

Biblical Narratives by Horane Smith

The Dream

King Nebuchadnezzar was a troubled man. He ran his fingers through his grey beard several times hoping it would take his mind off that dream last night. The empire of Babylon was a headache in itself, and it was no wonder a hard day's work often resulted in these nightmares. To keep the empire intact, and for it to maintain its great power and influence over the whole region, was becoming a formidable task. He had to be mindful of insurrection, lawlessness, and anything that could undermine the influence of the dynasty.

It was not often that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. His dreams were not out of the ordinary and he would forget them as soon as he was out of bed. Somehow, the dream last night was different. The symbols and the meaning were a puzzle. And that was what had taken up all his thoughts.

King Nebuchadnezzar sat on his throne watching some blackbirds playing on a wall bordering the palace. They sang and danced about as if they had no trouble in the world. The king wished he were like that. The rays of the sun shone through the parted window and landed right on his face. He didn't shift his position but allowed the sun to caress his face hoping it would help him get rid of his drowsiness.

"Are you okay Dad?" his daughter Rebecca asked. She walked into his room as she normally does each morning.

"Oh, it's you..." he mumbled, startled by her presence. He didn't see her walk into the room. The sandals she wore made little or no noise on the shining floor. "I'm okay my dear. It's just that I had a rather strange dream last night and it keeps bothering me."

"Dream, what it was about?" she asked, handing him the cup.

The king looked up at his daughter, noticing the concern in her lovely face. She was an attractive princess and the King wondered whether he should burden her with his dream.

"I wish I knew what the dream is about?"

"Why not call the astrologers and magicians?"

“That’s a good idea. Why should I bother when they can do it?”

The very next day the king summoned his astrologers, magicians, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans. They came as soon as they got his message.

“I have a dream, a very troubling dream,” the king said, scratching his long beard. “I have to know what it means.”

They whispered among themselves, an indication that they were curious to know what this dream was about.

“Tell your servants this dream and we’ll show you the interpretation O King,” the Chaldean spoke up from the group.

King Nebuchadnezzar was getting impatient and wanted to spare little time in getting the correct interpretation. “I can’t remember it all. If you’ll not make known to me this dream,” he said scratching his beard again, his eyes twinkling faster than normal, “you shall be cut into pieces,” he said in a commanding voice.

The so-called wise men of Babylon were shocked to hear him say that, but they were not frightened. Not in their time of practice have they ever been unable to interpret a dream. Each one of them was far from being humble about their achievements.

“Your houses shall be made of dunghill,” the king added. “But if you show me the interpretation, I’ll give you gifts, rewards, and I’ll bestow a great honor on you. Now show me the dream,” he demanded.

“Tell us the dream,” they repeated. “We have no doubt we can tell you the interpretation,” they said, with almost a smile.

“I see you’re bidding for time because you believe I have forgotten the dream,” the king answered. “Nevertheless, I still want you to interpret it, and if you don’t, there’s only one decree for you: you’re preparing to lie to me. I know if you can tell me the dream then you will be able to interpret it,” he said raising his voice.

The Chaldeans, the most talkative of the lot, spoke again: “There’s no man on this earth that can tell you this dream. There’s no king, lord, nor ruler that can ask such things of any astrologer, magician or Chaldean. It is very rare that the king asks and there is no one that can tell you that dream except the gods, who aren’t flesh like us.”

The king was furious and steaming with rage. His face took on more wrinkles and his eyes glistened with anger and impatience. He turned to his captain, Arioch. "All the wise men in Babylon must be destroyed, beginning with these," he said pointing to the group of frightened and trembling men before him.

Ten soldiers coming from out of nowhere marched up to them, grabbed each by the shoulder and whisked them away quickly. "Send out this decree at once to all the relevant people!" he snapped, grabbed his gown, and stormed out of the room.

A prophet of God, Daniel, who also carried the name Belteshazzar, heard of the decree. Arioch eventually met Daniel as he carried out his mission of slaying all the wise men of Babylon.

"Why is the king moving so quickly on this?" Daniel asked Arioch. "He should be a little more patient."

"He's the king and what he says must be done," Arioch replied.

"I believe I could interpret the dream," Daniel said, his eyes beaming with confidence

Arioch looked at the young Daniel and wondered if this was some kind of a joke or something. Daniel looked so simple; yet there was something in that face of his that told him he could be a man of surprises. Arioch knew of King Nebuchadnezzar's desire to get the dream interpreted as soon as possible. He had little choice about whether to dismiss Daniel's offer. "You truly believe you could?"

"Take me to him," Daniel said.

Arioch took Daniel to see the King who adhered to his request for some time to interpret his dream.

The first thing Daniel did when he returned from the palace was to visit his close friends Hannah, Mishael and Azariah, to seek their prayers to the God of their fathers that the king would not destroy them as he did the wise men of Babylon.

That night a troubled Daniel went to bed earlier than usual. The task he had taken on to interpret the king's dream burdened him, somehow he was confident he could provide the correct interpretation with the help of the God of Israel. He wanted to get some rest badly so that the next day he would rise early and ready to begin that strenuous task.

No sooner than he had Daniel fallen asleep that fell into a strange dream which appeared to be real as could be. The next

morning he rose to the thought of the dream and he and no doubt that the God of Heaven appeared to him. Everything that he had prayed for was revealed to him in the dream. As soon as Daniel realized that he fell on his knees.

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might belong to him,” Daniel declared.

“He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings, he gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He reveals the deep and secret things; he knows what lies in the darkness and the light dwells with him.”

Daniel clutched his chest and continued to pray fervently at the thought God had answered him very quickly. “I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has made known unto me now what we desired of him; for he has now made known unto us the king’s dream.”

After he finished eating, Daniel rode to the king’s palace to speak with Arioch, the captain. “Don’t destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me to the king and I’ll tell him what his dream means,” Daniel told him, a little excitement building in his voice.

Arioch did not hesitate: standing before a non-attentive King Nebuchadnezzar Arioch told him all that Daniel had said. “I’ve found a man of the captives of Judah that says he can interpret your dreams.”

The king, who had his head down while he spoke, looked up at once at the mention of the words Judah and captives. His eyes rested on Daniel surveying him from head to toe. Daniel did not possess the physique of a war hero; he was of ordinary stature but with piercing eyes.

The king rose from his seat, his eyes still set on Daniel, and made a circle around him examining him thoroughly.”

“Hmmm,” he said nodding his head in the affirmative, “Are you able to tell me my dreams and interpret them?”

With his chin tilted a bit, Daniel looked to the heavens and prayed silently to God for words of wisdom and for guidance in what he was about to say. “Your dreams O king cannot be known or interpreted by magicians, astrologers or soothsayers.”

The king listened attentively trying to exercise some patience because he was getting too disturbed about the dreams and wanted

the interpretation at all costs, even if it meant that a captive from the tribe of Judah could provide it.

“They can’t?” he asked, raising his eyebrows.

“No your majesty. But there’s a God in heaven that reveals secrets and makes them known to you what shall happen in the last days.”

There was a deathly silence in the palace. All eyes turned to this diminutive figure who stood so tiny to the many faces and bodies that towered above him. The king looked him over again: out of the mouth of this young man came some prophetic words that he had never heard before.

Daniel was bursting with confidence because he knew the God of Israel was with him. He looked around at them trying to read the expressions on their faces – they varied from concern to deep interest in what he had said.

“Go on,” the king mumbled.

“You should know that this secret of your dream has been revealed to me not because I have wisdom more than any other but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to you that you might know my thoughts.”

“Hmm,” the king grunted, not wanting to say anything at that moment.

“O King, what you saw was a great image...a bright image stood before you and it looked terrifying. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.”

Many people looking on wondered where all this was leading to, but the king got more and more interested in what Daniel had to say. Of a truth, his interpretation must be from the God Daniel referred to, the King concluded.

“You saw a stone that was cut without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, clay and brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. That is the dream and I will interpret it for you.”

“It’s no wonder I could not remember it,” the king replied. “It was so strange...so strange,” he said, his hands plucking his nose. “And you can interpret such a strange dream?”

“I can O King with the help of the God of Israel.”

“The God of Israel, huh?”

“Yes, he’s the living God that helps me in this matter. This dream comes from him to you O King.”

“Go on,” the king said, feeling a little more lighthearted.

“You O King art a king of kings: for the God of Heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. Wherever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven has he given into your hands and has made you ruler over them all. You’re this head of gold. After you shall rise another kingdom inferior to yours, and a third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things; and as iron that breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.”

There was still silence as Daniel took his time, pacing his words so they could be digested and easily understood.

“O King you saw the feet and toes, part of the potters clay, and part of iron which means the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it the strength of the iron, forasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, and as the toes of the feet were part of iron, so the kingdom shall be partly broken. Whereas you saw iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break into pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

There was some mumbling in the room when Daniel said this kingdom would stand forever. However, the king said nothing. He fixed his gaze on Daniel.

“O King,” Daniel continued, “you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God has made known to you what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain and the interpretation correct and true.”

Suddenly, King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel and started to say things as if he was praying. He commanded his servants to offer an oblation and sweet odors unto Daniel. “Of a truth it is true...your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing you could reveal this secret.”

The king made Daniel a great man in his kingdom and gave him great gifts and made him a ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Then Daniel asked the king to appoint three young Hebrew men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

Many years later King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and set it up the plain of Durai in the province of Babylon.

In the intense heat of the day, thousands of people, including the governors, princes, captains and judges, treasurers and counsellors, sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, gathered for the dedication of the image.

The king gave a command that at the sound of a cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and any other kind of music, everyone should all down and worship the image. The edict said anyone who failed to do that would be cast in a fiery furnace.

Daniel was very disturbed when he heard the command. At one point he had thought the king was interested in knowing more about the God of Heaven. The building of the image made him think otherwise.

As Daniel was thinking about the consequences of such action, a group of Chaldeans was appearing before the king with an accusation that was bound to affect the Jews.

“O King, the young Jews you appointed to serve the province of Babylon have refused to bow down and serve thy gods and will not worship the golden image?” their chief spokesman cried.

“Do you mean Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?” he whirled around quickly to face the men directly.

“You are correct, O King.”

“Bring them to me at once!” he commanded the guards.

The three young Jews marched into the room, bowing before the king in utter silence.

“Is it true?” the king asked. “Have you refused to bow down and worship the golden image and to worship my gods?” He rose from the throne in anticipation of a positive answer. King Nebuchadnezzar always had a liking for the three young Jewish men, and to learn they had refused to obey his command was not something he was looking forward to.

“O King, we aren’t careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace. We won’t serve your god, nor worship the golden image.”

The king was driven into a rage that disfigured his face; his eyebrows jerked up into his forehead and his eyes twitched in anger.

“Heat the furnace at once!” he shouted on top of his voice. “I wanted it heated seven times hotter than you would normally do it.” The guards bowed and walked out of the room quickly.

Soldiers tied up the three young men and then threw them into the furnace. The flame grew so hot that the king’s men, who had started it, were burned badly and died.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, saw what happened; instead of being overwhelmed with fear, they prayed to God to lead their way for them and to take charge of their lives. They hugged one another, praying quickly as they made each step along their way to the furnace.

The heat could be felt from afar off; the nearer they got, the less fearful they became. They knew their God was with them and there was nothing to fear; there was no need for resistance.

The king’s men grabbed them by the arms and hurled them into the furnace as soon as the door to it was opened. The heavy door slammed loudly, the noise it made echoed across the building.

The guards waited a few minutes, their ears listening keenly for cries and wails. There was none; they considered that strange and highly unusual.

They looked over into the furnace quickly, and immediately their hands went over their mouths. There, standing on the floor of the furnace, were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were not harmed. There was a fourth figure which made the king’s men nervous and fearful, very fearful. They rushed to the king to tell him what they had seen.

“Are you making a joke or something?” an astonished King Nebuchadnezzar asked. “Didn’t you throw them in the furnace?”

“We did,” they said in unison.

The king stormed out of the room and walked to the mouth of the burning furnace. “Shedrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God come forth,” he shouted.

The three of them walked out of the burning fire untouched. By now, all those who had followed the king to the furnace were now witnesses to the miraculous event.

“Blessed be the God of Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make a decree that anyone that speaks anything amiss against the God of these three men, shall be cut into pieces and their houses shall be made a dunghill because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.”

Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego were subsequently promoted by the king to play a greater role in the affairs of Babylon.