

THE BEST OR THE WORST

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Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your tranquillity. All this came on the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking in the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke and said, Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty.

Daniel 4:27-30 WEB

In the days of Daniel the known world's highest position of status and power was probably being king of the mighty Babylonian Empire, covering a good share of the Middle East. Atop that pyramid of power sat king Nebuchadnezzar with all his pomp and ceremony, coupled with a good dose of arrogance and delusion. As he walked the palace grounds gloating in his achievements, he uttered these famous words of supreme arrogance: "Is this not great Babylon, which I have built...by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty."

The result of this monstrous arrogance was God's revelation to the captive prophet Daniel that the king would be driven from human society to live with the animals until he learned "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses." It seems a curse that many high leaders consider their successes to be attributable to their personal greatness, but that's not what God says.

Kings, potentates, and other political rulers are often rated by historians into categories ranging from best to worst. Today we might say with considerable confidence that the American presidency is the modern counterpart of the ancient Babylonian throne. Back then God promised an extension of the throne to Nebuchadnezzar if he would turn toward righteousness by "showing mercy to the poor." The prophet Isaiah put his advice to rulers this way: "Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17).

If president-elect Trump would heed these simple bits of instruction concerning the taking of action to carry out justice, righteousness, mercy, and truth, he would receive much credit for the overwhelming era of justice and peace that would follow. He would then join the ranks of the few really great presidents, and would gain what he wishes---be remembered favorably by history.

On the other hand, should he pursue the opportunities for arrogance, status, power, and corruption that are easily available to people of political power, he could fall into a very low position in the pantheon of presidents, possibly even the bottom.

It remains to be seen which path he will choose, although even a few small steps toward justice would be welcome. His recent cabinet appointees fall heavily on the side of militarism, freer markets, a scaling-back of Medicare, reductions in the regulations governing big banks, and a studied refusal to accept the now almost universal truth of global warming. These ideas when translated into legislation could be disastrous to average Americans and certainly will not bestow the favors of history on their proponents.

It's difficult for so-called "good" people to believe that there are some people of power who would sacrifice the welfare of a nation for their own personal gratification and pet theories, but that seems to be increasingly true. Attempting to rein-in Social Security and scuttle Medicare are logical outcomes of the thinking that profits are more important than people, that free markets will always work to the benefit of the people, and will self-correct if they do not.

The opportunity to be either the best or the worst of presidents is now open to Donald Trump. We need to pray for him that he might come to see the error of some of his policies and choices, and that he might have grace and strength to correct them. We are the beneficiaries of whatever he does, so we also pray for ourselves and the peace of the nation as we consider this situation.

