

LESSON 13

One of the points I made in the last lesson was that the eternal kingdom established in Acts 2 was a restored kingdom. As I said, there was certainly much about that eternal kingdom that was new, but there was also an aspect of that eternal kingdom that was not new — Jesus did not get a new throne. Instead, Jesus reigns from the throne of David under the unconditional Davidic covenant of Psalm 89 — and the Bible speaks of that reign as a restoration of the Davidic throne.

Acts 15:15-17 — *And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.*

Those verses are speaking about the church, and particularly about the unity of Gentile and Jewish Christians in the church. Notice the language of verse 16 — I will build again that which is fallen down; I will build again the ruins; I will set it up. That is language of restoration; not language of creation. God is building something up that had fallen down. What was that thing? The Bible tells us — it was the throne of David. That is the aspect of the eternal kingdom that was restored. Luke 1:32 tells us the same thing — “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”

When I say that the eternal kingdom of Acts 2 is a restored kingdom, this is all I mean by that statement. It is just another way to look at the kingdom, and possibly

one that we have not considered before. (Jesus showed us the kingdom from many different angles: mustard seed, pearl of great price, etc.)

Another way to approach the issue is to start with the question in Acts 1:6 — “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Notice that verse 6 actually uses the word “restore.” In Acts 1:6, we are faced with a threshold question — was that a good question or a bad question? I think the evidence suggests it was a good question:

- The apostles had had their minds opened by Jesus to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45).
- Jesus had just spoken to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God for 40 days (Acts 1:3).
- Jesus’ answer in Acts 1:7-8 gives no indication that the apostles were wrong — but only that it was not for them to know the time when it would occur.
- As we have already seen, there is a sense in which the kingdom was a restored kingdom, and in fact Peter will mention the throne of David in the next chapter (Acts 2:29-30).

So if Acts 1:6 was a good question, what can we learn from it?

First, we can infer from verse 6 what Jesus told them about the kingdom during those 40 days. If they are asking when the kingdom will be restored, then it seems very likely that Jesus had told them that the kingdom was going to be restored.

Second, if verse 6 is a good question, then we know that in some sense the kingdom is a restored kingdom. In fact, verse 6 says it would be restored to Israel. What had Israel lost? What needed to be restored? Israel no longer had a son of David on the throne, and that had to be restored to fulfill the unconditional promise in Psalm 89.

That restoration (the restoration of the throne of David spoken about by the prophets and confirmed in the New Testament) happened in Acts 2. That is what Jesus tells us in Acts 1:8 and in Luke 24:49.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, we discover what it means to take a stand for the Lord and to refuse to compromise with the gods of this world. We also meet three young men who are truly profiles in courage.

Two of the central themes of this book are the absolute sovereignty of God and his love for his people. God is our loving king. The apocalyptic sections of Daniel will portray these attributes of God with signs and symbols. In this chapter (as well as in Chapters 5 and 6) we have historical demonstrations of these attributes.

As with Revelation, the book of Daniel is a book of assurance. God is telling his people that despite what they might think, they have not been forgotten. We must see the book in this context if we are to understand it properly.

In Chapter 2, God made known his great **wisdom**. Here, he will reveal his great **power**. Chapter 3 in this way will again support the overarching theme of the book of Daniel: In spite of present appearances, God is in control! That is a good lesson for all of us.

Daniel 3:1

**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.

The king makes a giant golden image and sets it up before the people. Daniel does not inform us whether the image was of a god or of the king himself, and commentators differ on that question.

The gold of this statue links this event with the dream in Chapter 2 in which the king was the head of gold. Perhaps this link is a clue that the statue was indeed of the king, though historians tell us that Mesopotamian kings rarely presented themselves as gods, and we have no other evidence that Nebuchadnezzar ever did so. Also, if the king considered himself divine, then why build a statue of himself for people to worship when he was there in person to be worshiped? More likely perhaps is that the statue's likeness was of one of Babylon's gods, probably the principal god, Marduk.

Notice that it did not take long for Nebuchadnezzar to forget those newly found religious insights that we saw at the end of Chapter 2.

Of course, like all polytheists, he probably felt that the Jews should be capable of having multiple loyalties and worshipping multiple gods. The Babylonian's polytheism is very strange to us. But our monotheistic view would have been just as strange to them. The idea of "one true God" was not something they understood.

When men create a religion, they create many gods. We see it over and over again in history. That the Jews worshiped one God is an indication that their religion was not created by man, but was instead received by man from that one true and living God. If Israel had dreamed up their religion, then they (like all of their ancient neighbors) would have had many different gods, as in fact we see them doing when they departed from God to serve false gods and idols.

Deuteronomy 6:4 — *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.*

That verse was revolutionary! Unheard of in the ancient world! And fast forward to Ephesians to see the importance of that revolutionary verse to us:

Ephesians 4:5-6 — *One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

There is one God. We need to stop and reflect on that more often. The only reason we know there is only one God is because that one God revealed himself to mankind long ago.

The similarity between this image and the one in Nebuchadnezzar's dream seems to be more than a coincidence. Recall that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold in his dream. If the image was of the king himself then it seems he was not satisfied with being just the head—he wanted to be the whole image! Out of all that Daniel told him, Nebuchadnezzar seems to have only remembered the statement “You are the head of gold.” (We also have our favorite verses...)

Perhaps the king was saying to Daniel's God, “OK. Here is the image. Now where is your big stone?” (Daniel's prediction that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be replaced had probably not set too well with him.)

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was a very common one: He intended to boost his own political power through the use of religion. We see this happen today when politicians espouse religious views when running for office that are quickly forgotten once that office is obtained. A characteristic of idolatry is that the idol serves the worshiper to achieve the worshiper's aims.

How large was the image? It was 60 cubits tall and 6 cubits wide. At 18 inches per cubit, that means the image was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. The height is about the same as the date-palms that still grow in the plains of Iraq (90 feet), and it was almost as slender, which means it looked more like an obelisk than a traditional

statue. Rising to a height of roughly a nine-story building, and expanding to a width of nine feet, the statue was enormous, but it may have looked more like a totem pole.

Why 60 by 6? We have already mentioned that the Babylonian number system was base 60 (unlike our own base ten). Also, when you study Revelation, you find that six has a symbolic meaning. The number seven denotes perfection and completion, and the number six denotes something that is hopelessly short of perfection. In Revelation, the beast of Rome (a new Babylon) was given the number 666. Rome, like Babylon, thought it was great and powerful, but it was hopelessly short of perfection. The numbers here are actual measurements, but the symbolism may apply nevertheless, and, if so, then in Revelation we may have a symbolic link with the literal measurements found here.

Liberal critics see the size of the image as a problem, claiming that the disproportionate proportions would have made the image look preposterous. Too tall? The colossus at Rhodes was taller (70 cubits compared to 60 cubits). Perhaps the image was on top of a large pedestal. Evidence for such a base may have been discovered by the French archaeologist Oppert, who located the remains of a brick structure (45 feet square and 20 feet high) twelve miles southeast of Hillah (about four miles south of ancient Babylon), which he believed formed the pedestal of this colossal image.

They also complain that there would not have been enough gold in all of Babylon to make such a large image, but where does it say that the image was solid gold? Like smaller statues that have survived, this one was no doubt gold plated. Compare the following description from Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:19 — *The idol! a workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains.*

The construction of this large image is yet another facet of this book that points to an early date.

Archaeological discoveries have shown that Nebuchadnezzar's building projects extended to some of the ancient Sumerian cities such as Ur of the Chaldees. Most feel that Dura (meaning "walled place") was a suburb of Babylon.

In these areas, Nebuchadnezzar was a religious reformer. Excavations have shown that when Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt religious temples, he removed the special rooms where the priests conducted their secret ceremonies and replaced them with areas where all could come and view the procedures. Nebuchadnezzar's reforms thus centered around permitting the public to participate in the religious ceremonies that had formerly been secret. This seems to be what occurred in here in Daniel 3. Sir Leonard Wooley wrote the following:

What was there new in the king's act? Not the setting up of a statue, because each king in turn had done the same; the novelty was the command for general worship by the public: for a ritual performed by priests the king is substituting a form of congregational worship which all his subjects are obliged to attend.

How did the author of Daniel know about this new phase of worship that began under Nebuchadnezzar if Daniel had been written 400 years later?

Daniel 3:2-3

2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, 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 counsellors, 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.

From Nebuchadnezzar's viewpoint, it was inconceivable that any reasonable person could refuse this simple demonstration of loyalty to the king. We experience the same sort of incredulity today. How could you possibly be opposed to gay "marriage"? Surely you don't really believe everything you read in the Bible! What, you don't drink? What do you mean you don't believe in evolution? And I think that they, as with Nebuchadnezzar, are genuinely shocked. As our society descends into the abyss, we will find ourselves increasingly different — as it should be.

Let's look at the list of titles in verse 2. The KJV has "the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces." The RSV has "the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces."

The titles used in this section point to a well-organized bureaucracy.

- **Satrap or Prince:** Persian term for "realm protector."
- **Prefect or Governor:** Lieutenant governors.
- **Governor or Captain:** Lord of an administrative district. Malachi 1:8 says that the province of Judea was administered by a "governor."
- **Counselor or Judge:** Persian term for "counsel-giver." This term is unique to Daniel in all known Aramaic literature.

- **Treasurer:** Persian term for “treasure bearer.”
- **Justice or Counsellor:** Persian term for “law bearer.”
- **Magistrate or Sheriff:** Persian term for “over chief.” The terms for “judges” and “magistrates” occur so far only in Daniel and in Aramaic documents of the sixth and fifth century.
- **Provincial Officials or Rulers:** General term for government officials.

Note that five of these terms are Persian. This use of Persian words is seen by some as a problem since this episode from early in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign predates the Persian conquest by nearly 70 years.

However, we have already been told that Daniel lived to see the Persian conquest. Thus, it seems most likely that Daniel wrote the book during the Persian rule and substituted the then current Persian titles for the older Aramaic terms.

Another possibility is that (as with some Greek musical terms) some Persian titles had already made their way into use among the Chaldeans.

The use of these words points to an early date for the book of Daniel. By the second century BC some of these Persian loan terms had become obsolete and could no longer be correctly translated by the Alexandrian Jews.

Daniel 3:4-7

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 musick, 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. 7 Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

The satirical effect of this section is clear. As one commentator wrote:

Here are all the great ones of the empire falling flat on their faces before a lifeless obelisk at the sound of a musical medley, controlled by the baton of King Nebuchadnezzar.

This command applied to all people of every nation and language. It was apparently Nebuchadnezzar's intention to unite his kingdom under one religion. We will see this later with Rome (the first century Babylon) first with Caesar worship, and much later with the Roman version of Christianity under Constantine.

Lesson for us: As Christians, we must remain involved in our society, and we have a responsibility to vote and participate in our government to do our best to maintain avenues for spreading the gospel. But we need to tread very carefully when the government wants to get involved with us and tries to use us for its own ends — and we will see more and more of that. What governmental persecution cannot accomplish, a governmental embrace often can.

When the music started, every person was to fall down and worship the image.

Let's look at the musical terms in verse 5. The KJV has "cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer" while the RSV has "horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe."

- "Cornet" or "Horn" is the only musical term found here that is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament.
- "Flute" or "Pipe" may come from the Hebrew word meaning to hiss or whistle.
- "Harp" or "Lyre" is a loan word from the Greek *kithara*.
- The term "Sackbut" or "Trigon" comes from the Greek word used in the Septuagint meaning a triangular harp.
- "Psaltery" or "Harp" is the Greek *psalterion* and also refers to a stringed instrument.
- The term translated "Dulcimer" or "Bagpipe" may not be an instrument at all, but may simply mean "in unison." Others think it refers to a percussion instrument.

As we discussed in our introductory lessons, Daniel 3:5 (which is in the Aramaic section) contains three words of Greek origin, all of which are musical terms — harp, sackbut, and psaltery. It is claimed that such words could only have been used after Greek influence had spread throughout Asia after the conquest by Alexander the Great — which some argue indicates a late date for the book. But how much cultural spread does it require to learn three new words? If the book had been written 400 years later, then wouldn't we expect to find many Greek words instead of only three?

There are twenty Persian words and three Greek words in Daniel. Does this make sense if Daniel had been written during the Greek empire and long after the Persian empire? (By 170 BC, a Greek speaking government had controlled Palestine for 160 years.) One author has said:

It is the fewness of the Greek words, coupled with the fact that they are only the names of musical instruments, that must prove fatal to the critics' theory that the book was written in 165 BC.

Experts now agree that Greek culture had penetrated the Near East long before the Neo-Babylonian period. The terms may have been introduced by Greek traders before the rise of the Persian empire. The Elephantine papyri is a fifth century Aramaic document that contains a number of Greek words. It is significant that the terms are all musical terms. Such terms are frequently borrowed when the instruments they describe become known.

In verse 6 we finally reach the punitive elements of the king's decree — those who do not fall down and worship the image will be cast immediately into the fiery furnace.

The furnaces in Babylon were used to fire the bricks that were used to build the city. As we mentioned before, each brick bore the name and image of Nebuchadnezzar, and many can be seen today in the British museum. These may have been fired in the very furnace spoken of here. The fuel was charcoal, and it burned at a very high temperature. Many large brick kilns have been excavated outside Babylon. The furnace would have been enclosed, since the technology of raising heat by forcing a draught requires it. Here is how one commentator has described the furnace:

It resembles a railway tunnel blocked at one end but with an entrance at the other. Uprights at frequent intervals support the dome and serve as ventilation shafts also. Charcoal provides the heat, and it is estimated that the temperature would have been 900 to 1000 °C.

Death by burning at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar is not unique to this event. Jeremiah also speaks of it.

Jeremiah 29:22 — *Because of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: The Lord make you*

like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire.

This has always been the world's message to God's people: Comply or face the consequences! The world still has its fiery furnaces, and it still loves to frighten God's people with them. If you step out of line in our politically correct but godless society, you too can expect to be cast immediately into a fiery furnace!

Daniel Moments

In an earlier lesson I talked about the Daniel Moments that we all face. Those are moments where we have an opportunity to stand up and be counted as someone who is on God's side. They are opportunities for us to show our loyalty to God and our refusal to compromise with God's enemies.

As this nation continues its decline into a moral abyss, we can expect those Daniel Moments to increase. Here are some recent examples that I recently received in an email:

- A Christian (where the term is being used broadly) photographer in New Mexico was fined \$6700 for declining to photograph a lesbian commitment ceremony.
- A Christian baker in Oregon is facing both civil and criminal penalties, including jail time, for declining to bake a cake for a gay "wedding" ceremony. Her business has closed.
- A Christian florist in Washington is being sued by the state attorney general for declining to prepare an arrangement for a gay "wedding" ceremony.
- Craig James was fired by Fox Sports Southwest after only one day on the job for expressing his support for traditional marriage while he was a candidate for the United States Senate.

- A student was dismissed from the counseling program at Augusta State University for her religious reservations about the homosexual lifestyle.
- The Wildflower Inn in Vermont was fined \$30,000 and forced to shut down its wedding reception business after declining to host a lesbian ceremony.
- A student was kicked out of a doctoral program in education at Roosevelt University for expressing in class her belief that homosexuals are not born that way.

As we see in Daniel 3, these Daniel Moments likewise include an opportunity to recant after being informed upon by modern day Chaldeans.

Very soon, homosexual so-called “marriage” will be legal in every state, including Texas. [In fact, sadly, it was so soon that it happened between when this class was presented and when these notes were prepared.] Yet neither Texas nor the United States defined “marriage” — and neither can redefine it. Marriage was defined by God long ago, and that definition will never change.

We can expect increased hostility and pressure from the world to conform, but we must not.

Romans 12:2 — *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

That verse should be the starting point whenever we are faced with a Daniel Moment!

Daniel 3:8-12

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 musick, 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.

The “Chaldeans” in verse 8 clearly resented the “certain Jews” who had been given power over them in Chapter 2. Now was the time for revenge!

They quote the king’s edict word for word and then inform him that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have paid no heed to the king or to his decree. Notice the language that is used: “These men, O king, have not regarded **thee**: they serve not **thy**

gods, nor worship the golden image which **thou** hast set up.” They are appealing to the king’s sense of vanity. The disobedience of the three Jews is a personal affront — made even worse in view of all that the king had done for them.

A record from ancient Babylon has been found that may include the names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego included among more than fifty officials listed on a Babylonian text from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Namely, Hananiah (Shadrach) may be associated with Hanunu, designated “chief of the royal merchants”; Abednego (Azariah) with Ardi-Nabu, “secretary of the crown prince”; and Mishael (Meshach) with Mushallim-Marduk, one of the “overseers of the slave girls.”

Except for the work of these informers, Nebuchadnezzar would likely never have known about the defiance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The world is full of people who love to create trouble and then sit back and watch the fun. God has a simple message for such troublemakers:

Proverbs 6:16-19 — *There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, 19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers.*

The phrase “maliciously accused” in verse 8 is a translation of the idiom “eat the pieces of flesh torn off from someone’s body.”

What was the motive of these troublemakers?

First, as we have suggested, they probably enjoyed watching the trouble they had created. Like an arsonist, they set fires and then watched them burn from a distance.

Second, they were jealous. These foreigners had been set up over them by King Nebuchadnezzar, and they had no doubt been looking for a way to get rid of them. Re-

call that Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees. This distant affinity may have contributed to the racial animosity.

Why did these three refuse to worship the giant image? We need look no further than the first two of the Ten Commandments to answer that question:

Exodus 20:3-5 — *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
4 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: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.*

Today we live in an image obsessed culture — one in which the written word is diminishing. In short, we live in a culture that has seen the movie, but has not read the book! God communicates to man with words, not with images. His church needs to always guard against any attempt to exalt images over words.

Daniel 3:13-15

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 musick, 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?

Nebuchadnezzar's response was exactly what these troublemakers wanted. He was in a furious rage. These Chaldeans had pulled his strings, and he had dutifully danced to their tune. The great Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the one who could make people dance or fall down at his whim — but who is dancing on the strings here? Who is playing whom? We need to be on our guard when some troublemaker tries to pull our strings.

Justice would not, however, allow these men to be condemned on just the word of their accusers, so the king gave them an opportunity to recant.

Remember that all of this was occurring in front of the international array of delegates that Nebuchadnezzar had assembled to see his statue. This may also explain the king's "furious rage."