

# How God captures a man!

Nebuchadnezzar and Me! (and perhaps You!)

Have you ever wondered how God brings about our salvation? I don't mean the necessity of crucifixion and the resurrection, which of course is the basis of salvation and eternal life.

Is our salvation a one event in time where we make a confession of faith? Or is there more to it when God bring about other significant changes, that are just as important as the initial step of faith?

We are going to look at that issue today by examining the life of Nebuchadnezzar, who is famous for many reasons.

Nebuchadnezzar story is perhaps the most dramatic and bizarre story in the whole Bible. If you have not heard it, you will be amazed.

Today's message is about How God captures a man - Nebuchadnezzar and me!

I am also going to tell you about aspects of my life, where God made major changes to my life. The purpose of sharing about my life is to see if it may cause you to think of your life and where the Lord might be taking you.

Through the experience of my stumbles in life, I am fully persuaded that God has far more for each of us than we could ever imagine. Jeremiah wrote about such things that God has in store.

But it takes knowledge and continuous abandonment to the Spirit of God, in order for Him to take our lives where He wants them to be.

In this story, the sovereignty of God is seen as strongly as it is anywhere in the Bible.

So let's go on. As always in any preaching or teaching, the Spirit of God is your Teacher. So let's all focus on Him. Before we go on, let's pray.

Father, we are about to look at one of the most famous captures of a man in all of history. May Your Holy Spirit quicken your word to each and every one, according to the need of each person - for Your purposes and for Your glory. Amen

## **1 Who was Nebuchadnezzar?**

Nebuchadnezzar was the King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, 2600 years ago. He became King just prior to the death of his Father in August of 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's name actually appears in eight O.T. books.

He is a key figure in the book of Daniel, and appears in secular history. Verdi Opera - Nabucco – March of the Hebrew Slaves. He is mostly known as the ruthless tyrant who destroyed Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground in 586 B.C.

## **2 What sort of a man was he?**

He trusted in his own personal wealth and power as a military leader. He had no room for God in his life or his Kingdom. He was a prideful character, as he was a warlord and skilled politically. e.g. He married the daughter of Cyaxar, to gain control of the Median Empire, uniting it with his own.

He was the Saddam Hussein of his day, being a very cruel man. For example, he ordered the eyes of Zedekiah, King of Judah to be taken out after he was captured. (2 Kings 25:7)

He had architectural skills, establishing the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. He took the credit, the honour and the glory for all that he did.

## **3 Nebuchadnezzar's timeline.**

We are going to look at his life as it appears in the book of Daniel, one of my favourite OT characters.

630 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar born.

605 B.C. Became King of Babylon.

562. B.C. Nebuchadnezzar died.

His 68 years produce a series of amazing events. We are going to look at three of them - to learn from them.

## **4 First incident - His first dream – was in 604 B.C. Just one year after becoming King.**

Everything about Nebuchadnezzar is extreme and bizarre. One day, he had a dream and did not know what it meant. So he demanded that the wise men of the land, not only to interpret the dream, but also to tell him the actual dream itself. And- if they could not tell him, they would be hacked to pieces.

He was a ruthless character! Eventually an official organized for Daniel to tell him the dream. Daniel asked for time to pray and then saw Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the dream and the interpretation. God revealed both dream and interpretation to Daniel.

The dream was really God giving Nebuchadnezzar a prophecy of future world events – some of which have occurred and others which will take place in relation to the second coming of Christ.

Because of the Spirit of wisdom within Daniel, he was able to inform the king of the details. If you have read Daniel you will know the story about the golden image, (that apparently was related to the earlier dream about the image of gold, bronze, iron and clay)

As a part of the interpretation of the dream, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that whilst he currently ruled over all, in the future, other kings would rule at different times. However, he also told him that in the latter days, there would be One ruler over all, whose kingdom would never end!! Who is that? JESUS of course! So what is going to happen soon was predicted 2600 years ago.

At the end of all this, Nebuchadnezzar worshipped Daniel and promoted him to rule over the whole province (shades of Joseph)

What Nebuchadnezzar said about these events was profound.

*"Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." Daniel 2:47*

What a profession! Great! But did that mean that the sins of Nebuchadnezzar were covered over and he was on his way to heaven?

Did he then put God first? Did he put God above himself? Let's wait and see.

Before we look at what happened next.....just a little about my spiritual beginnings. I grew up in the Salvation Army. At age 14, during a salvation meeting, I was converted, the term the army uses for making a confession of faith. My life did seem to be a bit different.

However, did that really change me? I believed I was born again, but did not really know much about God or Bible, nor was I taught much at the time. I can remember my Sunday school teacher telling me that I was now right for life. How wrong that proved to be!

Perhaps in one sense I was right for life, but as you will see, it did not make me immune from the temptations of life, and nowhere near knowing Jesus Christ. The questions I would now ask of myself of that time are:  
Was I on my way to heaven?

Did I put God first?  
We will soon see that I did not.

So, think back to your past. Did you have a similar stage?

But Now - Back to Nebuchadnezzar and a second main incident in his life

**5 Second incident – 580 BC – This happened 24 years later, when Nebuchadnezzar was 50 – It is about the golden image and the fiery furnace.**

Nebuchadnezzar's self-centered mind had him build an image to glorify himself to the world. It was the golden image from his earlier dream. It was 90 feet high and 9 feet in width and was placed on the plains of Duran for all to see the glory of Nebuchadnezzar.

Let's think about that! What had happened to his earlier proclamation that God was the God of gods? What had happened within his heart?

And then, to make matters worse, he then demanded that all people bow down to the image. It's a long story but sufficient to say that Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego refused to bow – and told Nebuchadnezzar. You may remember the story. The main point is that they were placed in a fiery furnace – but survived, because of God's keeping power.

This had a remarkable effect on Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 3:28 followed by Daniel 4:3)

"So much so that he said,

*"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because, there is no other God who can deliver like this." "How great are His signs, And how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion is from generation to generation."*

This was a much stronger proclamation about God than the previous one 24 years earlier. But was his heart now fully submitted to God? We shall see.

I had a second stage also – sad in human terms. By some coincidence it was also 24 years later when I fell into serious sin.

When I now look back on it, the seeds that would lead to my downfall, were being sown over all those years. I had not been prepared in knowledge for a godly life - and

I got into many wrong ideas during my University days. (Age 37-43) So I was not protected by the truth of God.

So, when I graduated aged 43, in 1977 with an Honours degree, my life was really a total dishonour.

So my initial commitment at age 14, did not seem to mean very much. It did not help me to resist the world, flesh and the devil.

The Lord had to break me down a long way and that took many years and two years out of my working life. I was in utter despair. But God found and revealed Himself to me again in 1979. Since then, although there have been many bumps, I have not looked back. However, sin always has devastating consequences and God needs time.

Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar, after being warned by God, was about to suffer the humiliation of having 7 years taken out of his life in a most dramatic way.

Let's now look at that incident.

## **6 Third incident, 10 years later when Nebuchadnezzar was 60 - 570 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's Vision of a large tree that was going to be cut down.**

Nebuchadnezzar had a vision one day. Again, as he did 34 years earlier he called the wise men and again they could not interpret the dream. Finally Daniel interpreted the dream for him.

In essence, the interpretation was that Nebuchadnezzar was going to lose his kingdom. Daniel's words to him included these. Daniel 4:27

*"Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."*

So here was another chance for Nebuchadnezzar to fully honour God and submit to Him.

**BUT HE DID NOT DO SO.** So God waited one year. Then, as Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the balcony of his palace, as he was speaking aloud exalting and honouring himself for his might power and achievements, whilst the words were in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven saying, (Daniel 4:31-33)

*"King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times (years) shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."*

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Just imagine this if you will. We are speaking of the strongest and most powerful and ruthless man in the world. God's power humiliated him ---- in order to save him by His grace.

God's power humiliated him ---- in order that by His grace, he was saved for eternity.

So for 7 years Nebuchadnezzar ate grass with oxen.

However, in that time God did a mighty work in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar. Let's see what happened next.

## **7 Nebuchadnezzar was restored - At the end of that time, God restored Nebuchadnezzar. He said in Daniel 4:34-37**

*"And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.*

*All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

*At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down."*

Notice the main elements he spoke of. He said:  
He lifted his eyes

He blessed the most high God.

His reason returned to him, as was the glory of his kingdom and his honour. He also said that:  
His kingdom will last forever

God does everything according to His will.

All God's words are true and His ways are just.

Those who walk in pride, he is able to put down. (and raise up, the Bible elsewhere says)

So, in all these amazing events, we can get a glimpse of how it is possible for God to capture a man and take him through many stages in life.

My third stage – a much happier one, was just 11 years ago when I was 65. Over the previous 20 years I had studied the Bible seriously, but was never content – something was missing. Then, I received an email from a friend in USA. It was an article written from St Paul's Romans chapters 6, 7, 8. It was called The Key to the Liberated Life. It turned out to be a mercy from God – something I have never forgotten. As I read it, intellectually I did not understand it, but my spirit leapt. This was what I had been looking for. It has gradually become a new way of life. Life is not any easier. The trials and tribulations continue. But the difference is that they are now all related to God's purposes.

Galatians 2:20 is the key verse in living as God intended. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!" Our old Adam life is gone and the life of Christ is now within me. *An illustration of clay pot filled with dead soil and refilled with new soil. The Bible refers to us clay vessels. Before we are saved we are clay pots filled with dead soil. But we are now filled with the new soil of the life of Christ.*

We can know this by the Spirit of God. That verse is a good one to meditate upon...for month or more. Nebuchadnezzar's revelation was far greater, as we have the N.T. He did not. So, Nebuchadnezzar was heaven bound from that great moment of his.

## **8 What can we learn from this story generally?**

Knowing God is a journey, not a destination.  
God's power is the ultimate power.

By His grace God allowed Nebuchadnezzar into heaven, even though he had destroyed Jerusalem and killed thousands of His own people. God makes a righteous mix of His justice, His love, His forgiveness and His grace. In all this, Daniel was used by God to direct Nebuchadnezzar's life and – and to tell us about the events preceding the Second Coming. What a mercy that is to us!

Another thing to learn is that we can only know our eternal future, when we belong to God.

Also, that, God can capture any man, once, twice, three times or more, although extreme adversity is often involved in the process.

Finally, David gave me permission to mention the linkage with his sermon two weeks ago, when he talked about the mental assent given by believers towards knowing Jesus, but apparently without a full heart commitment. So was my initial salvation a mere mental assent to the facts of salvation? Perhaps the only way to be sure is to go on in Christ and not look back. You can always decide to go hard after God. He will respond.

## **9 Some personal considerations**

At what stage are you in your life with God? Did you think that when you made your confession of faith, that was all there was? Consider - is there now more for you after all?

Moses was 80 when his third stage began. John Newton was a slave trader in Africa when in one of his later stages, the penny finally dropped for him.

Joseph, Jacob's son had 14 years of extreme suffering before he was fitted to be Prime Minister of Egypt, to do God's will.

The whole book of Job is summed up in two verses – Job 40, verses 9 and 14, where Job found out his own arm (strength) could not save him – only God's could be capable of that.

He isn't finished with us yet, however hopeless we might feel! God designs a set of life circumstances for each of us.

We all need to realize that God is behind the tough times we have. Hudson Taylor taught that (among many others)

Don't be surprised wrote Peter, about the fiery trials you are experiencing – but rejoice – you are partaking in the sufferings of Christ – so we that the Spirit of God will rest upon you.

You can safely believe that the Spirit of God is trying to get your attention, for His purposes and His glory.

It is a sign of God's relentless love that he organizes the Hound of Heaven (the Holy Spirit) to chase us.

## *Nebuchadnezzar and Me – and You ??*

We all need to be aware of the way God works and be ready to pick up on every clue He provides, both positive and negative.

These are the challenges that I leave you with today.

## **10 Prayer time – We are now going to have a time of prayer, to complete the sermon and introduce communion.**

Let's bow our heads and hearts. Before I pray I am going to reflect on what we have just heard, in the attitude of prayer.

These lessons from the life of Nebuchadnezzar are profound.

Do you see how God never gives up on any one of us – at any stage of our believing? He is faithful, even when we are not, or cannot be.

So know this. God can and will do anything to engage a man or woman and reach them from any position in life.

Just talk to God like he is right there now – because as a believer, He is within you. As a non-believer He is never far away. You can talk to Him honestly in the quietness of your heart, right here right now.

You might ask Him such things as, *"Where am I with you Lord? Is there anything blocking me? Do I lack in wisdom or knowledge?"*

- *Lord, do I lack in giving You my time? – for reading, study, prayer, praise, worship or just being silent before you?*
- *Lord, do I have any wrong attitudes towards a spouse, a brother or sister, or any other person? If so, resolve today, to reconcile with them and God.*
- *Lord, do I accept adversity or suffering as Your means of making me holy? (and as Your means of teaching me grace?)*
- *Lord, help me to see myself in Your pure light.*
- *Lord, help me to know myself better – that I may know you! As Paul said, "that I may know Him"*

### **Closing Prayer**

*"Father, I ask for each brother and sister, that you meet them at their point of need, in the fullness of Your grace and love.*

*Father, whether you hear prayers of confession or pleas for help, or knowledge, or wisdom or guidance, please answer....for each one.*

*Father, have us fully know that we cannot help ourselves. Only have us dare to believe, so we can let You take over our lives.*

*Father, we pray all these things in the precious Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.*

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*This is the 14th in a series of articles to further outline and provide resource for believers to move towards Fullness of Life in Christ.*

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**Availability.** *This study is for use in one to one teaching or in small groups by those who know this experience for themselves, or by those open to the Spirit to learn together.*