a tree which could be seen by all men on the earth. The tree produced much fruit which was food for all. Beasts lived in its shade and birds in its boughs. Secondly, an angel from heaven comes with the message that the tree must be hewn down, and the stump must be preserved. And the angel begins to speak of a man: "Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him, and let seven times pass over him." And finally, the purpose of the decree is stated in these words: "To the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." In other words, God sets up one and putteth down another; even when base men are on the throne, God puts them there and rules through them.

The king makes every effort to discover the meaning of the dream. After his wisemen and magicians fail, he finally summons Daniel. The meaning of the dream astonishes Daniel to the extent that he cannot speak for an hour, but then he explains the matter. The tree is Nebuchadnezzar who has become great and strong. The leaves and fruit refer to his riches. That all birds and beasts find their needs supplied by the tree means that all men everywhere looked to the king for their food, safety and well-being. And that the tree could be seen from every point of the earth refers to the world dominion of the kingdom. He ruled to the end of the known world! That the tree could be cut down means that Nebuchadnezzar would be driven from his high office, yea, from the company of men, and he would live, act, and think as a beast. He would be humiliated! And the purpose of this humiliation is that he might learn that the MOST HIGH GOD rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He pleases, something that the king would not admit or recognize. Undoubtedly, the lesson here is that which Isaiah referred to when he rebuked Israel for her unfaithfulness: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." The dumb beast knows who feeds it, the dumb beast shows a certain kind of loyalty to his master, the dumb beast does not exalt himself above its owner. So Nebuchadnezzar must learn humility, must learn that God has given him the throne, that God has made him rich, that God requires him to rule

for the glory of His Most Holy Name. And, finally, that a stump will be left means that the kingdom will be returned to Nebuchadnezzar after he has learned that the heavens do rule.

This all sounds very much up to date, does it not? The Word of God is timeless, speaks pointedly to every age, is of great profit for the believer! The church is no longer confirmed to one nation as it was in the time of Isaiah and Daniel. Yet, wherever the church exists, she is in contact with earthly rulers whom she must obey in all things lawful. The child of God must show honor unto the magistrates for the Lord's sake, even as Daniel honored Nebuchadnezzar. And that magistrate has a calling before God too! That calling is to punish the evil doer and reward those that do right. That calling is to uphold the laws of God in the public sphere of life... to uphold righteousness and truth, and punish the evildoer. This high calling must be performed in the consciousness that a king or prince or president is the servant of the Lord. And when a man refuses to be a servant, but exalts himself without recognition of God, then he misuses his office and denied that the heavens rule! He might vaguely speak of there being a God who rules in heaven, but he denies that THE GOD rules in the kingdom of men. And he denies that God has given him the kingdom, and can take it away just as easily, for He giveth it to whomsoever He wills!

This is what has happened in our land in the past months! Striking similarities! Our nation is the richest and strongest nation in the world. God made it that way. The leader of our nation is the strongest leader in the world. God made it that way too! Our nation is like a tall tree that everyone sees, and to which everyone looks for wheat, defense, and technology. What a great responsibility, then, falls to the man or men who lead this nation. And if they rule in such a way that they refuse to recognize God, and we mean the only living God of the Scriptures, then they show themselves to be worse than the brute beast and filled with pride and boastfulness. The Lord says in Proverbs 8, "Pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate." And that which He hates He destroys.

THE WARNING IGNORED: This warning made little impact upon Nebuchadnezzar, although it seemed to have troubled him for a time. In about a year, as he walks about the palace in Babylon, he observes vast riches and power that he has accumulated. Hear him boast: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" In that single mouthful of words, the king violated every law of God in respect to one who has a position of authority and power. It is the ultimate blasphemy for a king to say that kingdoms and people exist for the glory of his majesty, rather than to confess that all things exist for the glory of God's name. Nebuchadnezzar placed himself above God's laws and thus above God.

And the Lord resists the proud, He knows them afar off, He drives away those who refuse to acknowledge Him. While these boastful words are still in his mouth, a voice from heaven spoke: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from thee." This is not all a dream. At first the king received a dream, but now a year later, he actually experiences these things. This is an historical fact! God gave him a beast's heart. And the result was that he was no longer fit to rule the kingdom. Men drove him off the throne. How fitting! When a man, any man, acts in pride he is as a beast... in fact, worse than a beast. So Nebuchadnezzar stands out in the rain while his hair and nails grow long and ugly. At long last he lifts his eyes to heaven and he blesses the Most High! He makes some rather nice statements about God. He can hardly do anything else after such an experience. But he does not confess his great sin. He does nothing that the reprobate in hell shall not do in the day of Christ, for then "every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father."

We see today as well, a wide ignoring of the great truth of this passage that "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He wills." Men care about what history will say of them, what man will say of them, but they care not what God will say concerning them. Men address themselves to the great problems of our day with only a passing reference to God. And today, also, we see how God is able to debase those that walk in pride.

THIS GREAT TRUTH MUST BE LEARNED! Nebuchadnezzar learned it! God is not mocked, his warnings cannot be ignored with impunity, He will not share His glory with any man! All those that rule in pride, that refuse to honor God as the supreme authority Who sets up one and puts down another, God will abase.

We must also see that Israel learned this great lesson in the time of her captivity. Those were dark times. But God had promised to raise up a certain King Cyrus who would permit them to return to Jerusalem. God shows that He is able to bring to power this Cyrus who will perform His will in respect to the elect remnant. The elect learned that God is on the throne!

And we who live in the land of the shadow of death, who live under the tyranny of sin in a sin cursed world, must also learn this. What a vivid reminder we have had that God gives kingdoms and nations to whomsoever He wills. As people of God we must not shrug our shoulders as if nothing serious has happened. Nor must we become alarmed and ask, "Now who will lead us to peace?" God has spoken. And God will continue to speak and to act until finally He dispossesses all the kings and princes of this world, and He will give it to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! He will crush all that nations of the earth as the Lord of Lords! He will rule with a right scepter, and of His kingdom there will be no end! And all those who long for His coming will have an everlasting place in that Kingdom. That is our true citizenship!