

"The Great Tree"

Daniel 4

The Vision in this chapter does not particularly connect itself with the object proposed in these "Remarks," which was to speak of those portions of Daniel which are still in a great measure future. It is, however, one of much interest; for here we find, in the past accomplishment of a vision, an earnest of the exact and precise fulfillment which all these visions must necessarily receive.

The *form* of this chapter is remarkable. It is a decree proceeding from Nebuchadnezzar himself, after those things had passed over him which God foretold to him in vision; when he was forced to confess "the signs and wonders that the high God has wrought towards me. How great are his signs, and how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (verses 2, 3). Thus did the king, at length, acknowledge the hand and power of God. After the vision in the second chapter had been declared to him by Daniel, he looked to the prophet as though he were the *source* of the communication of divine truth to him: "then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshiped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors unto him" (2:46). He then acknowledged God as the revealer of secrets, although it is evident that his heart was in no way humbled before Him.

And thus in the next chapter [chap. 3], so far from honoring the living and true God, the king set up his golden image in the plain of Dura, commanding that all should worship the idol (as if he, who was himself the receiver of power from God, could himself possess authority to decree anything as to *who* should or should not be the object of religious worship). The miraculous deliverance of those who refused to obey the king's command to commit idolatry leads to an acknowledgment on his part of the God whose power had thus shown itself, so that he made an edict that no one should speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, on pain of death.

But still his heart was lifted up in pride; he continued to trust in his own power. And this fourth chapter is his own remarkable declaration *how* God had dealt with him to humble his haughty spirit.

After acknowledging the power of God, he goes on to say: "I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." He then describes (verses 6, 9) how he sought in vain from the wise men of Babylon to learn the meaning of the vision, until Daniel came in before him. To the prophet the king thus detailed his vision

Thus were the visions of my head in my bed. I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all. The beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it (verses 10-12).

Such then was the tree as seen in its greatness. But the sentence of *God* followed:

I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven. He cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit. Let the beasts 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 heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth (verses 13-15).

The next verse shows that even the dream intimated that the tree symbolized *a person*

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. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand of 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 whomsoever he will, and sets up over it the basest of men (verses 16, 17).

Having thus narrated the dream, the king sought the interpretation from the prophet. Daniel shows us that the communication of truth from God, or a place of special service to Him, does not at all interfere with the full action of right human feelings. He saw that the vision foretold a solemn chastisement from God which should fall upon Nebuchadnezzar, and therefore he felt deeply his own position as being thus the communicator of evil tidings.

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spoke and said, "Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation thereof trouble thee." Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies" (verse 19).

He then, after describing the tree in all its greatness, adds: "It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong; for thy greatness is grown, and reaches unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth." He then applies the Judgment on the tree to the king: "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 rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will." But still the king was told that his kingdom should be sure unto him, after he knew that the heavens do rule. Daniel's feeling towards the king did not allow him to rest with merely delivering the prophecy of chastening. He exhorts the king as having a true and earnest desire for his welfare: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility."

A year passed on. The king's heart was not humbled. He still looked on his power and might as his own, and did not confess that rule and authority are from above, and not from beneath. He was walking in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and his haughty utterance was, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" According to the thoughts of man this was only natural. It was Nebuchadnezzar who had made Babylon what it was in its greatness and vastness, not merely

politically, but also as to the actual, visible, edifices.¹ At once there came to him a voice from heaven declaring the immediate accomplishment of the prediction, which was fulfilled the same hour.

The appointed seven years were at length accomplished in the king's humiliation, and then (he says): "At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me; and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that lives forever" (ver. 34). And then, according to the word of the Lord by Daniel, his kingdom was restored to him and "excellent majesty was added to him." He whose earthly power had been so great had now learned to "praise, and extol, and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment. And those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

This is an instructive lesson of the exactitude with which prophecy is accomplished. It may teach us how we should expect the fulfillment of what is yet future. These things took place under the head of the first of the four great monarchies; and thus they might have been regarded as a warning to those possessed of the power of the earth, that they might learn *who* gives them their power and *who* it is that rules among the children of men.

How little this was heeded is shown us in the next chapter, where Belshazzar, unmindful of what he had *known* (chap. 5:22) of the actings of God, went on in a course of unhumbled blasphemy. The neglected warning made the condemnation all the greater. The kingdom of Belshazzar was numbered and finished. He was weighed in the balances and found wanting. To him there was no ulterior promise of restoration, for he had sinned willfully after having had the lesson of God's dealing set before him.

Thus has God, from the beginning, shown us what the result is of power in the hands of the Gentile monarchs--the Giver of authority has been continually forgotten. It has been regarded as something not received, or else it has been attributed to wrong sources.

In the sixth chapter of Daniel we find one remarkable exemplification of what man may do when possessed of authority. Darius was led by the craft of the presidents and princes to decree that no petition should be asked for thirty days of any God or man save of himself only. He seems to have thus unwittingly put himself in the place of God, and thus became an aider of the evil design formed against Daniel--a design which, by the miraculous interposition of God, issued in the destruction of those that formed it.

All the results set before us in this book show that power will never be held as from God, and for God, until Christ takes it into his own hand. God dealt with the first head of Gentile power for the instruction of those who should come after ("to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men"). But the result has only been farther and yet farther estrangement from God, until this shall be fully exhibited in the last head of Gentile power.

¹ It was reserved to our day to bring out to light an abiding record of the extent of the works of Nebuchadnezzar. The inscription in the arrow-headed character, found on the *bricks* in every part of the plain of Babylon, is "*Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar.*" Turned to so many new uses, they still speak of the establisher of Babylon's greatness.