Daniel Chapter 3 (Part 1) — The Image of Gold

Nebuchadnezzar's God-Consciousness Without Submission; The Number Six; Music Acting on the Old Nature; Exodus 20; Acts 15 on Idolatry; and the Prophetic Shadow of the End-Times Image

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Scripture Reading: Daniel 2:48–3:23; Exodus 20:3–5, 23; Acts 15:19–20; Genesis 1:26–28; Matthew 16:26

> *"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits." (Daniel 3:1)*
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> *"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter." (Daniel 3:16)*

God-Consciousness Without Submission

Chapter 2 ends with Nebuchadnezzar falling on his face before Daniel and declaring that Daniel's God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, a revealer of secrets. That sounds impressive. Chapter 3 then shows us immediately where that went. The very next thing Nebuchadnezzar does is build a golden image and command the entire empire to worship it. This is a man who acknowledges that a particular God is remarkable — but who has not submitted to that God. He said in essence, there is a great God, and then turned around and thought: but I am also pretty great.

This is not unusual. It is possible to recognize that God exists, that the God of the Bible seems powerful and good, and even to be impressed by what he does,

without surrendering one's heart to him. The man in the village who hears a missionary and thinks, that missionary's God seems to give him much better material circumstances than my gods give me, I would like to know more about this God — that is a God-consciousness, and it is not salvation. Nebuchadnezzar had a God-consciousness at the end of chapter 2, and chapter 3 shows that he had not believed on God for himself. He said, your God is the God of Daniel. Not: this God is my God.

The Numbers Six and Seven: Man and Perfection

The image was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. Six is the number associated with man in his natural condition throughout Scripture — one short of seven, which speaks of completeness and perfection. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was building something perfect and complete — a vast golden monument to his own greatness. It happened to be measured in sixes. The number is not accidental. It is fitting that a monument to man's self-exaltation should be measured by the number of man. Seven times also appears later in the chapter when the furnace is heated seven times more than usual — the king's attempt to achieve absolute, complete destruction through his own power.

The Role of Music: Acting on the Old Nature

The ceremony for the image was accompanied by an elaborate musical program: cornet, pipe, lute, sambuca, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music. Nebuchadnezzar knew what he was doing. Music acts on the old nature — the nature descended from Adam that every human being has. It does not act on the spiritual life that a believer has received from God. This is why the music worked on the nations gathered to worship, and why it had no effect on the three faithful Israelites.

This distinction matters for Christian worship. When believers gather to remember the Lord Jesus, the goal is that the new nature — the life received from God — should be stirred toward him. Instruments and musical performances that act on the old nature work against that purpose. They produce an emotional response in the flesh rather than a spiritual response in the new life. The Old Testament had legitimate use of musical instruments because Israel's religion was given to the first man to see whether he could be recovered by it. But we are a heavenly company, and what belongs to the first man has no place in our worship. The Scripture says, if anyone is happy, let him sing psalms. That is the appropriate expression for believers gathered to remember Christ.

Why They Could Not Bow: Exodus 20 and Acts 15

The question why they could not simply bow down to the image has a clear answer in the law given to Israel. Exodus 20:3 says, thou shalt have no other gods before me. Verse 4 adds, thou shalt not make thyself any graven image, or any form of what is in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the sea. Verse 23 says, ye shall not make beside me gods of silver, and ye shall not make to you gods of gold. For an Israelite, this was a direct command of God; bowing to the image would have been direct disobedience. There was no ambiguity and no room for pragmatic reasoning.

Acts 15:19–20 shows that even for Gentile believers in the New Testament, the instruction concerning idols goes beyond what the Mosaic law required of Israel. The Jerusalem council wrote to Gentile converts to abstain from pollutions of idols — a broader command than merely not making or worshipping them. It means having nothing to do with anything contaminated by idolatry. This instruction is grounded not in the Mosaic law but in creation itself — like the prohibitions on fornication and blood, which go back to God's dealings with mankind before the law was given. For Christians, idolatry in any form is precluded. If a ruling authority in our day built an image and commanded

everyone to worship it, a believer would be in the same position as these three men — required by God to refuse.

Adam's Dominion and Nebuchadnezzar's: The Man-Image

The image Nebuchadnezzar built was in the shape of a man — head, arms, chest, torso, legs, feet. This was not coincidence. Adam was made in God's image to represent God to the material creation; the image of Genesis 1 means representation and authority. Nebuchadnezzar had been given authority over the earth by God, comparable in scope (though not identical) to what Adam had received. And instead of representing God to the earth as his responsibility required, he built an image of man — and commanded the earth to worship it. Man worshipping man. Self-exaltation at its most open and deliberate. The New Testament has examples of angels and even of the apostle Peter instructing those who tried to bow before them: do it not, I am a fellow servant. Yet here is a man setting up man to receive worship.

The Prophetic Shadow: The End-Times Image

The fiery furnace narrative is not historical decoration in a prophetic book. It is itself prophetic. Daniel 11:36 speaks of the king who shall do as he wills — the Antichrist, the final and fullest expression of the self-will that Nebuchadnezzar displays here. Nebuchadnezzar's image is a shadow of the image that will be set up in Jerusalem in the middle of the seventieth week, before which all the world will be commanded to bow. The musical ceremony of chapter 3 is a shadow of that coerced worship. The three men who refused are a shadow of the faithful remnant of Israel in that coming day, who will refuse to worship the image and will be preserved through a time of fire.

There are two distinct aspects to the final power: the governmental authority and the religious authority, both ultimately driven by Satan. Nebuchadnezzar

combines both in chapter 3 — he is the supreme ruler, and he uses religion as the unifying force to cement his empire. Atheists in our own day have discovered that they need a central temple, something that binds their adherents together, because that is what religion does for a society. Nebuchadnezzar arrived at that insight four thousand years earlier. Satan will use the same mechanism at the end. There will be a gathering around a man, and an image, and music, and pressure — and there will be a faithful remnant who refuse.

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter.