

Nebuchadnezzar And Dreams In The Word

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

"I have dreamed a dream" (Daniel 2:3).

These were the words of Nebuchadnezzar. He knew there was something of great importance in his dream, something to do with his destiny. Yes, a king awakens from a dream and senses that it has an important bearing on his life. That seems to be a recurrent theme of Scripture. We will return to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, but first let us consider other dreams of Scripture.

The first example is in Genesis 20, and it is very dramatic. Abimelech the king of Gerar had taken the wife of Abraham. And God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said, "You are a dead man ... she is a man's wife." And Abimelech said, "Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'?" "And God said to him in a dream, 'Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.' So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very afraid" (verses 3-8).

"And he will pray for you" (Genesis 20:7). This is the first mention of prayer in the Word, and it is here that the Writings give the well known statement about prayer being speech with God to which there answers an influx into the thought of the mind and an opening of the interiors toward God, sometimes a feeling of hope, comfort and inward joy (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2535).

But note especially here that the king was told he was made aware that his actions had been influenced in a way not conscious to him. God said, "I withheld you from sinning ... I did not let you touch her." In this first dream example we note that a king's actions were being controlled beyond his knowing. And much more than we know, our actions are led.

How is this possible? There are angels with us who influence our affections. This is not just a poetic thought, but a constant reality. Indeed, if there were not angels present with us, we would plunge into evil (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5850). By influencing our affections and feelings they influence our actions but never violate our freedom. They "inspire good affections so far as people will receive them in freedom; and by means of these they also control the deeds or works by removing as far as possible evil intentions" (*Heaven and Hell* 391). So, in the first scriptural example of a dream there is a lesson about life.

Without the Lord we can do nothing, and the Lord is constantly influencing us through angels. And in the second example the subject of angels comes to us in a most memorable way. This is in Genesis 28. Jacob dreamed that he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder or stairway at the top of which was God. The angelic influence did not take away his freedom or his own initiative. On the contrary it created the setting for him to make choices--to make a resolve. If God would be with him in the way he was going, He would worship Him and would give one tenth of all that he had. When Jacob awoke from that dream he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." He had a new sense about life in this world.

"This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (verses 16,17). The dream gives a different sense of what life really is. We may be making choices and making resolves about short-term goals in our daily lives, but the dream is a reminder of a greater reality. We will mention this again in connection with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

With Jacob's son Joseph, dreams become especially prominent, and we notice that these dreams predict the future; not only Joseph's own dreams of the sheaves of wheat and the sun, moon and stars, but also the dreams of others which he interpreted, the dreams of the butler and the baker in prison, and the great dream of Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt.

Several times the Writings mention that the meaning of a dream is a foretelling of the future (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3698, 5091, 5104,

5110, 5195, 5252). Let us be clear that we are not intended to know the future. In fact we should not even want to know the future, for knowing it would take away our very humanity. This is the well known teaching of Divine Providence 179, where it is said that it is quite common to have a longing to know the future, but this can be taken away from us and in its place can be given "a trust that the Lord is directing our lot" (*Divine Providence* 179).

Yes, in the case of Joseph and for those whose dreams he interpreted, a general idea was granted of what would happen. This is not so for us. The message for us, one might say, is that there is a future. It is something known by the Lord. A dream signifies His Divine foresight and providence. Well, isn't it obvious that there is a future? In a way, yes. It is an obvious fact that we are going to die. But this can be so unreal to us. In fact it can require effort to get it into our heads. The Writings invite and urge us to think about it. Now they do not ask us to think about the fact that we are going to die, but that we are going to live. "Let him who wishes to be eternally happy know and believe that he will live after death. Let him think of this and keep it in mind, for it is the truth" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8939).

Sometimes we are so influenced by worldly spirits that our thoughts are fixed hypnotically on this world, and we are told that in order to be delivered we need to think about eternal life (see *Arcana Coeslestia* 6201). The dream that Pharaoh had and which Joseph interpreted was about seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. And hearing that dream made him choose to turn the power of his kingdom over to a stranger. He removed the ring from his finger and placed it on the finger of a young man he had only just met and said, in effect, "Since you know this, you shall be ruler in my kingdom." It is almost beyond believing that a king in full power would turn over that power to another man. As it is said in the Writings, "Pharaoh deprived himself of his own authority, and put all Egypt under Joseph" (AC 5316). Each one of us has a sense that we are doing something.

We have in our waking conscious life a sense of our own freedom and strength, our authority and our own prudence. We are king in our own realm. But God is doing something too. What Pharaoh saw (and what he had not seen before) was that what God

was doing had a vital application to what he was doing and what he ought to do. He ought to choose out a man. The Writings say to think above the idea of choosing some individual, but to think about "realities" (*Arcana Coelestia* 5287).

When we speak of the operation of the Divine Providence, we mean what God is doing. That operation or working begins at birth and continues thereafter. It goes on first in the simple, unknowing years of infancy and childhood. And even as it continues in our more mature years, we are no more aware of this Divine Providence than one is aware of a forgotten dream. That private kingdom of our own life's history is only partly recalled. Some more than others enjoy flashes of tender childhood memories. And those childhood states are realities. The Lord is speaking of our kingdom when He says, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how" (Mark 4:26).

When we consciously acknowledge the Lord, trust Him and submit our lives to Him, we are like a king, remaining on the throne yes, but acknowledging the sovereignty of the Lord. This is not something that happens only once in our lives. We awaken repeatedly into new realizations, and like Jacob we say, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

"I have dreamed a dream." King Nebuchadnezzar knew in the privacy of his mind that he had a dream and that the dream was of great importance. He knew many other things he might not be sure of. In fact, things he had trusted he was beginning to distrust that day. Astrologers, sorcerers and wise men had enjoyed his trust, patronage and protection. But now he was awaking to a realization of their inadequacy. If in the past they had been able to say or show things of some value, in the light of that day it was not enough.

Was he right or wrong? Was he a most unreasonable man as his astrologers were protesting? Was he only a superstitious fool? On the contrary, he was less a fool that day than perhaps on many other days. For that day he was not like the man whom Jesus postulated as saying, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, 'You fool,

this night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'" (Luke 12:19,20). A fool is one who relies upon the fallacies of the sense, or who thinks this world is everything. One who is wise from himself alone, that one is a fool. Nebuchadnezzar listened with wonder as Daniel told him the meaning of his dream, and he knew that it was his dream and that it had to do with his past life and his destiny. Daniel told him that the dream was given "that you may know the thoughts of your heart" (Daniel 2:30). Some of our thoughts we do not know, because they do not arise in explicit consciousness.

There are people who have much more belief in life after death than they know. The simple "believe they will live after death, in which simple faith, unknown to them, there is hidden the belief that they will live there as men, will see angels, will speak with them, and will enjoy happiness" (*Arcana Coelestia* 6053).

How often the Lord told stories, and if we were wise we would see that He is telling our story, and we would see meaning in the way He recounts it. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar was a vivid sequence. He had seen an image. At the beginning he saw first its head made of gold, and descending from the head the substances changed from gold to silver to bronze to iron, and finally to iron mixed with clay. What is going on in our lives right now? What is the story? What is the sequence? If asked at a given moment, we might reply that we have time only to say that we are facing certain present obligations and dealing with present needs. But our life is a story that could be told from a distance, or told from the distant perspective of a dream. It could be told in angel conversations taking form in correspondential images in the world of the spirit.

In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar we may see in the first golden state our early infancy, but it passes away. The strength, or iron, is then mixed with clay, and in later years we sense an impending end. Daniel said that the iron was strength and the clay was brittle, but then came a stone cut out without hands which grew into a mountain and lasted forever. The gold was beautiful, and the iron was strong, but it was followed by what is brittle. How brittle and vulnerable we sometimes feel. Our very senses tell us that we are growing older and more fragile. And it is not just our bodies. We also come into a

sense of our inner inadequacy and the limitations of our self-intelligence. Our memories are not as acute, and even the strength we have built up in our lives is mingled with what is perishable. And all this can enable us to look with absolute wonder to Him who is the rock in whom we trust and in whom we may live forever and ever.

Remember the gift the Lord gives of trust that He is directing our lot (see *Divine Providence* 179). This comes to us like the interpretation of a dream. Our life is in His hands. Skeptical voices may tell us something else, but they are like unreliable astrologers. The voices may come from our own thoughts, arrogance, or self-intelligence. The fallacies of the senses put a wrong construction and a false interpretation on our lives. And even if they make some sense of the present, when it comes to the future they have no answer but are like mute magicians, soothsayers, standing there with nothing to say. But the reality of the Lord's presence and Providence is like a rock growing to a mountain from which comes all our help. And His voice tells us, "Without Me You can do nothing." "He that follows Me shall not walk in darkness." "He that comes to me shall never hunger." "Great is your reward in heaven." "I go to prepare a place for you." "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." Particulars of our future we do not know. Our passing states day by day are directed to ends of which we are unaware (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2796). Unaware we may be, but every night that we sleep we are associated with angels sent to us by the Lord, whose Divine knowledge takes form in fragments of dreams which we cannot interpret. And He is saying that He is with us and will not leave us.

Our destiny is in the hands of Him who has all power and strength, "For wisdom and might are His ... He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:20,22).

Amen.

Lessons: *Daniel 2 and Arcana Coelestia* 1975, 1980