



THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL

Lesson Number 11



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

THE SECOND TEST BY THE KING'S DECREE

Dan 3:1-23 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ³ Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, ⁵ That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: ⁶ And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ⁷ Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ⁸ Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. ¹⁰ Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: ¹¹ And whoso falleth not down and worshipping, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

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13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. 19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ^{KJV} (Daniel 3:1-23)

INTRODUCTION

Through the power of God, Daniel has unveiled a magnificent and detailed prophecy of the future of global powers. He has confirmed that God does not stand aloof from the affairs of men, nor is He inactive in the rise and fall of empires. Care must be taken not to view this circumstance as though the Living God is a mere observer of the activities of men. Some see the Lord as having made man with a free will that does not allow for Divine government without human approval. God did, indeed, create man in His own image. It is that Divine imagery that provided humanity with a will. However, when we attach the word “free” to that will, the matter tends to become more complicated.

SCRIPTURAL USE OF “FREEWILL”

The word “freewill” ^{KJV} occurs seventeen times in Scripture (Lev 22:18,21,23; 23:38; Num 15:3; 29:39; Deut 12:6,17; 16:10; 23:23; 2 Chron 31:14; Ezra 1:4; 3:5; 7:13,16; 8:28; Psa 119:108). The NKJV adds one more reference (Amos 4:5). The KJV translates that text “free offerings.” The NASB and NIV adds six more references (Ex 35:29; 36:3; Lev 7:16; 2 Chron 35:8; Ezra 1:6; Ezek 46:12). The KJV uses the words “voluntary offerings,” “willing offerings,” and “willingly.”

None of these texts are a comment on man’s will. Rather, they all have to do with the willingness of men to do what

they did. Thus, some offerings were called “freewill offerings” (Lev 22:16; 23:38; Num 29:39; Deut 12:6,17; 2 Chron 31:14; Psa 119:108). However, all offerings were not “freewill offerings.” In this case, “freewill” described what was given over and above the requirements.

The tithes, for example, that were given to the Levitical priesthood, were not on a freewill basis. The Israelites were obligated to give this (Num 18:24,26,28). Failure to do this constituted robbery, and God saw withholding of tithes as personally robbing Him. As it is written, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are

OUTLINE

- ▶ THE KING SETS UP AN IMAGE (3:1)
- ▶ GATHERED TO THE DEDICATION (3:2)
- ▶ THE PEOPLE GATHER TO THE STATUE (3:3)
- ▶ THE ORDER IS ISSUED (3:4-6)
- ▶ COMPLIANCE WITH THE DECREE (3:7)
- ▶ THE ACCUSATION AGAINST THE THREE (3:8-12)
- ▶ THE BLASPHEMOUS FURY OF THE KING (3:13-15)
- ▶ THE RESPONSE OF FAITH (3:16-18)
- ▶ THE FURY OF THE KING INCREASES (3:19)
- ▶ THROWN INTO THE FURNACE (3:20-23)

cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Mal 3:8-9).

THE POINT OF THIS

There is a point to this observation, and it is germane to our text. Without being distracted by other considerations, God has not relinquished the government of the world to men – even though it may appear that He has. If they do not “will” to obey Him, He can make them do so. However, that will not accrue to any blessing for them. There is coming a day when, willing or not, “every knee” shall bow to Christ, and “every tongue confess to God” (Rom 14:11). Several centuries before Christ, the Lord said through Isaiah, “*I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*” (Isa 45:23). Those who imagine they will not precisely conform to that declaration are only deceiving themselves.

There are a number of examples in Scripture that announce how God actually imposed His will upon obstinate hearts. In these cases, the will of man opposed the will of God, and the Stone of Divinity forced them to live, or die, contrary to their own will. Whatever you may think about the human will, it cannot survive an encounter with the Sovereign God. No one can stand before the Lord – no one! They

will bow the knee and confess with their mouth that He, and He alone, is Lord.

- ▶ Adam and Eve driven out of Eden (Gen 3:24).
- ▶ Cain forced to be a fugitive and a vagabond (Gen 4:12).
- ▶ The mass destruction of the world’s population, with the exception of eight souls (Gen 7:21-23).
- ▶ The disruption of the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:8).
- ▶ Haggar and Ishmael cast out of Abraham’s house (Gen 21:10-12).
- ▶ Esau was rejected, even though he sought for repentance and his former inheritance with tears (Heb 12:17).
- ▶ The will of Joseph’s brothers was overturned, and the advantage given to Joseph (Gen 50:20).
- ▶ Israel comes out of Egypt in spite of Pharaoh’s will (Ex 14:8).

There are an abundance of additional examples, but this will suffice to confirm **there is a level of Divine involvement where the will of man is utterly impotent, and upon which the working of the Lord does not depend.**

Think how Christ’s birth and increase in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man, frustrated the will of the devil, demons, principalities, powers, Herod, and countless others. Make no mistake about this, for the will of God to triumph, opposing wills and purposes must be put down. **This is the very point that was made known to**

Nebuchadnezzar! God set up His kingdom in the midst of colossal and seemingly invincible kingdoms. He did not do it when there were no official kingdoms, but when they had risen to their zenith!

The kingdom God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar did not have its genesis in man. In fact, it originated independently of man – like a stone coming out of a mountain “*without hands*” (2:34-35). The success of that kingdom does not rely upon men, for it is essentially “*the kingdom of God,*” and “*of heaven.*” It will triumph over all other kingdoms, even though the “*wills*” of those kingdoms are set against it.

Eventually, “*The kingdoms of this world*” will “*become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever*” (Rev 11:15). If “*the kings of the earth*” are unwilling to yield their kingdoms to King Jesus, it will make no difference – Jesus will take them anyway, for He is, in very sense, “*the Prince of the kings of the earth*” (Rev 1:5). The only bearing personal attitudes have in this matter is whether or not individuals will be profited by Christ’s determined rule. However, the attitudes of men have no influence whatsoever upon the kingdom itself, or its King.

Daniel has revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that the four great empires in the history of the world will be crushed under the advancing Kingdom of God. They will not merely be absorbed into this superior Kingdom, but will be destroyed by it. They will not want to yield their power to Christ, but will do so anyway. The fact that all of this is from God is emphasized by the fact that each of these worldly kingdoms is succeeded by one inferior to itself.

THE KINGDOM GOD REVEALED TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR DID NOT HAVE ITS GENESIS IN MAN. IN FACT, IT ORIGINATED INDEPENDENTLY OF MAN – LIKE A STONE COMING OUT OF A MOUNTAIN “WITHOUT HANDS”

WE NEED TO HEAR IT!

The saints of God need to hear of this advancing and impregnable kingdom frequently. They need to be told that God has called us into an invincible Kingdom.

- ▣ How refreshing to hear our labor is not vain in the Lord. *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58).
- ▣ The saints will judge the world and angels. *“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things*

Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

- ▣ Tell the saints that God is able to keep them from falling. *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).
- ▣ Recall to their minds that no adversarial power can remove them from the hand of Jesus – and in His hand, we are also in the hand of the Father. *“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand”* (John 10:28-29).

him, He also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

- ▣ Remind the body of Christ that He that is in them is greater than He that is in the world. *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4).
- ▣ Tell them in due season they will reap if they faint not. *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Gal 6:9).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

These are not high sounding words. Nor, indeed, are they unrelated to our text. **They spell out for us HOW God’s kingdom will subjugate and grind to powder all completing kingdoms.** These promises directly relate to the ultimate and public triumph of God’s Kingdom – the Kingdom He revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. For him, that Kingdom was perceived only as destructive of all inimical powers. In Christ, the blessings of that very Kingdom are declared and expounded.

When a person is extricated from the course of this world, caused to stand, and at last overcomes the devil, a living testimony of the stone of Daniel is seen. The principle of life that characterizes the whole of the Kingdom, also penetrates into all of its parts. **There is a sense in which each person in Christ is a sort of miniature cosmos.** The triumph of Christ belongs to His Kingdom as well. The triumph of His Kingdom also belongs to each individual. When you can relate the vision expounded by Daniel to your own situation, it will edify you.

AND NOW . . .

Now we will receive a stirring reminder that the flesh cannot be reformed. Nor, indeed, can it keep hold of the things of God. The very next thing that is said of Nebuchadnezzar seems to contradict everything he has declared following the interpretation of his dream. It only confirms to our hearts that flesh cannot learn the things of God. They are too high for it, too lofty for it to grasp. It readily and easily forgets them all, choosing self over the Living God.

THE SAINTS OF GOD NEED TO HEAR OF THIS ADVANCING AND IMPREGNABLE KINGDOM FREQUENTLY. THEY NEED TO BE TOLD THAT GOD HAS CALLED US INTO AN INVINCIBLE KINGDOM.

that pertain to this life?” (1 Cor 6:1-2).

- ▣ Assure them that God will bruise Satan under our feet shortly. *“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”* (Rom 16:20).
- ▣ Let the saints be reminded they are being kept by the power of God to a salvation that is ready to be revealed. *“Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Pet 1:5).
- ▣ Herald the glad tidings *“that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in*

- ▣ Let us be careful to tell the people of God the kingdom is going to be given to them. *“But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever . . . Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him”* (Dan 7:18,22,27).

- ▣ Declare that the meek will inherit the earth. *“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matt 5:5).
- ▣ Tell those in Christ that they will reign with Christ. *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny*

THE KING SETS UP AN IMAGE

“^{3:1} Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.” We do not know precisely when this occurred, except that it was after Nebuchadnezzar was told his dream and its interpretation. At the time of this incident, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were “*over the affairs of the province of Babylon*” (verses 12-13). Therefore, the actions of the king follow a special revelation to him of the demise of all earthly kingdoms. I suggest that considerable time may have passed, so that the effect of the king’s dream had worn off. Suffice it to say, with the passing of time, the dream that once troubled the king, and moved him to ascribe preeminence to the God of heaven, no longer dominated his mind.

HE MADE AN IMAGE

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits . . . ” We do not know if this was the image of a man or not. The proportions of the image do not reflect that of a man – ten times taller than wide. Some have suggested it may have been an image of Bel, the principal deity of Babylon.

VALUE AND SIZE

“ . . . an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits.” The value and size of this statue are staggering. It confirms the magnificent wealth that was at Nebuchadnezzar’s disposal.

Value

This immense image was made “*of gold.*” Some have conjectured the entire image could not been made of gold, but must have been overlaid with gold. The Spirit does not say that, although He frequently mentions things that were overlaid with gold (Ex 25:11,13, 24,28,29,37; 30:3,5; 26:32; 1 Kgs 6:22,30). I understand the text to mean the image

fashioned from gold, and not merely overlaid with gold.

Although the extent of Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge of the Law was no doubt very limited, the fashioning of this image violated the Law – particularly because people will be required to bow to before it. “*Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold*” (Ex 20:23). You remember this was one of the first command’s Israel violated – at the very foot of Mount Sinai. They had Aaron make them a golden calf, then ascribed to it Divine qualities, even offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to it (Ex 32:4-6). When Moses saw it, he “*returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold*” (Ex 32:31). Isaiah spoke of those who made “*idols of gold*”

We are not told how this image was made, but it obviously required considerable expertise. Being ten times taller than it was wide, unusual wisdom was needed to make it stable. Whether it was built in sections, or of one solid piece, considerable engineering proficiency was essential to erect this massive image.

History records some of Nebuchadnezzar’s architectural wonders. One of them was the temple of Jupiter Belus. The quote from Herodotus that is included on this page will serve to show how Nebuchadnezzar thought of his gods – even after He knew of the true God. It also highlights the colossal nature of some of his works.

THE PLAIN OF DURA

“ . . . he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.” The

“The temple of Jupiter Belus, whose huge gates of brass may still be seen, is a square building, each side of which is two furlongs (1,213 feet, 6 inches). In the midst rises a tower, of the solid depth and height of one furlong; (606 feet, 9 inches – over 60 stories) upon which, resting as upon a base, seven other lesser towers are built in regular succession. The ascent is on the outside; which, winding from the ground, is continued to the highest tower; and in the middle of the whole structure there is a convenient resting place. In the last tower is a large chapel, in which is placed a couch, magnificently adorned, and near it a table of solid gold; but there is no statue in the place. In this temple there is also a small chapel, lower in the building, which contains a figure of Jupiter, in a sitting posture, with a large table before him; these, with the base of the table, and the seat of the throne, are all of the purest gold, and are estimated by the Chaldeans to be worth eight hundred talents. On the outside of this chapel there are two altars; one is gold, the other is of immense size, and appropriated to the sacrifice of full grown animals; those only which have not yet left their dams may be offered on the golden altar. On the larger altar, at the anniversary festival in honor of their god, the Chaldeans regularly consume incense to the amount of a thousand talents. There was formerly in this temple a statue of solid gold twelve cubits high; this, however, I mention from the information of the Chaldeans, and not from my own knowledge.” — Herodotus, Clio, 183.

(Isa 2:20). The Revelation of John also mentions some who did not repent , or cease to “*worship demons, and idols of gold*”^{NKJV} (Rev 9:20).

Gold is valuable as a commodity, but worthless when shaped into an idol.

Size

The size of this image is impressive in any culture, and at any time. It was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. A cubit is eighteen inches, which would make the statue ninety feet high and nine feet wide. That would be the height of a nine story building.

location of this plain is not known. It appears the king chose this location so that the statue could be seen by all. The plain probably would accommodate the significant number of people who were required to bow before the image.

I cannot help but recall another plain, generally considered to be the very one on which Babylon was built – Shinar. There men attempted to build a tower that reached into heaven. The Lord brought an end to that project (Gen 11). How much, if any, of that tower remained, we do not know. However, it is almost as though the spirit of idolatry had lingered in that area.

FLESH CANNOT LEARN THE THINGS OF GOD

How is it that Nebuchadnezzar could build this great image, which flagrantly contradicted the revelation given to him by God? One would judge from the king's response to Daniel's revelation that he would never do what is recorded in this chapter. Why, after extolling the God of heaven, would he do such a thing?

The answer is found in the nature of the flesh, or the human nature. **Flesh cannot learn the things of God: it has**

The nature of the flesh is confirmed in the nation of Israel. Even though they were subjected to the most remarkable sensual phenomenon ever wrought in this world, it had no lasting impact upon them. Because this is such an important point, allow me to linger for a moment on it. Here is a sampling of the things they witnessed.

- ▣ Excluded from the dreadful plagues that came upon Egypt (Ex 8:22; 9:26; 10:23).
- ▣ Miraculously delivered from Egyptian

their enemies with miraculous overthrows, and causing them to triumph over forces superior to themselves. Yet, in all of this, no change was wrought in the people. They remained fundamentally obstinate, rebelling against the Lord with staggering consistency.

Even though this nation was chosen by God, and nurtured and cultured with tender care, this is what He said of them. *"All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"* (Rom 10:21).

In Israel, to put it one way, we have the best of all flesh. The call of God was upon the people. They were delivered by Him, directed by Him, and favored by Him. Every possible advantage was given to them. They were preferred above all other peoples. As it is written, *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth"* (Deu 7:6). Yet, after all of that preferred treatment, they were noted for murmuring (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; 1 Cor 10:10), obstinacy (Ex 32:9), idolatry (Psa 106:36), immortality (2 Chron 21:11; 1 Cor 10:8), and even killing their own prophets (Matt 23:31; 1 Thess 2:15).

FLESH CANNOT LEARN THE THINGS OF GOD: IT HAS NO CAPACITY TO DO SO. IT CANNOT BE "TRAINED," SO TO SPEAK, TO ACT PROPERLY, NOR CAN IT RETAIN A PROFITABLE REMEMBRANCE OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DECLARED.

no capacity to do so. It cannot be "trained," so to speak, to act properly, nor can it retain a profitable remembrance of what the Lord has declared. That is precisely why it is written, *"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Rom 8:8). The flesh serves *"the law of sin,"* consistently, and without interruption (Rom 7:25). It straightway forgets the things of God to which it has been exposed, having neither the desire nor ability to retain them. The *"carnal mind,"* or mind-set of the flesh, is *"enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be"* (Rom 8:7).

This is the why men must be *"born again"* – because there is no hope for the fallen nature, which is another way of saying *"flesh."* Men must take the words of our Lord seriously, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God . . . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"* (John 3:3,5,7).

Seen In Israel

bondage (Ex 14:8).

- ▣ Passed through the Red Sea on dry land (Ex 14:29).
- ▣ Witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea (Ex 14:28; 15:19).
- ▣ Given miraculous bread from heaven throughout their wilderness wandering of forty years (Ex 16:35).
- ▣ Drank water that gushed from a wilderness rock (Num 20:11; 1 Cor 10:4).
- ▣ They were given the Law of God by the disposition of angels (Acts 7:53).
- ▣ They were given such advantages that God challenged them, *"What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it?"* (Isa 5:4).

The Lord gave them judges (Acts 13:20), and prophets (Jer 7:25) – each one solemnly reminding the people of their obligation to Himself. He *"reproved kings for their sakes"* (Psa 105:14), defeating

FLESH HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN

Unless there is some understanding of the nature of the flesh, these things tend to confuse our minds. In every way, it is unreasonable for such responses to erupt from people who had received so much. However, the flesh has a mind of its own – a particular way of thinking. It is called *"the carnal mind"* (Rom 8:7). This world is the domain to which it is limited, and self is the focus of its thoughts. This mind-set cannot be changed, improved, or made acceptable to God. It can neither receive nor handle the things of God.

This is why Nebuchadnezzar forgot the tremendous impact that registered upon his spirit when he first heard the meaning of his dream. He could not forget that he had a troubling dream. However, he easily forgot what the dream meant, and was incapable of drawing any conclusions from it with a lasting impact.

Does Not Excuse Nebuchadnezzar

All of this does not excuse the action of the king, but only accounts for his forgetfulness. Following the words of

Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar gave honor to him and exalted him. However, you will note that he claimed no allegiance to God,

or chose to follow Him. He admitted He was the God gods and Lord of kings, but did not chose to serve Him.

GATHERED TO THE DEDICATION

“² Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which

is “a ruler of provinces.” It is understood that they had extended civil jurisdiction; authority over several smaller provinces. They were responsible for maintaining order and regulating the affairs of their province. They did not control military powers, as that was a separate branch of

guarding the country. Some consider these to be chief diviners or astrologers, using their occultic arts to rule the people.

TREASURERS. These superintended the public treasury, collecting and dispersing funds.

COUNSELORS. These were the arbiters, or counselors of the government. They were skilled in the law of the land.

SHERIFFS. These are also specialists in the law; guardians of the law, or lawyers.

RULERS OF THE PROVINCES. These were subordinate rulers, carrying out the will of the governors.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The breakdown of authority included civil, military, and economic branches. Within those branches were those who maintained order, interpreting and enforcing the law. All of these leaders were required to come to the dedication of Nebuchadnezzar’s great image.

This was a gala affair that was considered quite serious by the king. Acceptable conduct was mandatory, and no deviation was allowed. Thus, the stage is being set for another test. This time, the greater weight will fall upon Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo.

THIS WAS A GALA AFFAIR THAT WAS CONSIDERED QUITE SERIOUS BY THE KING. ACCEPTABLE CONDUCT WAS MANDATORY, AND NO DEVIATION WAS ALLOWED. THUS, THE STAGE IS BEING SET FOR ANOTHER TEST.

Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.”

The project now completed, the king establishes a time of dedication. All of the officials of his government were to gather together at this dedication. A most remarkable breakdown of his administration is provided in this text. There is not a clear knowledge of the specifics of this hierarchy of power. A brief overview will suffice to show the scope of delegated authority within Babylon.

PRINCES. Most other versions read “*satrap*s.” The meaning of the word

government ^{MCLINTOK}

GOVERNORS. Other versions use the word “*administrators*,” ^{NKJV} “*prefects*,” ^{NASB} “*deputies*,” ^{ASV} and “*magistrates*.” ^{DOUAY} These were high ranking officials, under “*princes*,” yet having significant power and authority. They were the chief representatives of the king in the various provinces.

CAPTAINS. These were commanders, probably of military chiefs in the provinces.

JUDGES. The presidents of the civil government, and those charged with

THE PEOPLE GATHER TO THE STATUE

“³ Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the

image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

In obedience to the summons of the king, all of the officials of the empire “*gathered together*” for the dedication of the image. They would no doubt be expected to promote this image among

those who were under their authority. Those who handled the law of the land were not to interpret it in view of this new image. Not only will the image itself be dedicated, we will find those in attendance were expected to dedicate themselves as well to this image and what it stood for.

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

In our text, a diversity of people were gathered together in one place for a single purpose – a purpose that was not defined by those who gathered. The cause of someone else brought them together – the will of someone other than themselves.

If a gathering of this sort can

occur in the flesh, how much more can it occur in the Spirit. When the Old Covenant was dedicated, the people were gathered together (Ex 19:8). When the New Covenant was dedicated, the people were also brought together (Acts 2:1). When the Lord Jesus returns, the children of God will also be gathered together (Matt 13:30; 24:31).

In each of these cases, the people were gathered together for a purpose higher than themselves. Unlike the case of Nebuchadnezzar, in Christ such gatherings are sanctified. Therefore, they bring honor to God and edification to His people. Let every soul be more responsive to the Living God than the Babylonish leaders were to Nebuchadnezzar!

THE ORDER IS ISSUED

*“**Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,** ⁵ **That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up:** ⁶ **And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”***

The assembled host is now given a commandment. In this matter, they will be given but one choice, and the harshest penalty will be exacted upon them if they fail to obey. It is not by coincidence that the requirement is precisely the one Satan set before the Son of God when He was tempted in the wilderness. Although the devil knew he could not destroy the Son of God, he offered a more subtle incentive: *“Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me”* (Mat 4:8-9).

The Impact of the Gospel

Having been raised in a society impacted by the truth of the Gospel of Christ, accounts like this are difficult to comprehend. Absolute obedience was required, and a penalty of merciless punishment was inflicted if it was not given. In such an environment one’s profession and allegiance was put to the acid test. Human rights, mercy, and the likes were not considered. For the most part, those qualities are the result of exposure to the Gospel. They are not natural human qualities, even though

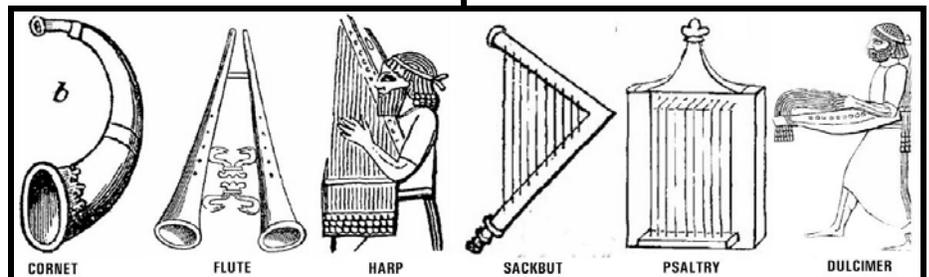
some have come to consider them to be so.

Prior to Christ, barbarism and ruthlessness were on a much larger scale. In the time of the flood, the inconsideration man to man had grown to epidemic proportions. How graphically this condition is portrayed in Moses’ description of that time. *“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was*

humanity. This very condition is seen in the proliferation of violence and inconsideration in our own country. The condition itself testifies to a serious departure from the truth of God.

A UNIVERSAL COMMAND FROM THE KING

“To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages . . .” Other



filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen 6:11-13).

Now, in our text, even though the earth had been purged by the flood, and a fresh start experienced, humanity is seen as degenerating into the same condition. It is only because of the restraining hand of the Lord that conditions were not worse.

I therefore conclude that the further a society is from Christ, whether in time or spirit, the more fear and heartlessness dominate

versions read, *“Then the herald loudly proclaimed, ‘This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language,’*^{NIV} *“People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king’s command!,”*^{NLT} and *“Nations and peoples of every language.”*^{NAB}

We see from this requirement that more were involved than those within the province of Babylon itself. Conquered nations, as well as those who willingly paid tribute, were represented – *“nations and languages.”* This was a global requirement, for Babylon was a global power. Later, in the fourth chapter, Nebuchadnezzar will issue another decree to *“all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth”* (4:1).

Those who fear “one world

government” and a universal ruler, must realize that is exactly what Shadrach, Meshach, And Abednego were confronting. They were not delivered from such a tyrant, but required to keep their faith in such a global government with a single ruler. Some imagine that such a condition (one world government with one ruler) can only occur after the people of God have been removed from the earth. However, our text has the saints very much in the earth, simultaneous with a single sovereign government and king – both of which were heathen.

THE TIME APPOINTED

“That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up . . . ” Other versions read, *“horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music,”*^{NKJV} *“the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music,”*^{NASB} and *“the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble.”*^{NRSV}

Cornet. This was a trumpet, or horn – often that of an animal.

Flute. A wind instrument, often consisting of multiple pipes with holes.

Harp. A stringed instrument on which both notes and chords could be sounded by plucking the strings.

Sackbut. A triangular instrument with four or more strings, and described as having a shrill tone.

Psaltery. This was similar to a twelve-stringed guitar, with six different tones.

Dulcimer. Some feel this is a stringed instrument, and considered to be a precursor of the harpsichord, often held in a horizontal position. Some versions also refer to this as a wind instrument – the *“bagpipe”* (NASB, RSV), and even a *“drum”* (NRSV).

The commandment required the simultaneous falling down and worshiping of everyone standing before the image. There, in the sprawling plain of Dura, there could not be a single dissenting soul. In order to assure perfect accord, an orchestra of all manner of musical instruments would strike a chord, or begin some anthem. As soon as the sound

was heard, the people were to prostrate themselves and worship *“the golden image.”*

Also Used in Praise to God

Although these instruments were used in an unlawful way in our text, most of them were also to be employed in the praise of God. *Cornet* (1 Chron 15:28; Psa 98:6), *harp* (Psa 33:2; 150:3), and *psaltery* (Psa 57:8; 144:9). The flute is mentioned in the NASB version, which is called a *“Nehiloth”* in the KJV. The fifth Psalm was written *“for the flute accompaniment”* (Psa 5:1). The *“sackbut”* is referred to in other translations as the *“lyre.”*^{NKJV, NASB} David wrote the sixth Psalm to be played upon *“an eight stringed lyre”*^{NKJV} (Psa 6:1).

Under the leadership of David, certain musical instruments were dedicated to the service of God. They were called *“the musical instruments of God”* (1 Chron 16:42), or *“instruments for the songs of God.”*^{NASB}

A Satanic Tactic

The point to be seen here is that Satan makes every effort to move men to use every means to serve what is false. Here, the sound of instrumental music, a thing most sacred to the Jewish mind, was used to initiate the worship of a golden image. The music itself was not the point, but what it was designed to provoke in men.

We should not be surprised that the devil still uses this same tactic. **There are all manner of wicked ways and thoughts that are summoned into prominence by the sound of music.** Just as surely as Nebuchadnezzar’s orchestra was designed to initiate profane homage and worship, so there are still certain manners of music that are designed to vault the flesh into prominence, moving people to give honor to Satan’s own devices.

THE PENALTY FOR DISOBEDIENCE DECLARED

“And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

The king left no question about the seriousness of the occasion. The strictest conformity was required, with no provision made for any variance of

opinion. Anyone and everyone who failed to conform to this requirement would be thrown into a gigantic oven – and there would be no hope of survival. Thus the king will force his subjects to do his will

1. **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”**
2. **“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”**
3. **“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”**
4. **“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”**
5. **“Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”**
6. **“Thou shalt not kill.”**
7. **“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”**
8. **“Thou shalt not steal.”**
9. **“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”**
10. **“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor’s.” (Exo 20:3-17)**

by holding a dreadful way of dying before them.

A Principle to Be Seen

There is a principle to be seen here. It was abused by the king, yet there is profit to be realized if we can see it correctly. **Mediocrity tends to reign where there are no requirements.** When men are left to themselves, with no sure direction, they tend toward half-heartedness. Nebuchadnezzar sought to address this tendency by coercion – the threat of death. It is as though he sensed men’s reluctance to do what he commanded them to do.

Prior to the fall of man, there is no record of incentives being held before him. We do not know the extent of God’s

communication with Adam and Eve before they sinned. The record of what was said to them is worthy of note.

- ▣ *"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (Gen 1:28)*
- ▣ *"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so." (Gen 1:29-30)*

situation changed. Now God appealed to men to do what was right. He offered incentives to move them to obey His commands, which under Moses were mostly prohibitive. A few samples will serve to illustrate this point.

- ▣ *"But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries." (Exo 23:22)*
- ▣ *"And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God." (Deu 28:1-2)*

Under Christ, these incentives take the form of "exceeding great and precious promises," by which we become "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

A DIFFERENCE IN NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Here we ought to note the difference between Nebuchadnezzar and the God of heaven. God also imposed penalties upon those who refused to do what He said. There was, however, a very distinct difference in the approach. Even under the Law, where men died "without mercy" (Heb 10:26), it was because they insisted on doing what was wrong. Men were not slain because they did not bow the knee to God, but because they did bow, and serve other gods. Note the nature of the ten commandments, and how sharply it conflicts with Nebuchadnezzar's order.

There is only one positive commandment: "Honor thy father and mother." The remainder are prohibitive, declaring what men were NOT to do: "no other gods," "not make unto thee," "not take the name," "not do any work," "not kill," "not commit adultery," "not steal," "not bear false witness," "not covet." **The thrust of the Law was to prohibit sin – to restrain men from doing what was wrong.**

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the penalty was for failing to do the very thing God had forbidden men to do. In his command, the king was binding his own will upon men, seeking to turn them to another god. That is why this test is of such critical importance – particularly to the Jews who have been brought into the land, and are in places of prominence.

Now we will see if the terror of the king will outweigh the fear of the Lord. We will see if faith is equal to such a test. Will these young men be able to stand?

YOU WILL NOTE THAT NO APPEAL WAS MADE TO DO WHAT WAS RIGHT. NO BLESSING WAS PROMISED FOR DOING WHAT WAS PROPER. A JUDGMENT WAS HELD FORTH FOR DOING WHAT WAS WRONG.

- ▣ *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen 2:16-17)*

You will note that no appeal was made to do what was right. No blessing was promised for doing what was proper. A judgment was held forth for doing what was wrong.

Following the fall, however, the

- ▣ *"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it." (Deu 30:16)*

Sin has so corrupted human nature, that incentives must be held before men to move them to do what is right, or compel them to do what is wrong.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE DECREE

"⁷ Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut,

psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshiped

the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

The scene must have been quite impressive. As the orchestra began to play, this mass of people *“fell down and worshiped the golden image that king Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”* They are described as *“all the peoples, nations and men of every language.”*^{NIV} Instantly they obeyed the word of the king. They knew a refusal to bow before this image would be taken as an act of antagonism against the king. Those who did not bow would instantly be regarded as enemies, and would be so treated.

Thus, whatever religious persuasions that were held by these people allowed them to instantly acquiesce to the commandment of the king. Perhaps they thought they could secretly worship their own god, while they bowed and worshiped this golden image. After all, Babylon did allow for many gods. The king had not commanded that all nations abandon their own gods – only that they bow before his golden image. It is clear from the response of this multitude that they felt they could do this. For them, it was better to bow than to burn.

INFERIOR RELIGION

The fact that this mass of people instantly bowed and worshiped the golden image confirms the inferiority of their religion. Any religion, regardless of its identity, that allows a person to bow and worship anyone or anything other than the God of heaven is unworthy of embrace. **To put it another way, a religion that cannot keep a person in the midst of testing should be abandoned with zeal.** Such a religion is not true, and has nothing to do with the God of heaven. A faith that does not keep is spurious and pretentious.

I fear this whole circumstance is closer to some of our contemporary conditions than some would care to believe. **Nebuchadnezzar was not the last person who set up a test of allegiance that required doing something God forbids.** In our own time, we have a word from the Lord: *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thess 5:17), and *“praying always with all prayer and supplication”* (Eph 6:17). Our own government has sought to countermand

times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim 4:1).

This text will profit us if we can make a correlation between it and the times in which we are living. It is written for our admonition, and there are benefits to be gained from it.

WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING?

God is at work in this text.

WHEREVER FAITH IS COMPROMISED, A LIE HAS BEEN WELCOMED AND EMBRACED. DECEPTION HAS EFFECTIVELY INVADED THE MIND, AND THE TRUTH, IF IT EVER WAS BELIEVED, IS THRUST INTO THE BACKGROUND.

that word by saying, “Do not pray in the schools,” “Do not pray in public places,” etc. Some have bowed to the decree, like the mass of people bowed to Nebuchadnezzar’s image.

A New Covenant Application

Wherever faith is compromised, a lie has been welcomed and embraced. Deception has effectively invaded the mind, and the truth, if it ever was believed, is thrust into the background. That is why a departure from the faith is viewed with such sobriety. Note how the Spirit accounts for people leaving good and godly persuasions. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter*

Something more is happening than merely carrying out the edict of king Nebuchadnezzar. Of itself, his word is not important enough to justify inclusion in the Scripture. What is really happening is this. **God is setting the stage for the demonstration of His great power and absolute supremacy. He will overturn the word of the king, and show that His support of those who trust in Him is vastly superior to a Babylonian monarch. He will confirm that those who trust in Him will never be ashamed. He will never leave or forsake those who rely on Him.** This event has been tailored to strengthen saints in succeeding ages.

THE ACCUSATION AGAINST THE THREE

“⁸ Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. ¹⁰ Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds

of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: ¹¹ And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have

not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

Here is the purpose for this whole account. Nebuchadnezzar has fastened the attention of the people upon the image. God will now call his attention to three young men. They are of more value

than his ninety foot golden image. What is more, this pompous occasion will cause them to stand out from all others. When all of the men of distinction were called in, these three men did not stand out. As they all stood before the golden image, they did not appear prominent or distinctive. However, when the music sounded, and the people were to bow before the image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego became very apparent. **Their distinctiveness was instantly known by what they would not do.**

GOD'S PEOPLE ACCUSED

"Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews." Other versions read, *"For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews,"*^{NASB} and *"At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews."*^{NIV} **We will see from the following verses that the Jews in general were not accused,**

occasion such as this, when allegiance to a worldly ruler is being confirmed.

Some have suggested that Nebuchadnezzar was provoked to erect this idol in order that an accusation might be raised against the Jews. The reasoning is that their enemies knew they would not bow, and so arranged for this whole affair to take place so the Jews might be exposed. However, our text does not suggest this. Later, we will find such a tactic taking place (6:5-7), but there is no evidence that is what occurred here.

As I have already said, it is my persuasion that this was orchestrated by God Himself. On this occasion, the king himself did not realize what was really taking place.

A TECHNICAL POINT

"Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut,

present the Jews as rebelling against the solemn and clear decree of the king.

CERTAIN JEWS

"There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

There is hatred in these words. How these men must have despised the three they now accused. Even though they were captive Jews, they had been exalted over all the affairs of Babylon, and it did not set well with these men.

Three Charges Levelled

They have not regarded the king. Other versions read, *"have not paid due regard to you,"*^{NKJV} *"have disregarded you,"*^{NASB} *"who pay no attention to you,"*^{NIV} *"have ignored your command,"*^{NJB} and *"have defied your majesty."*^{NLT} Thus, even though these were subjects of the king, and had been put into their place by his word, the three Jews are represented as despising, ignoring, and paying no attention to the word of the king.

They serve not thy gods. Other versions read, *"they serve not thy gods,"*^{ASV} *"they worship not thy gods,"*^{DOUAY} and *"refusing to serve your gods."*^{NLT} **Even these men knew that no god is served before whom men do not bow and do homage.** They knew a god cannot be served that is not honored, or whose word is ignored.

They do not worship the image. This was the only word that actually applied to the king's decree. The king demanded that as soon as the music was heard, everyone was to fall down before the image and worship it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not do that. They chose to *"obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

AN APPLICATION

It has been a favorite tactic of the enemies of God's people to charge them with political insurrection and disobedience. Following the Babylonian captivity, when the Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, *"the*

IT IS WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND UNRIGHTEOUS ARE MINGLED THAT THE UNIQUENESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS STANDS OUT. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE AT AN OCCASION SUCH AS THIS, WHEN ALLEGIANCE TO A WORLDLY RULER IS BEING CONFIRMED.

but three of them in particular.

These Chaldeans had their eyes on the Jews they would accuse. Amidst this mass of people, it is difficult to conceive of them as being able to detect these particular Jews if they had not been looking for them. Prior to this, they would not have thought of accusing them before the king, for they had been put into their position by a sovereign edict. However, this occasion proved to be ideal for them to reveal their hatred of them. Thus they quickly and intentionally noted their response to the music.

It is when the righteous and unrighteous are mingled that the uniqueness of the righteous stands out. This is particularly true at an

psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: ¹¹ And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

The recitation of this technical point was designed to cause the king to favor the accusers. It was a way of feigning allegiance to the king, whose previous judgment they would shortly question. These were words of flattery, designed to help them realize their own desires. Note how they precede their accusation, as though they had more interest in the king's name than those whom they would accuse: *"O king, live forever."* Also, they were not sloppy in their wording, but precisely related the decree word for word. Thus they would

adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” heard it and raised an accusation against them. After opposing the work, they finally wrote to king Artaxerxes, accusing the Jews of insubordination. *“Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings”* (Ezra 4:13).

The same sort of accusation was raised against the Lord Jesus Himself. The Jews said to Pilate, *“We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King”* (Luke 23:2). When it became evident Pilate wanted to release Jesus, the Jews pressed this matter with him. *“But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend:*

whosoever maketh Himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12).

Early in the history of the church, its opponents also charged it was unpatriotic, not yielding to the king. In *“And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus”* (Acts 17:7). Paul responded to such accusations, denying they were true. *“While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all”* (Acts 25:8).

Such charges were a gross

misrepresentation in these cases, as well as that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They represent Satan’s effort to bring discredit upon those who trust in God. Those who serve God are the best citizens, honoring the king (1 Pet 2:17), giving honor to whom honor is due (Rom 13:7), paying taxes (or giving tribute (Rom 13:7), and rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s (Matt 22:21).

What Nebuchadnezzar had required was not political in nature, but spiritual. Bowing down and worshiping a man-made image involves the repudiation of the God of heaven. In this, he had extended his authority beyond the border of Divine allotment. The response of the three Jews was not an act of disregard for the king, but of a higher regard for the Lord of the king. This will become clear in their response to Nebuchadnezzar.

THE BLASPHEMOUS FURY OF THE KING

“¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”

The enemies had so framed their speech as to provoke anger in the king. Even though his exposure to the three young Jews had yielded only good, yet all of this is forgotten as he flies into a rage. **When the flesh is offended, it cannot recall anything good, but only thinks of self.** Those who are tempted to compromise with the flesh need to learn

from this text. It will not turn to your good to yield to those who are offended by your faith. They will only turn and tear you like wild animals, as Jesus said (Matt 7:6). There are surely important things to be learned from this incident.

FURY ISSUES A COMMAND

Still other versions read, *“Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage.”*^{NAB,NLT}

This is the kind of state the king was in when he ordered the destruction of all the wise men in Babylon (Dan 2:12). From an earthly point of view, things could not possibly be any worse. This was

WHEN THE FLESH IS OFFENDED, IT CANNOT RECALL ANYTHING GOOD, BUT ONLY THINKS OF SELF. THOSE WHO ARE TEMPTED TO COMPROMISE WITH THE FLESH NEED TO LEARN FROM THIS TEXT. IT WILL NOT TURN TO YOUR GOOD TO YIELD TO THOSE WHO ARE OFFENDED BY YOUR FAITH.

“Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” Other versions say he called for the three young men *“in rage and anger,”*^{NASB} *“furious with rage,”*^{NIV} *“furious rage,”*^{NRSV} *“shaking with fury,”*^{NJB} and *“in wrath and passion.”*^{BBE}

the ruler of the world, whose word was implemented at his command. His summons did not pass through other political chambers, as a Senate or House of Representatives. **To further complicate things, he had received his power from Almighty God.** Earlier

Daniel told him, “*You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands He has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, He has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold*” (Dan 2:37-38).

In this matter, however, the king is crossing over into a domain that does not belong to him. **He is going to exact something beyond his authority to demand.**

How will the three Jews respond to this summons? Will they run and hide?

IS IT TRUE?

“Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?” It is as though the king cannot believe what he has heard. It is apparent he is not accustomed to his word being disobeyed. This may also be perceived as an opportunity for the young men to deny the charge, saying they are quite willing to do anything the king demands.

My Gods

It seems to me that the Lord Himself is pushing the king’s words out of his mouth. The real issue is clearly stated, and it will allow for the predetermined

Much of the religious corruption that is prevalent in our day is nothing more than yielding to this crafty approach of our adversary the devil. Myriad of people are bowing down to and serving the flesh in its varied and corrupt forms, all the while maintaining they are also servants of God, and worship Him. They go to church regularly, give of their means to religious causes, and sing and pray at the appointed times. But they are also bowing down to idols men have raised up. Those idols may take the form of money, music, pleasure, or some other worldly corruption. However, yielding to them is exactly the same thing as bowing down before the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar and worshipping.

Of course, the truth of the matter is that we cannot serve two masters. It simply is not possible. Those who attempt to do so have been deceived. Jesus said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Mat 6:24).

The Golden Image Which I Have Set Up

The king does not ask that the young men acknowledge the architectural excellence of the statue in the plain of Dura. He does not request that they simply look at it, or be present at its dedication. He demands that they worship the image – bowing down before it. Now, he gives them an opportunity to change their minds by asking if it is really true that they have refused to do this simple deed.

THE THREAT REAFFIRMED

“Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace . . .”

The king is willing to go through the entire procedure again. The orchestra will strike up yet another time, and full opportunity will be granted to correct behavior that is not acceptable to the king. If the young men will simply do what the king has commanded, all will be

MUCH OF THE RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION THAT IS PREVALENT IN OUR DAY IS NOTHING MORE THAN YIELDING TO THIS CRAFTY APPROACH OF OUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL. MYRIAD OF PEOPLE ARE BOWING DOWN TO AND SERVING THE FLESH IN ITS VARIED AND CORRUPT FORMS, ALL THE WHILE MAINTAINING THEY ARE ALSO SERVANTS OF GOD, AND WORSHIP HIM.

Is this a time when they must flee, as Jesus instructed the Jews to do when they saw Jerusalem surrounded (Matt 24:16)? Will their Jewish brethren assist them to escape the wrath of the king like Paul’s brethren assisted him when they let him down a wall in a basket (Acts 9:25)? Or will they simply leave Babylon like Moses forsook Egypt (Heb 11:27)?

We will see from this account that our response to trouble and danger is not stereotyped. The Lord has not provided us a handy manual of conduct that outlines exactly what we are to do when faced with danger and threats. **Like the Hebrew children, we will have to live close enough to the Lord to know how to respond to peril and risk.** In this case, running is out of order. This is a test in which standing by faith is the only thing to do. In order to please the Lord, there is no other alternative.

exaltation of the God of heaven.

Being polytheistic, or believing in many gods, Nebuchadnezzar was quite willing to allow the Hebrews to have their own God. **He does not ask Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to curse their God, renounce Him, or swear they will not worship Him.** He was not willing, however, for them to ignore his “gods.” He demanded that they ALSO bow down before his gods, and worship them.

In this we behold another tactic of the devil. Satan has no difficulty with a profession of faith, or the claim to worship and honor God. When he tempted the Lord Jesus, he did not ask him to renounce the God of heaven, or to withhold worship from Him. He only asked that Jesus *“fall down and worship”* him (Matt 4:9).

forgotten, and the charges will have no weight before him at all. "Now if you are ready . . . to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well." The appointed penalty is again stated, the king hoping it will strike enough fear into their hearts to obey his word.

THE EVIL CHALLENGE

" . . . and *who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" The king's demand was bad enough as it was. Now he greatly compounds his transgression by adding something to his edict. This was not included in his original decree. It is a bold and brazen challenge that will at once draw attention to the seriousness of this matter. It will also serve to awaken the three Jews to an

even stronger faith: "and what God is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"^{NASB}

This very challenge has been hurled in the face of others who put their trust in God. They are defiance against God, which He takes quite seriously.

▣ Pharaoh said to Moses, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo 5:2).

▣ Sennacherib, the king of Assyria boasted to Hezekiah, "Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out

of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (2 Kgs 18:35).

▣ When Jesus was crucified, the people chided, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God" (Mat 27:43).

At this point, the issue is no longer with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Now it is with God, and He will come to the aid of those who trust in Him. Thus the real battle is set in array – the God of heaven against king Nebuchadnezzar, and ultimately against the gods of Nebuchadnezzar. God will not ignore this bold challenge.

THE RESPONSE OF FAITH

¹⁶ *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.* ¹⁷ *If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.* ¹⁸ *But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."*

How will these young men respond to such a frightening threat of instant and dreadful death? Will their faith be able to sustain them? Will it cause them to be bold for forward in their reply? Will they have a peace that will keep them from stammering or crying? Remember, they are living in spiritually primitive times when the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God had not yet been unfolded (2 Pet 1:4). They did not have the indwelling Spirit in the sense those in Christ possess it (1 John 4:13). Nor, indeed, had they experienced Christ in them, the hope of glory (Col 1:27). For them, the star of hope was not shining as brightly as it does now that we have "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet 1:19).

Yet, in them the power of faith will be seen – a power that is multiplied

exceedingly in Christ Jesus. We do well to listen intently to their response, taking it into our hearts, and mulling it over in our

The words "we are not careful" mean, "there is no need for us to even give thought to this matter, for we are under

THE FUNDAMENTAL THING HERE WAS TO DO THE WILL OF GOD, NOT PROVIDE ELABORATE EXPLANATIONS FOR WHY IT WAS BEING DONE.

spirits. Like David ran to meet Goliath, these three eagerly leap into the fray, not hesitating for a moment to respond to the king. This is nothing less than a display of the boldness of faith.

THE BOLDNESS OF FAITH

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." Other versions read, "we have not need to answer you in this matter,"^{NKJV} "we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter,"^{NIV} and "we have no need to present a defense before you in this matter,"^{NRSV} "your question needs no answer from us."^{NJB}

no obligation to explain our refusal. What we are being asked to do is unlawful, and that is the end of the matter." **The fundamental thing here was to DO the will of God, not provide elaborate explanations for why it was being done.**

The answer of the three young men is instant. They do not hesitate for a moment. They have been living by faith, and now they can answer by faith as well. They will speak in a calm and respectful manner, but they will not yield one minuscule point in this matter. There is nothing vague about what they face, and

there is nothing vague about their answer. They will speak straight to the point, leaving no doubt about where they stand.

The idea here is that they will not negotiate with the king. This matter is not open for discussion. They have made up their mind, and, with the Psalmist, their heart is “fixed” (Psa 57:7; 108:1). The straightforward demeanor of these three men is depicted in the 112th Psalm. “*Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.*” (Psa 112:6-7). That is precisely what is taking place in this text. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have to deliberate about this crisis. **They did not have to pray about it, speak among themselves, or frame an eloquent answer for the king. Their**

living in a time of far less spiritual illumination than that of our day. The Sun of righteousness has now risen with “*healing in His wings*” (Mal 4:2). In the bright rays of His gracious light, we ought to have no difficulty being as firm in our resolution to honor God as these men. Yet, it is most apparent that our generation is not characterized by people who have made up their minds NOT to do what is wrong. There is altogether too much negotiation with the enemy, and compromise is the result. A brand of Christianity is being hawked in the religious world that allows both young and old to live close to the edge – so close it is difficult to detect whether people are worldly or godly. People are walking in the shadow of the forbidden. They mingle with multitudes that bow down to the golden images of this world.

because such people are caught unawares, it is because they live unawares. It is because they have not committed themselves to the Lord. It is because they have not lived by faith, and thus they were not kept by the power of God, which keeping is “*through faith*” (1 Pet 1:5).

OUR GOD IS ABLE

“*If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . .*” The three young men leave no question about whom they serve. They do not explain their action, but confess their Lord. They do not talk about what the king is purportedly able to do, but what their God can do.

“If It Be So”

These words mean, “*if we are thrown into the blazing furnace.*”^{NIV} The New Revised Standard Version provides us with a blasphemous translation of this verse. “*If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us.*” This translation reads as though the question was whether or not God could deliver them. Rather than spouting unbelief, these men were confessing their faith in God. If it really did come to them being cast into the furnace, they knew God was able to deliver them.

Our God Is Able

Immediately, they confess this is their God – the One they worship and serve: “*whom we serve.*” **In doing this, they were also confessing they did not serve Nebuchadnezzar’s gods.**

With Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the question was never about what God **could** do – there was no question about that. They were not speculating about what God **would** do, but believing what He was **able** to do – and there is a big difference between the two. **They did not devote themselves to contemplating what the outcome of their decision was going to be.** Rather, they focused on the decision itself, knowing full well they served a God who was able to deliver them.

Nebuchadnezzar had asked the question, “*who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hands?*” Now the

THEY DID NOT HAVE TO PRAY ABOUT IT, SPEAK AMONG THEMSELVES, OR FRAME AN ELOQUENT ANSWER FOR THE KING. THEIR MINDS WERE MADE UP, AND EVEN THE THREAT OF AN AWFUL DEATH COULD NOT TURN THEM. FOR THEM, THIS WAS NOT A COURT OF APPEALS, BUT A PLATFORM FOR WITNESSING TO THEIR UNWAVERING FAITH IN GOD.

minds were made up, and even the threat of an awful death could not turn them. For them, this was not a court of appeals, but a platform for witnessing to their unwavering faith in God.

These three faithful men refused to give any thought as to how they might avoid the curse of the king and the flame of the fiery furnace. They knew in their hearts that bowing to that golden image would dishonor their God, and therefore they would not do it.

An Application

Because these things are “*written for our learning*” (Rom 15:4), there is much to be gained from a sober consideration of this text. These men were

I suggest this is because they have never reached the point where a determination was made NOT to dishonor God. They have never resolutely said with David, “*I will have nothing to do with evil*”^{NIV} (Psa 101:4), or “*I will not forget Thy Word*” (Psa 119:16). Although Job lived before the Law, his resolve represents a commitment to God that is virtually unknown in the Western world: “*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl*” (Job 31:1).

This is why departures from the Lord are common in the professing church. It is why leaders fall into sin, infidelity intrudes into the church, and all manner of sin erupts among those professing faith in Christ. **It is not**

three young man respond, “our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.” **With them, the issue was whether the king could throw them into the furnace, not whether God could deliver them from it.** They were saying the same thing Jesus said to Pilate, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).

AND HE WILL

“ . . . and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.” This is a statement of faith. It is much like the reasoning of Abraham when he was required to offer up Isaac: “Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb 11:19). These young men knew their God had power even over death, and could raise them from the dead, should He choose to do so. He could deliver them from going into the furnace, or raise them up from the effects of the furnace. At the best or at the worst, their God was over all. **They were putting themselves into the hands of their God – not Nebuchadnezzar – and they trusted He would honor their faith.** They were, in fact, saying what David did when asked to make a choice, “let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Sam 24:14).

I do not understand their statement to mean they were persuaded God would stop them from going into the furnace. Rather, by being delivered out of Nebuchadnezzar’s hand, they knew God’s will would override the will of the king. They were thinking in the same manner as the Apostle Paul when he faced danger. “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. **And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen**” (2 Tim 4:17-18).

BUT IF NOT

“But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” Here the faith of these

young men rises to glorious prominence. They are not thinking of themselves, but of the glory of their God. Faith is not driven by considering what God can do for us. Trusting in God is not contingent upon whether or not He delivers us. He is not governing the world with our agenda in mind, but in view of His own “eternal purpose.”

With great care, we must avoid any approach to life that does not consider “But if not . . .” The fact that God is able to deliver us out of the hands of men does not necessarily mean that He will. Abel was slain by his own brother (Gen 4:3-8). John the Baptist may be beheaded by Herod (Mark 6:18-28). Stephen may be stoned by the Jewish council (Acts 7:58-60). James may be slain by Herod (Acts 12:2). Antipas may die for Jesus (Rev 2:13). Even at this very

God or not, they want the king to know this. “O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”^{NASB} **They will serve the Lord, whether He delivers them or not!** They resigned themselves to the will of the Lord, at that point, not knowing what it was.

They were ready to live for the Lord or die for the Lord. **Further, they would rather die than sin.** Not only was this in their hearts, they insisted that the king know it was well. Their faith and determination were a precursor to that of Paul, who said, “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, **whether it be by life, or by death.** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil

WHAT WILL THESE YOUNG MEN DO IF THE LORD CHOOSES NOT TO DELIVER THEM? WHAT IF THEY KNOW THEY WILL BE THROWN INTO THE FIERY FURNACE? WILL THAT ALTER THEIR DETERMINATION NOT TO BOW BEFORE THE KING’S GOLDEN IMAGE?

moment, “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held,” are “under the altar,” awaiting the vindication of their blood (Rev 6:9-12). There have been, and will continue to be, cases when the saints are **not** delivered in the ordinary sense of the word.

What will these young men do if the Lord chooses NOT to deliver them? What if they know they will be thrown into the fiery furnace? Will that alter their determination not to bow before the king’s golden image?

We Will Not!

The faithful trio leaves no question about this matter. Whatever the outcome, whether publically supported by

1:20-21).

Once they had determined to do the will of God, they gave no thought to the consequences of that decision. They knew the truth of what God told Eli, “them that honor Me, I will honor” (1 Sam 2:30).

Application

Our day sorely needs people with the conviction and confidence of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The amount of compromise that is found in the Christian community is staggering. It is found in fashions, leadership, music, and preaching and teaching. It is not unusual to find a preacher changing the manner and content of his preaching to please those who are at variance with God. Many young people, instead of being

an “example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,” as they are admonished (1 Tim 4:12), have chosen to emulate the world. Christian educational institutions have chosen to pattern themselves after the worldly schools, adopting their standards and manners. The virus of carnality has invaded the Western church, and we have a plague of carnal-mindedness as a result.

I do understand this may seem very negative, and cannot be received by some. However, we must have the courage to compare such conduct with that of the three Hebrew children. Keeping their positions, and even their lives, depended upon caving in to the demands of the king. Yet, they refused to dishonor God by

honoring men. Those in Christ Jesus must be able to make a correlation between the challenges they face and those of our text. Nebuchadnezzar offered these young men their lives if they would bow before his golden image. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world, and their glory, if He would fall down and worship him (Matt 4:8-9). Balak offered Balaam “rewards of divination” to curse Israel (Num 22:5-7).

What has been offered to you? Perhaps it is wealth, pleasure, being well liked, or being accepted by the institution. Sometimes the temptation takes the form of a career, or an influential position. Maybe someone has promised to be your friend if you will only compromise your

faith, or go where they go, and do what they do.

You must settle it in your heart and mind to do what is right, whatever the cost. God is fully able to deliver you, just as He was able to deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But whether He does not, you must not bow to the demands of those who do not serve the Lord. You must make that determination now, before you are faced with the test. You must choose now whom you will serve.

The Gospel boldly announces you have every reason to serve the Lord, and that it is not vain to serve Him. He will not forget those who remember Him.

THE FURY OF THE KING INCREASES

⁴¹⁹ Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against

his own kingdom, and the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God (2:45-46). The king has prostrated himself before

previous encounter with Daniel, or associating the image he set up with that in his dream, the king was “filled with wrath.”^{NASB} Even his “facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”^{NASB} Though he once highly regarded them, now “his attitude toward them changed.”^{NIV} One version says, “his face became distorted with rage.”^{NLT} Another reads, “Nebuchadnezzar’s face became livid with utter rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”^{NAB} **Those whom he willingly promoted to be over the affairs of Babylon now became the target of his furious anger.** In a moment of time he went from asking a simple question to being determined to kill the three who stood before him.

THOSE WHOM HE WILLINGLY PROMOTED TO BE OVER THE AFFAIRS OF BABYLON NOW BECAME THE TARGET OF HIS FURIOUS ANGER. IN A MOMENT OF TIME HE WENT FROM ASKING A SIMPLE QUESTION TO BEING DETERMINED TO KILL THE THREE WHO STOOD BEFORE HIM

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.”

We will now see the reaction of the flesh – flesh that has already been exposed to the works and word of God. Nebuchadnezzar has beheld the working of God in giving unusual wisdom and expertise to Daniel and his three companions (1:20). He has witnessed the revealing power of God when Daniel received the knowledge of his dream, together with its interpretation (2:26-45). He has heard first hand of the demise of

Daniel, offered oblations to him, worshiped him, and confessed God to be the “God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets” (2:26-48). Now, after hearing of this same God from the mouths of these three young men, will the king recall a single word that he has heard concerning God? Will he be able to associate his own confession with the inferiority of his gods? Will he now view the God of heaven as his own Lord, as he previously had acknowledged?

FLESH WILL NOT BOW TO GOD

“Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . ” Instead of recalling his

Because his heart was corrupt, Satan could freely work within him. He had heard the good word of God, and even acknowledged its truth. From his own mouth he had blurted out praise to God, admitting He was over all. Yet, he had learned nothing from it all. **Flesh will not bow to God!** When its own will is opposed by the Divine will, flesh will not yield. It is ever true, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). They would rather burn God’s servants than bow to Him, or admit their gods are nothing. That is the nature of the flesh.

Faith Moves the Three Hebrew Children to Make the Right Choice and Face the Furnace, by Given O. Blakely

Flesh Cannot Learn Truth

No matter how frequently or abundantly truth is set before the flesh, it is not capable of grasping it. Just as Satan cannot learn, or profit from the working of the Lord, so those who are “*in the flesh*” cannot do so. You can subdue the flesh with laws and threats, but you cannot change it. You cannot alter its perspective, make it prefer the Lord, or provoke it to forfeit its own way. “*The flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63), and in it “*dwelleth no good thing*” (Rom 7:18).

The very words that bring great edification to our spirits caused Nebuchadnezzar to become exceedingly angry. When we read of the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we are encouraged to trust in the Lord. When the king heard them, he flew into a rage. **That is the nature of the flesh. We do well to zealously avoid any compromise with a nature such as that.** When your profession of faith and determination to serve the Lord causes anger in others, you are confronting the flesh. Do not yield to its suggestions.

SEVEN TIMES HOTTER

“ . . . *therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.*” The furnace had already been prepared, and was ready to receive those who refused to honor the

king’s word. But that was not enough for Nebuchadnezzar. He now orders that the blazing furnace be heated “*seven times more than it was usually heated,*”^{NKJV} or, “*seven times hotter than usual.*”^{NIV} The

receive unquestionable honor – even from a heathen monarch.

It is good when we can assess our own circumstances in this manner, not judging according to appearance, but

WHAT APPEARS ON THE SURFACE TO BE AN IMPOSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCE WAS NOTHING MORE THAN AN OCCASION IN WHICH THE LORD WOULD RECEIVE UNQUESTIONABLE HONOR – EVEN FROM A HEATHEN MONARCH.

meaning is, “**seven times hotter than it had ever been before.**” He no doubt gave no thought that, from his perspective, this would reduce the amount of suffering through which the victims would go. Rage does deprive men of all rationality.

WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING

We must not fail to see what is really happening here. God is actually setting the stage for His own glory. He is going to deliver His faithful ones, but will do so in such a way as will not allow His power to be questioned. **What appears on the surface to be an impossible circumstance was nothing more than an occasion in which the Lord would**

judging righteous judgment (John 7:24). When everything seems hopelessly against us, let us reason in this manner. “Here is an opportunity for God to receive glory for Himself. Everyone can see that my case is hopeless, and that everything is against me. Perhaps this will turn out to be an opportunity for me to bring glory to God in a remarkable deliverance.”

Take heart, child of God, and do not yield to the pressures of threat and trouble. They are only small puffs of smoke amidst the strong gale of eternal purpose. They will soon disappear in the current of Divine will. God is still able to deliver you. The very contemplation of this will give you the strength to stand.

THROWN INTO THE FURNACE

“²⁰ *And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.*”²¹ *Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.*”²² *Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.*”²³ *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the*

burning fiery furnace.”

There are a remarkable number of details provided in this account, and that for a reason. In them the Lord is removing all doubt as to the Source of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s deliverance. **Possibilities are reduced so Divine power can be seen.** Deliverance seems distant in order that Divine power might shine the more. It is like Elijah having twelve barrels of water poured upon his sacrifice before he prayed for God to consume it with fire (1 Kings 18:33-35). It is like Jesus asking that six water pots of 20-30 gallons each, be filled with water before He turned it into wine (John 2:6-8).

God is going to show that man can do nothing to reverse His decrees. Heat the furnace as hot as you will. Take whatever measures you consider will guarantee your desires will be fulfilled. The will of the Lord will still be done!

THE MOST MIGHTY MEN

“*And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.*” Even though the three young men offered no resistance, the king has “*some of the strongest soldiers in his army tie up*” the three. These were no doubt the strongest in both body and mind, noted for their

obedience and bravery. Surely no known power could loose the bonds secured by these mighty men. Some have thought all three of the men were bound together in a bundle, then thrown like one great package into the fire.

Every possible disadvantage is now heaped upon the young men – as though being tied up in a furnace that was seven times hotter than it had ever been before, would make their death more certain.

The furnace is thought to have been circular, with both fuel and victims put into the top, and ashes removed from the bottom. Whether this is true or not makes little difference. What is occurring here is that three men are being cast into the equivalent of a modern blast furnace. They are totally bound, with, according to appearance, no possible way of escape.

BOUND IN THEIR CLOTHES

“Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments . . .” It is quite true that this condition may be the result of the hasty binding of the three men. However, we will learn from the outcome of this whole event, that their clothing proved to be a testimony to the power of



“coats” (robes, or outer garments), and *“other garments”* (coverings for the feet and head).

THROWN INTO THE MIDST

“ . . . and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” Thus the three were thrown into the center of the blazing furnace – the heart of the heat, so to speak. In this way the king thought to do his worst against the Lord’s best.

EXCEEDING HOT

“Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up

which they threw the young Jews.

Their death is attributed to two things. First, *“because the king’s command was urgent.”*^{NASB} Second, the furnace was *“exceeding hot.”* Some alternative translations put the matter in perspective for us. The idea is this: because the king had commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter, and because of the effects of this increase, the flames leaped out and destroyed the ones throwing them into the furnace. This is captured in several of the more free translations. *“And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames leaped out and killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in!”*^{NLT} The Amplified Old Testament reads, *“the flame and the sparks from the fire killed those men who handled Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”*

If, therefore, the fire was so intense that it killed those who were outside of the furnace, what would be the fate of those cast into the very center of it?

THEY FELL DOWN BOUND

“ . . . And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” There is, therefore, no question about who was thrown into the fire: *“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”* There is no question about their condition: *“fell down bound.”* There is no doubt about where they fell: *“into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”* They were utterly helpless, thus they *“fell,”* fully clothed, yet fully bound.

These men trusted God when they stood before the king. They relied upon Him when they were questioned. They trusted the Lord when they gave their answer. They maintained their faith when they heard the judgment. They kept on believing while they were bound. They depended on the Lord when they fell into the furnace. There is now way the Lord will forsake those who believe so strongly.

There is no earthly power or wisdom that can deliver these men from this dilemma. All flesh in all ways is powerless in this matter. If God does not come to the aid of these men, no aid will come to them at all.

NOW THE SPIRIT FURTHER SETS THE STAGE FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF JEHOVAH. LEST ANY IMAGINE THAT SOMEONE COULD POSSIBLY SURVIVE THIS ORDEAL BY NATURAL MEANS, WE LEARN THAT THE “THE STRONGEST SOLDIERS” NIV OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S ARMY WERE THEMSELVES KILLED BY THE VERY FLAMES INTO WHICH THEY THREW THE YOUNG JEWS.

God. It was the Lord Himself that saw to it their clothes remained on them. I do not doubt that men thought leaving the prisoners in their clothes would make their torment greater. Instead, it would make the working of the Lord more obvious.

The clothing included *“hats”* (turbans), *“hosen”* (underclothing),

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . .”

Now the Spirit further sets the stage for the deliverance of Jehovah. Lest any imagine that someone could possibly survive this ordeal by natural means, we learn that the *“the strongest soldiers”*^{NIV} of Nebuchadnezzar’s army were themselves killed by the very flames into

CONCLUSION

The event we have just reviewed is one of the better known ones of Scripture. Many people have known of it from their youth. It should not surprise us that it has also been the target of skeptics, who would have us believe such things could never really happen. But this is a real account, with real people, and a very real outcome. It speaks loudly to us of the power of faith, and the way in which God honors those who honor Him. It testifies to the ultimate futility of opposing the Lord, and the absolute wisdom of obeying God rather than men. It confirms that the world does, in fact, hate the people of God, and thinks nothing of consigning them to the worst of all circumstances if they refuse to do their bidding.

In this account the depravity of the flesh is confirmed. It will not learn from God, even though it is given every possible advantage. Extensive explanations can be given to the flesh, and it will not recall them when put to the test. It can behold great wisdom, see the excellence of Divine counsel, and forthwith forget it without any hesitation.

It prefers the honor of men to the honor of God, and the works of men to the works of God. It seeks the praise of men, not of God, and craves for honor that comes from peers and cannot last. Flesh thinks nothing of viciously opposing the very people it has exalted. It has no compunctions about painting the godly as foolish, and aligning itself against them. That is the nature of flesh. It can kill righteous Abel, mock Isaac the child of promise, and at last crucify the Lord of glory. It can hear God speak and think it thundered, see a blind man healed and say a sinner did it, and betray the Son of God for thirty paltry pieces of silver.

Flesh cannot learn the things of God, even though it is exposed frequently and extensively to the Lord and His ways. The natural man always considers the things of God to be "*foolishness*" (1 Cor 1:18-23). Flesh can say the right thing, but it cannot maintain a right perspective. Eventually, it will always act in contradiction of the truth, never agreeing with truth or willing to tolerate it.

All of this accents the folly of compromising with the flesh, or accommodating ourselves to it. They that are in the flesh cannot please God, whether they are a heathen like Nebuchadnezzar, or a prophet who prophesies for wages, like Balaam. Whether it is in Cain slaying Abel, or Peter denying he knew Jesus, the flesh always leads in the wrong direction. It is ever true, in the flesh, "*dwells no good*

are admonished, "*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*" (Jude 1:20-21). Weak and emaciated souls will not stand in the hour of trial. Such a time is not an occasion to get faith, but one in which faith is to be used – faith that has already been obtained, kept, and nurtured.

THOSE WHO NEGLECT THEIR SOULS, NOT BUILDING UP THEMSELVES ON THEIR MOST HOLY FAITH, AND PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (JUDE 1:20), ARE SURE TO FALL. WHEN A PERSON NEGLECTS HIS FAITH, NOT FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH, FAITH CANNOT SUSTAIN HIM IN THE HOUR OF TRIAL.

thing."

On the other hand, faith makes the individual equal to any occasion, whether it is being promoted to a high position, or consigned to a furnace of fire. Faith can stand while the persecutors are being burned in the flame they intended for the saints. It can survive assault, come back from seeming defeat, and hold still while men bind the believer in vain. Living by faith is always the right thing to do, and never puts the one possessing it at a disadvantage. It always puts the trusting one at the helm, guaranteeing triumph at last. It is "*the victory that overcomes the world*" (1 John 5:4).

One other thing can be observed from this incident. Those who expect to stand in trial must build up their faith before hand, determining in their hearts not to sin against the Lord. Solemnly we

If a person does not commit himself to the Lord, resolving to do what is right and honor the Lord, they will not be able to stand in "*the hour of temptation*" (Rev 3:10), or "*the evil day*" (Eph 6:13). Once the fiery trial comes, it is too late to make your good resolves. Better to make them during the quiet times, when you are feeding your soul, pressing in to the bosom of the Lord, and seeking to obtain the prize. God will invariable side with those who have faithfully maintained fellowship with Him.

Those who neglect their souls, not building up themselves on their most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20), are sure to fall. When a person neglects his faith, not fighting the good fight of faith, faith cannot sustain him in the hour of trial.

However, there is no need for such

neglect to take place in you. God has given to you "all things pertaining to life and godliness." These resources are given to us "through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet 1:3). Additionally, multiplied measures of "grace and peace" are given to us by the

same means: "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2).

That simply means that in the experience of fellowship with God, the things we require are ministered to us. Those things will keep us in all situations.

That includes trials like the one Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went through, as well as great honors, like that bestowed earlier upon Daniel. As you walk with God, as did Enoch and Noah, you will always be prepared for the circumstances of life, and will be the victor in them.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 6/14/2002. We will continue in our overview of Daniel, covering verses 46-49 of the second chapter. The lesson is titled, "**DELIVERED FROM THE FURNACE AND PROMOTED BY THE KING.**" The superiority of faith is seen in its triumph over the world. While that triumph takes various forms, our text will focus on victory that is immediate and apparent. The fiery furnace proved to be too much for those who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Faith, however, proved too formidable for that same furnace. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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