

# Daniel 18 – From Powerful to Powerlessness

Dr. Leon L. Sanders  
Daniel 3:26-30


## Understanding the Problem

- As interesting as this miracle is, it is simply a story unless it conveys concepts God wants His people to understand
- Nebuchadnezzar linked worship with his rulership; to not worship was rebellion
- Nebuchadnezzar also linked his gods with his rulership; to not worship meant disrespect of the gods and punishment
- Furnace of fire that **burns** would purge his kingdom of unbelievers and dissidents
- Visible display of punishment would affirm his rulership supported by his gods and legitimized by public executions
- Problem: What if unbelievers did **not** die; what does this say about the legitimacy of his rulership; Nebuchadnezzar's future is suddenly in doubt: What can he do?



## Fallacy of Poor Hermeneutics: Interpretations Have Consequences

- Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar he was the head of gold; i.e., the **best** of the world kingdoms (Dan 2:37-45)
  - Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was the pinnacle of kingdoms; those kingdoms that came after were of baser metals because of their deteriorating underlying philosophies and religions; they were greater by men's criteria
  - Nebuchadnezzar ignored **all** kingdoms were linked and **all** would be destroyed by God's Rock; His eternal kingdom (Dan 2:34-45; Isa 2:1-4)
  - Nebuchadnezzar took this to mean that he was the best ruler with Daniel's god's approval, coupled with Marduk's annual approval; he was erecting the image, idol, to focus people's minds on his divine right of rulership
  - Non-worship was rejection of him, Daniel's god and his gods, especially Marduk; all were linked in an unholy triad as a metaphor of the coming Antichrist's image



## All Governments Linked to Religions: Nebuchadnezzar's Image is the Link

- Though Nebuchadnezzar linked **his** image with worship of his gods, truly it was about himself, legitimizing his rulership: self-worship
  - His assembled his bureaucracy and at the signal of the worship music, they had to swear allegiance by worshipping the image: linked government to religion (Da 3:1-7)
  - Chaldeans, whom he nearly executed, pointed out that the Jews **he** had promoted were not present: ergo, they had not sworn allegiance (Worshiped) (Da 3:8-12)
  - Nebuchadnezzar summoned the Jews, furious they ignored his worship decree, he questioned them, then **publicly** told them to worship or die (Da 3:13-15)
  - Nebuchadnezzar challenged God when he told them that **no god** could deliver them out of his hand: annul his judgment of the furnace of fire that burns
  - Nebuchadnezzar, and his gods (Satan), did not kill these Jews; God protected them showing that Nebuchadnezzar's government was **not** the ultimate rule





## Public Message Gone Wrong: Strength to Weakness

- Nebuchadnezzar forced to publicly admit in front of his bureaucracy that these three Jews were protected by another who looked like a son of God
  - Public display of his power being supported by his gods turned into a public display of his powerlessness
  - Nebuchadnezzar could not execute those who appeared disloyal, publicly demonstrating his powerlessness before his bureaucracy; those on whom he depended to rule his empire
  - Nebuchadnezzar, and his gods, had **no** control over natural elements as the extensively heated furnace killed loyal military members; if he could not protect those loyal to him, and those on whom he depend for safety, he was doomed
  - Nebuchadnezzar had to salvage this debacle lest he find himself deposed or assassinated; usually from one's bureaucracy, military or family





## Nebuchadnezzar Astute Leader: Lessons for Worldly Leaders

- Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated why he was King by salvaging this debacle seeking to turn it to his advantage; he demonstrated Christ's appraisal that the sons of this world are shrewder than the sons of Light (Da 10:1-6)
  - Nebuchadnezzar immediately allied himself with his counselors, Chaldeans, by asking their confirmation of what he saw; he turned from threatening them with death to needing their guidance (Empowerment) (Da 3:24-25)
  - This was a change from, "I am god over everyone" to "I am leader of a coalition" or "we are in this together"
  - This sudden necessary change demonstrates the hypocrisy of leaders who will do **anything** to obtain or remain in power: in a monarchy there is no un-election, there is only death to effect a change in leadership: One who threatens death lives in fear of death (Da 3:10-12)





## Furnace of Fire that Burns: Did Not Burn

- Nebuchadnezzar immediately displayed his authority calling the three Jews out of the fire and into his presence, which they obeyed because God is not a god of rebellion; Satan holds that position (Dan 1:11-13; 1Sa 15:22; 9:14; 13:14; Jn 8:44)
  - Throughout the Bible God never supports rebellion against legally constituted authority; nor does he support blind obedience when governments promote sin (Jn 4:19-20; Ps 131:1)
  - Nebuchadnezzar and his bureaucracy examined the three Jews verifying that they suffered no harm, no singing, nor even any smell from the furnace of fire
  - For these three Jews, there was no burning because they were to be a metaphor from Christ throughout the ages
  - Nebuchadnezzar unified his bureaucracy by seeking their assessment; this will be vital in his coming declaration



## Declaration of god But, Not of God

- Because of the public non-execution of the three Jews and the agreement between Nebuchadnezzar and his bureaucracy, he issued a decree with them siding with their God; but, not really God
  - Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge the public miracle; he does so to identify himself with the legitimacy of their god who is able to save them by defying him
  - He declares Judaism a legal religion, like other legal religions of his kingdom; by making such a declaration he is demonstrating his power over their religion, God, even though this event showed his powerlessness
  - He threatens the force of government, gruesome death, against all who speak or act against their god; this is an indirect slap against the Chaldeans who had manipulated this debacle
  - He then promotes the three Jews as a means of ensuring his safety and rule; thus, he did exactly what Daniel did to ensure his safety (Dan 2:16)



## Declaring a Fact Is Not Worship

- Just because Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the fact that the God of the Jews saved these men and sided with them because he needed to save his own power, and self, does not mean he worshiped God as God
  - Satan and his demons recognize God, and tremble; however, they cannot worship Him; no one's rebellious sin nature can ever worship God (Ps 82:2f; Jn 2:19)
  - Nebuchadnezzar simply acknowledges the fact that the three Jews risked death to remain faithful to their God who was able to save them in spite of the King's command, an admirable and rare quality to have in one's government
  - Hence, the King, and his bureaucracy, embrace and support this power; but this is not an acknowledgement of salvation; he is reinforcing the addition of God to his pantheon of gods as he did with Daniel
  - This gives Judaism a special place in Babylonia, probably not good for majority of Jews who continued to mix idolatry with cultic Jewish practices; Talmud

## Transitioning to Salvation

- This miracle is transitioning us to next miracle: Nebuchadnezzar's salvation
  - God could have used a variety of methods to cause Nebuchadnezzar's salvation: speaking from a bright light (Paul); personal appearance that would have overwhelmed him (Daniel; John); or even a still small voice (Elijah; you or I) (18:17-18, 29-30; 14:17-18; 11:13; 11:13-14)
  - God used a unique means to remove Nebuchadnezzar from power for seven years so that he would not have been considered a threat; i.e., God preserved his physical life and his soul
  - This is a supposition on my part and while not directly addressed in the Bible, neither is it beyond the pale of possibility considering his revealed weakness
  - God is preparing him for salvation, of this we can all agree since he does become the only leader to be saved; i.e., the true head of gold

## Christendom's Poor Hermeneutics: The Lie of Miracles

- Miracles were performed to authenticate God's message **before** the Bible was completed
  - God gave miracles to Moses so the Hebrews would believe (9:42-30)
  - John the Baptist, when imprisoned and suffering doubt, was reassured by Christ based on His works, miracles (9:7-18:25)
  - Paul demonstrated the truthfulness of his gospel by his apostolic signs, miracles, which his readers saw performed (20:12-13)
  - These stopped with the completion of the Bible; however, so-called modern apostles claim the revival of signs in order to do what Paul did not; prey upon the foolish, the ignorant and the simple (10:1-18:10, 29; 2:1-4; 2:28-9-10)
  - Sinners embrace The Lie to ponder to their fleshly lusts as foretold (29:23-32, 29:31-2, 43-4)

## Incredible Complexity of Daniel: Past, Present and Future Times

- Christians need to study Daniel as a far-reaching book that embraces the entire Bible
  - New Testament Christians cannot understand New Testament events unless they study Daniel and its Old Testament imagery
  - Complexities of social and political events are not limited to modern times but present throughout all times; there is nothing new under the sun (1:18-11)
  - Understanding Daniel greatly impacts how one understands Revelation to avoid becoming trapped in the errors of those who would lead you astray
  - There are no Old Testament or New Testament Christians; there are only Bible Christians; those who limit themselves feed on the milk of the Word when they should be digesting the meat of the Bible (24:5-11-14)
  - This is the basis of discernment; studying the whole counsel of God (24:23-24, 23-28)