

The Test of True Worship (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] We looked at this dream of Nebuchadnezzar's, remember last time?

! Two weeks ago, I guess it was. Kind of walked our way through that. I have one more point there that I didn't cover last time. I want to get that in there real quickly. Just to remind you, first, the dream and its circumstances, kind of leading up to the statue.

The dream and its consequences. Then the dream and its contents. And we looked at the statue and kind of talked about each element of that image that Daniel saw, from the gold head all the way down to the toes.

And then finally, and this is what I want to cover tonight, the dream and its conveniences. The dream and its conveniences. Convenience, that is, to Daniel.

So, how did Nebuchadnezzar react to Daniel's correct description of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? And also to his correct interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

[1 : 22] Well, two things. First, respect. And then reward. So, first of all, a respect. The respect that was given to Daniel. Verse 46.

This is all coming from chapter 2, just as a reminder. Verse 46. Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him.

That sounds like, by the way, that Nebuchadnezzar is worshiping Daniel, right? And I guess we could, in some sense, say, because everything that he's doing here, from falling on his face, prostrate before Daniel, bringing, presenting an offering of incense to him and so forth.

Those are obviously things that are done in relation to worship. Certainly in pagan worship, as well as in correct worship.

Humility, offerings, and so forth. And yet, it becomes clear as you read on that Nebuchadnezzar is not, if he is paying him some respect or even to the point of some worship, it's not because he thinks that Daniel is some kind of deity.

[2 : 45] It is because he's going to give credit to Daniel's God. So let me go ahead and read. The king answered Daniel and said, Truly, your God is the God of gods.

That's quite a confession, isn't it? The God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret. Now, you know, the question is, is Nebuchadnezzar, did he become a believer here in Yahweh God?

Well, not necessarily so. It may, you know, just on the face of it, and if you just take these verses out of the greater context, really out of the book itself, you'd have to take it out of the entire book, at least that portion of it that pertains to Nebuchadnezzar.

If you did that, then maybe you could say that Nebuchadnezzar became a true believer. But he's not necessarily acknowledging God as the one and only God here.

He is just simply acknowledging him as the God of all gods. And so he still has an openness to all the other gods. I mean, you know, the Babylonians, and it's true of most of the idolatrous pagan societies and cultures that have lived, they have a multiplication of gods, many, many gods.

[4 : 06] And so even those religions that believe in a multiplicity of gods, they usually have a hierarchy of gods.

You know, there's one that's the greatest. I mean, you think of the Greeks, and who would be the greatest god of the Greeks? Zeus, all right? So there's always this hierarchy of gods.

And so Nebuchadnezzar just admitting that Daniel's God is truly a god. I mean, he's truly, truly God.

And he's not only that, but he is the god of all gods. Because, you remember, he paraded all of these other magicians and astrologers and all of the wise men, all of his counselors, all of those who were in charge of administering the pagan worship of the Babylonians, those who were the

experts on all the various gods and so forth.

And none of them could, first of all, identify or describe the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. And none of them certainly, I mean, they couldn't even get to first base. They couldn't go even from there and give the interpretation of the dream.

And so all the other, in effect, all the other gods kind of failed him in this. And so Daniel's God is the God of gods because he was the only God who could accomplish what he was looking for.

[5 : 29] And so he's giving respect to Daniel. And none of that, because it's not just lip service, because then next he gives reward. Reward is given to Daniel.

So first respect and then reward. And verse 48, Then the king promoted Daniel, promoted him, and gave him many great gifts, which, by the way, was what he promised to the one who could, you know, tell him what his dream was and then interpret it.

All right, so he gave him many gifts. And he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon. That's a big deal.

Really big deal. The Babylonian Empire, at this time, kind of early stage of the Babylonian Empire, included many provinces, conquered lands, and nations that were brought under the rule of the Babylonian Empire.

And so Daniel is given the responsibility to be a ruler over the whole province of Babylon. What would that be? That would be the key province in the Babylonian Empire, because it would include the capital city of Babylon, which is Babylon, okay?

[6 : 53] Well, this is the seat of government for the Babylonian Empire. So this province, Daniel is given rulership over that whole province, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.

So those two things, pretty incredible thing that Nebuchadnezzar would do this. I mean, really, in effect, all of those wise men, at least those that were left, because I think a bunch of them were snuffed out after they couldn't produce, you know.

Still many, many hundreds and maybe thousands of these kind of chief counselors and wise, so-called wise men and astrologers and all those. And so Daniel is now in charge of all of that. They probably would have had a hierarchy of leadership there, you know. They would have, you know, some that were, you know, in charge of the astrologers, someone in charge of the, you know, the other wise men, so many counselors.

And Daniel was given authority over all of them. Pretty incredible. And as Daniel petitioned the king, I mean, it goes even further than this.

[8 : 00] He petitioned the king and sent Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, his three Hebrew friends, buddies. And he petitioned the king and it was granted, it doesn't say that, but it's implied, granted that the king would put Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

So they are kind of under, or administrators under Daniel. And then, but Daniel, then it ends with this, but Daniel sat in the gate of the king, which was simply an expression of that day, of that culture, expression that meant that Daniel came into the palace.

He was in the king's court. He was, I mean, he's up there among the high muckety-muck of the Babylonian empire, you know. And so he not only lives in the palace, but his office is there.

That's a pretty big deal. So the respect given to Daniel, the reward given to Daniel, and I wanted to put that in there because some of this really is, this information is given to us at the close of chapter 2 to help introduce some of what's going to take place in chapter 3.

So we'll be reminded of these things that were done for Daniel and for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as we get into chapter 3. And then I wanted to conclude with three theological truths and that we can, we learn from this chapter, from chapter 2.

[9 : 49] Now you have to kind of remember as we, as you think back what we covered in this chapter. But here they are. God is sovereign over kings and the affairs of this earth. All of them.

Even the most wicked of kings. All right. So remember that. God is sovereign over kings and the affairs, all the affairs of this earth. That becomes very clear, clearly revealed in this chapter, but really revealed all throughout scripture.

Second, God is omniscient, knowing all things, including the future, and at times chose to reveal the future to human beings.

And he did that with Daniel, of course, and has done that with all of his prophets down through the Old Testament and really on into the new until God's word was completed.

All right. So he's sovereign over all the kings and affairs of the earth. You know, he's the one putting up all these kingdoms that were represented by this statue. And in his omniscient, he knows all things, even the future.

[10 : 52] And then third, empires will arise on the earth until the end. But God's glorious kingdom will surely come and all the wickedness of earthly rulers will cease one day.

And that's just been part of history all down through the ages. Okay. Now we're ready to get into chapter three. And I want to go ahead and read chapter three so that we can familiarize ourselves once more really about this story that is familiar.

This is one of those, you know, stories in the book of Daniel that we learned when we were just kids. And that is, if you grew up in the church, you certainly heard this story many times through Sunday school and so forth.

So let me go ahead and read it. Nebuchadnezzar, the king, made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its width, six cubits.

He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, would be just rulers, some rulers, a level of rulership, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces.

[12 : 25] That is, all the provinces of Babylon. To come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. That's an important phrase.

Who set this image up? King Nebuchadnezzar did. And that tells us a great deal about what this image was all about. Probably what it looked like as well.

So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers of the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication.

And of course they would. They were commanded by Nebuchadnezzar. So they gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And, you know, it's a little redundant there, but that's for purpose.

Keep it in our minds that it was Nebuchadnezzar set this image up. That Nebuchadnezzar had set up. All right, then a herald cried aloud.

[13 : 26] I mean, all kings have heralds. You know, to go throughout their kingdom and to speak in behalf of the king under the authority of the king, a message, whatever the message might be.

So then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, all peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. So at that time when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

There's that phrase again. Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews, the Hebrews. They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever.

So they're, you know, they're sucking up to him here. You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery in symphony with all kinds of music shall fall down and worship the gold image.

[15 : 01] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.

Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and fury gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?

Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, and symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made good.

It is good for you. But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?

[16:15] That's a good question. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. They don't have any reason to answer the king.

If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

And Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the burning, fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments and were cast in the midst of the burning, fiery furnace.

Therefore, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[17:35] And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace. Then king Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?

They answered and said to the king, True, O king. Look, he answered, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt and the form of the fourth is like the son of God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning, fiery furnace and spoke, saying, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high God, come out, come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came from the midst of the fire and the satraps and ministers, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power, the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected and the smell of fire was not on them.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, his servants who trusted in him and they have frustrated the king's word and yielded their bodies that they should not serve nor worship any God except their own God.

Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces and their houses shall be made in ash because there is no other God who can deliver like this.

[19:17] Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Alright, so, interesting story, isn't it? And before we get into the text and I guess really into my outline and we're not going to get all the way through this tonight at all but before we do let me answer a couple of obvious questions and I don't know if they're questions you would have had.

These are at least two questions that, you know, after I read the story two questions that come to my mind and the first one is where did Nebuchadnezzar get this idea?

The idea for a golden statue? I mean, where did he come up with that? I mean, it wasn't very long really there's not much time not much time has elapsed here. Don't, you know, there's some scholars that want to say well this is, you know, this is kind of a story that came much, much later in Nebuchadnezzar's history and his reign but no, this occurred early in his tenure as king of Babylon and really in succession to his experience with Daniel and Daniel interpreting his dream and so forth.

This just comes pretty close right after that. So where did Nebuchadnezzar come up with this idea of building this tall statue? Well, he didn't take much imagination to know that he got it from his dream.

He got it from his dream and I guess specifically we'd have to say from Daniel's interpretation of the dream and I guess you know though we can't say definitively but perhaps the thought was already kind of in his mind as he was trying to interpret his own dream.

[21:18] You know, maybe this statue, this grand statue, maybe that's me and so forth. But anyway, he got it from the dream because you remember it's this great image, this is what his dream was, this statue or whatever it was.

The great image had a head of gold right? Now Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar remember in Daniel chapter 2 verse 38 you are this head of gold.

you're this head of gold. So he got this idea from the dream. And we'll talk more about that as we go along. But it's obvious this is where he got the idea from his dream.

The second question, and this is probably one that is more important, and that is where was Daniel in this? Have you ever wondered about that? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego they would not bow down to this image.

Well what about Daniel? Did Daniel bow down? Where was Daniel? Why was he not in the fiery furnace with his Hebrew brothers? Well the answer goes back to something we started with tonight as we looked at the closing verses of chapter 2.

[22 : 30] The answer is obvious that Daniel just wasn't present. He wasn't there when this took place. See this didn't happen in Babylon, the city of Babylon.

Chapter 2 verse 49 remember it says Daniel sat in the gate of the king, which means that Daniel was in the palace in Babylon.

He was a member of the king's court. He was there in the palace and the king, where was he at this time? Well he was not in Babylon. The king was according to chapter 3 verse 1 was in the plain of Dura.

Some scholars speculate that it might have been 60 miles south of Babylon, still in the province of Babylon but not near the city.

He was down there in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon which of course was where the image was put up. A lot of speculation as to why the image was put there.

[23 : 35] Well probably because this kind of gets into what we'll talk about here in a minute about who the image represented and it represented Nebuchadnezzar himself.

I mean he's really kind of making himself a deity. And so they've already got in Babylon got all these other statues and shrines and such to all the various gods and so he wanted to put it kind of out there by itself so it wouldn't kind of be obscured from all the other idols that would be in Babylon.

So the king is down there and so Daniel was governing the city of Babylon while the king is away. I mean somebody has to keep things going you know while the king is out of town.

So that's a pretty simple answer I think to that and then according to chapter 2 verse 49 Daniel remember petitioned the king and set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon that's what it says which would have included the plain of Dura where the golden image had been placed and so since this area would have been under their jurisdiction whatever capacity that was exactly we don't really know but it would be under their jurisdiction it's likely that they would have been present when the image was dedicated in fact it would have been mandatory for them to be there.

Verse 2 the king Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together all of the I don't have to read it again all of the leaders in Babylon and not just in that province province of Babylon where the capital city was but all the provinces had come together and so certainly Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have been there.

[25 : 23] So there's just a couple of questions that I think we should answer before we really get into it. Alright so getting into the outline of the passage first one we have about five minutes to cover it.

The Hebrews would not bow, that's number one, they would not bow. Now it all starts, the story all starts with really I think clearly is the deification of the king.

The deification of the king. The image represented obviously was an idol of course. Now this image was gold, it wasn't solid gold, the image was made of wood and overlaid with gold and this would have been, was, the standard way of doing it.

It didn't make things solid gold but it was, you know, this huge statue was made out of wood and then overlaid with gold. The image was huge, it was 90 feet high.

The Bible says 60 cubits. 90 feet high, that's tall obviously. Pretty hard to miss it, which was the idea of course.

[26 : 46] And 9 feet wide. Alright, now I want you to imagine just on the face of it an image 90 feet tall but only 9 feet wide.

Wouldn't that be a little odd looking? Wouldn't you think it'd be a little odd? If you just take it at face value there, if the image is of a man, obviously it doesn't say that, this image that Nebuchadnezzar

set up, but I think, you know, it's pretty well implied here and safe to say that this is an image of a man.

And I think specifically of Nebuchadnezzar, I think he used his own face on that. And so if that's the case, then if we take the measurement of face value, the statue would be pretty strange looking.

A little skinny and very tall. Now 9 foot is not skinny, but the dimensions, 90 foot high, 9 foot wide, would be strange. I read one scholar speculated that it was probably like a totem pole.

You know, a totem pole where it was skinny and had faces on it, or at least in this case, one face at the top, but kind of like a totem pole. But probably not. It's likely that the width of 9 feet refers to a base, the base for it.

[28 : 16] And that's why I included this picture. Did I get the picture on there? All right, you got it on there. Is it in color? Well, what do you know? I want to make sure you knew it was a gold image. So it's just a picture, but you can see all these people bowing down, the three guys standing up.

That's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, of course. But what I wanted to call your attention to, and this probably is more correct, this statue would be standing on a base, a pedestal kind of thing. In fact, the pedestal may have been even taller than what this picture represents. so that the figure that was standing on top of the pedestal, however tall it was, would be in the right proportions of a human image.

And so base and statue all together be 90 feet tall, and the base would be 9 feet wide, and the base could be 20, 30, 40 feet.

Because the idea is to have that image up high so everybody could see it, not just the head but the whole thing. So a base and then the statue on top of that.

[29 : 32] The whole idea is that the image was made in the likeness of Nebuchadnezzar, and I have to be honest with you, we don't really know that.

There's an assumption here, and I think it's a pretty safe assumption, and I say we don't know that because the Bible record here is just not all that detailed.

It's an image, but Nebuchadnezzar just repeatedly, the image that Nebuchadnezzar, now you know Nebuchadnezzar didn't make the thing. He had it made, had it set up, but his name, throughout the text here, is connected directly with the image every single time.

And I think it's safe to say that it was in the image, the likeness of King Nebuchadnezzar, and he would, obviously would not have been the first king, pagan king, throughout the history that did such a thing.

They all did that. And so, I think Nebuchadnezzar's desire, pretty apparent, if you just kind of put chapter 2 and chapter 3 together, his dream was of a mighty statue and the head of pure gold.

[30 : 53] And remember, Daniel had told him that the head of gold represented him, his reign, over the kingdom of Babylon. And Daniel was very specific in chapter 2, verse 37, he said, O king, you, O king, are king of kings.

He loved that part, don't you think? You king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory.

And wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, the birds of the heaven, he has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. Which means of the known world of the day, he ruled over it all.

And actually, at the time when he had the dream, that had not yet been accomplished, but by the time, the end of his reign, he would be king over all of the known world.

Now, Daniel's telling the truth here. It's true. But I think all that went to Nebuchadnezzar's head. And so, he had a 90-foot image of himself erected upon a tall pedestal, not just with a head of gold, but the whole body, the whole thing is gold.

[32 : 13] So, I think it's pretty clear. B, and I'll give one more in here, the dedication of the king's image.

So, Nebuchadnezzar dedicated, he deified his image as an object of worship.

I mean, that's clear. All right? Thousands, thousands of leaders, we don't know how many, hundreds and thousands, I think thousands of leaders were summoned, they were commanded to come.

Leaders from throughout the entire empire, they were commanded to stand. You can just visualize this, can't you? they're all commanded to come to this place, this plain of Dura, where the image has been set up.

We don't know if there was anything else there. And so, they're all standing before it. This is what was commanded. And they're standing before this image, and they're commanded to come at its dedication.

[33 : 26] This is going to be a dedication service here. And you need to consider that these would be people from all different languages and cultures and nations, nationalities, different various religions.

All of them, of course, except for the Hebrews, would have been pagan religions. But they would be all various different religions. So, Nebuchadnezzar would bring them all together in one religion, the worship of himself.

And so, there's the dedication of the king's image. Let me get one more in here. The decree of the king. The decree, Nebuchadnezzar commanded everyone to worship his image.

His worship. Verse 4, Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded. Old people, nations, and languages.

So, they're all different people. Many of them conquered people as well as Babylonians. That at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, psaltery, in symphony.

[34 : 49] So, there's great music going on here. All kinds of music. You shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. A couple of applications I would throw in here and then we'll be finished for tonight.

But, first of all, you know, as a herald, as a herald of God, which is what I am, you know, the New Testament uses the word herald a number of times to describe the service of pastor and preacher. we're heralds. As a herald of God, I don't speak for the government. I don't speak for the government. I speak for God.

And quite often the message of God is different than the message of the government. In fact, we're living to see it become more and more different, diametrically opposed. Here's a herald speaking for his government, but as a herald of God, I don't speak for the government, I speak for God.

As a herald, I don't serve the wishes of my government. I serve God and his wishes. So this is kind of striking why, you know, this word herald means a lot to me.

[36 : 05] Think of the correlation there, the herald that speaks for a king. I mean, certainly there is some instruction there on the herald of God.

I speak for him and I speak with his authority. It's not my authority, it's the king's authority, King Jesus. Not my words, but his words.

But, you know, compare that to some heralds of our day who are not speaking for God any longer. And the other thing is this thing about music I think is kind of interesting because it's repeated so many times.

And, you know, notice how music is used to manipulate the crowd. Do you know how powerful music is? It's a powerful thing, powerful medium music is.

And, you know, you can just kind of manipulate people with music. I mean, can't you? And if you really think about it, how much false doctrine is accepted in the church through the medium of music?

[37 : 24] I'm not against music. I love music. But it's not the melody that's the important part. And it's not the instrumentality that is the most powerful part of it.

Or the most important part. It's the substance of the words. it's just amazing to me how, you know, you can get a group of Baptists to sing something that's not biblical.

But then when the preacher gives up, if he were to say the same thing in his teaching, that's not true. But music, it lends itself, we're just kind of accepting of it. And we get all emotional and we get kind of, you know, wrapped up in it.

And then finally, under the decree of the king, Nebuchadnezzar put some teeth to his command to worship his image. Verse 6, And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace.

So there was a great deal of incentive there for these, you know, these wise men and government officials to bow down to their king.

[38 : 34] If not, they're going to be thrown into a fiery furnace.