

A KING WHO ATE GRASS



KING SAUL was the first king to rule over the children of Israel. Then, as you know, they had other kings. There was David, who was a very good king. Then there was Solomon. Another one was called Ahab. He was not a good king, because he allowed the people to worship false gods. There were many other kings about whom we haven't told you at all. The very last king that the Israelites had was a man by the name of Zedekiah—Zed-e-ki-ah.

Zedekiah was a very wicked king, and many of the children of Israel were also wicked. So God allowed the enemies of the Israelites to capture their king, and all the people became captives and were carried away into a strange country called Babylon. It will be well if you can remember that Saul was the first king of the Israelites, and that Zedekiah was their last king.

Many grown-up folks do not know this!

The people of Babylon were all heathen, which means that they did not serve the true God, who was the God of the Israelites. The Bible also calls such people Gentiles. The Gentile nations had kings also, and at this time a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Gentile nation, Babylon.

Isn't that a long name!

Here's the way to pronounce it: first you say Neb, then u, then kad, then nez, and the last part is zar. So when you put it together it is Neb-u-kad-nez-zar. Now, that's not so hard after all, is it? I want you to learn that name because most of this story will be about Nebuchadnezzar, and you ought to be acquainted with him. About the time Nebuchadnezzar captured Zedekiah he had a very wonderful dream, but the strange part of it was that when he awoke from his sleep he couldn't remember the dream. Did you ever have a dream, and in the morning couldn't remember it? Well, that was Nebuchadnezzar's experience. It was truly a wonderful dream. He knew that, but he tried and tried to remember it and just couldn't. Well, what did he do?

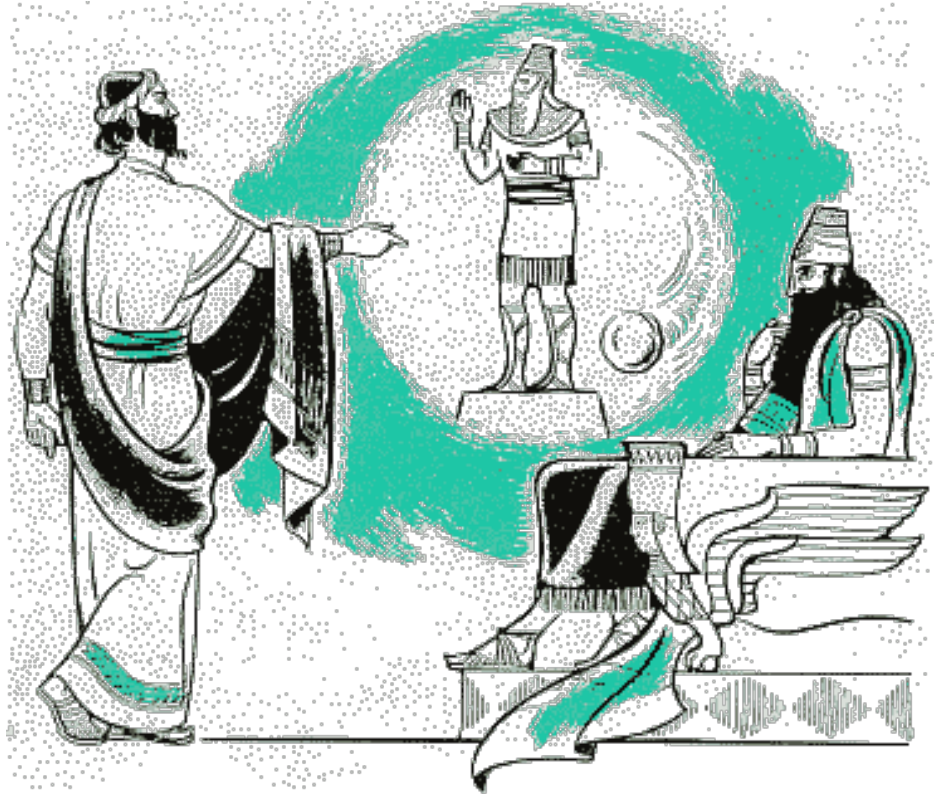
First he sent for some of his wise men. These were men who were specially trained so they would be able to tell the king what he wanted to know. Of course they were not really wise men; they were just called wise men. Nebuchadnezzar asked them to tell him what it was that he dreamed, and then to explain the meaning of the dream.

My, but that was a hard job for those wise men, wasn't it? Yes, it was really too hard, for they told the king that they couldn't possibly know what it was that he had dreamed. They told the king that if he could remember the dream and tell them what it was, they could certainly explain its meaning. But this the king could not do, so they didn't help him very much. The king was very angry, and ordered that all the wise men should be killed.

Among the wise men who were specially appointed to advise the king and explain secrets to him, were four young Israelites. The name of one of these was Daniel. When he heard that the king was angry and wanted them all killed, he asked if he might try to tell the king his dream. Nebuchadnezzar agreed to let Daniel try.

Daniel couldn't possibly do this all by himself, but God helped him, and because God helped him he was able to tell the king just what it was that he dreamed. He told Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream he saw a statue which was the shape of a man. The Bible calls it an image. The image was like a man, with shoulders, arms, body, legs,

and feet. The head appeared to be made of gold, the arms and chest of silver, the stomach and hips of brass, and the legs of iron. The feet were very odd, for they were made of a mixture of iron and clay.



Then Nebuchadnezzar saw a big stone separate itself from the side of a mountain, and the stone fell on the feet of the statue, causing it to fall and break in pieces. The wind blew the pieces away. Then the most peculiar thing occurred. That stone which fell on the feet of the statue began to grow, and it grew until it was so large that it filled the whole earth. Now wasn't that a most remarkable dream! Of course you want to know what it means. Nebuchadnezzar did too, so Daniel explained it to him. He explained that the golden head of the statue stood for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that each of the other parts of the statue represented very strong nations which would rule over the Israelites and the whole

world after the nation of Babylon became weak and was defeated by its enemies.

This dream meant that the Israelites would be ruled by the Gentiles for hundreds of years. And they were, too. It is wonderful that God knew this and could tell about it before it took place! We can't do that, can we? But God can, and he helped Daniel explain the history of the world hundreds and hundreds of years ahead of time.

Daniel explained that the Gentile nations would rule until God sent his King.

God's kingdom was shown by the stone that broke the statue to pieces and then became a great mountain which filled the whole earth. Jesus will be the King in God's kingdom, and this means that the children of Israel will never have another king until King Jesus rules over them and over the whole world.

Aren't we glad that wicked Gentile kings won't rule over the earth forever and ever? Surely we are, for God has promised that Jesus will be the King, and we know that all his promises will come true. Of course Nebuchadnezzar couldn't rule over the Israelites and over the whole world unless God allowed him to do so. He forgot that, and became very proud. He tried to make the people think that he was very wonderful, and that they should worship him. He didn't trust God as some of the kings of the Israelites did, but had the very foolish idea that he could be a wise and wonderful king without any help from God.

So what do you suppose occurred?

Why, the king had another dream, and when he found out what it meant it was really terrible. In this dream God told him that he would lose his mind and would go out in the field and eat grass just like the cattle for seven years. And Nebuchadnezzar actually did this, too. Can you imagine a mighty king, as he thought himself to be, crawling around on the ground eating grass? The Bible tells us that his hair grew long and coarse and looked like bird feathers, and his fingernails became like the claws of animals.

Finally, though, Nebuchadnezzar's reason returned to him, and when he found out what he had done he was very much ashamed

of himself. However, he learned by this experience that he was not as wise and powerful as he had thought. Learning this, he gave praise to God for allowing him to be the ruler.

QUESTIONS

- Who was Israel's lost king, and by whom was he made a prisoner?
- Who was Daniel, and what was Nebuchadnezzar's dream which Daniel explained to him?
- Why was it necessary for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to eat nothing but grass for seven years?

Dawn Bible Students Association