

# CONCERNING THE WAY

January 6, 2009

## LESSON 42: PROPHECY SERIES — THE BOOK OF DANIEL



### Additional notes on the statue's ten toes of iron and clay in Chapter 2:

Some believe the mixture of iron and clay indicates, not a mixture of human ethnic groups, but an unnatural mixing of humans and fallen angels, much like the event before the flood in Genesis 6. The Bible does speak of increasing demonic activity in the last days (Timothy 4:1), so this is a definite possibility. The other intriguing thing about this in our day are the advances in genetics, making possible things like cloning, transgenics, and even experimenting with transhumanism. These advances could play right into a demonic scenario where the Nephilim will return. This is believed to be the main reason God sent the flood to wipe out humanity, because there was a genetics problem. And Jesus said that in the last days it would be as in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37).

The world appears to be headed towards a one-world government. Already there are rumors of talks about joining the EU with some sort of North American Union. It is easy to see how other parts of the world could eventually follow suit. This could possibly result in some kind of ten division setup.

The Club of Rome, The Trilateral Commission, and the Council on Foreign Relations all use a “ten kingdom” administrative model in their plans for the coming world government. In the book of Revelation it is this type of government setup that the antichrist will rule over during the seven year Tribulation period until Messiah Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God. (the stone not carved with hands)

### Chapter 3

**The kingdom of man begun by Nimrod in history, smashed by God at Babel, incarnated by the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and the Romans in our day, the kingdom of man always seeks to create security apart from God. It always seeks to generate a distorted concept of man subduing the earth; it wants to subdue the earth but it wants to subdue the earth on man's terms. It always wants to ignore God's laws and yet not pay the price for ignoring God's laws.**

What does a Christian do when he's in a situation where he says I'm sorry, I cannot go along with this, this violates the Word of God and I am not about to take part in this, and he runs into collision with his employer, or authorities in some area? Daniel 3 is about what happens when you have to say “no”.

**Daniel 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.**

It is estimated that this event took place some 15-18 years after the events of chapter 2. The NASB we're using doesn't translate the cubits, but this statue was at least 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. That would have been a LOT of gold if it were solid, but most scholars agree it was probably gold-plated. Plating statues with gold or silver was common in those times.

Archaeologists found Dura about a century ago southeast of Babylon. It is a fairly level plain, which would allow a lot of people to see the statue. There's a mound there which apparently is the base of this. It's a brick mound and we can tell that there was something big on top of it; it's destroyed now but the mound is still there and apparently that mound formed the pedestal of this great image of Daniel 2.

Now Nebuchadnezzar had reasons for doing this kind of thing. We know that this was a normal thing in the

Ancient East. You can turn to a book like Herodotus, one of the first, supposedly, historians in the world; Herodotus was a Greek, he traveled around the world and he interviewed various people. In the first book of Herodotus, Section 183, you have Herodotus' trips and his interviews in the city of Babylon. Herodotus tells us the following account, not that he saw exactly the image of Daniel 3 but listen to what Herodotus did see:

"Below in the same precinct," of the city of Babylon "there is a second temple, in which is sitting a figure of Jupiter, all of gold. Before the figure stands a large golden table, and the throne whereon it sits, and the base on which the throne is placed, are likewise of gold. The Chaldeans told me that all the gold together was eight hundred talents' weight. Outside the temple are two altars, one of solid gold, on which it is only lawful to offer sucklings; the other a common altar, but of great size, on which the full-grown animals are sacrificed. It is also on the great altar that the Chaldeans burn the frankincense, which is offered to the amount of a thousand talents' weight, every year, at the festival of the God. In the time of Cyrus" that was the man who conquered the city of Babylon, we'll read about him later in Daniel, "in the time of Cyrus," this is a very strange notice, "there was likewise in this temple a figure of a man, twelve cubits high," which is considerably shorter than this one, maybe it was an image derived from this one, "entirely of solid gold. I myself did not see this figure, but I relate what the Chaldeans report concerning it. Darius, the son of Hystaspes, plotted to carry the statue off, but had not the hardihood to lay his hands upon it. Xerxes, however, the son of Darius, killed the priest who forbade him to move the statue, and took it away. Besides the ornaments which I have mentioned, there are a large number of private offerings in this holy precinct."

So what we read in Daniel 3 is not the figment of somebody's imagination. Don't be swayed by the critical attacks that would argue that Daniel 3 is just a sweet little story dreamed up. It fits precisely in the culture and with the times that we know.

Most assume that this was a statue the king made of himself, but the text actually doesn't say that. It also could have been a statue of one of his gods. I think he got the idea from his dream of chapter 2, except that he wasn't about to make it of different metals. He wasn't going to accept God's Word that his kingdom was going to come to an end, so he made this statue out of gold, which is what the Babylonian kingdom part of the dream statue was made of. **He just took the part of God's Word he liked and made a religion out of it.** Wow, how many times has that happened? That seems to be the major temptation of every religious movement – just using the parts we like instead of the whole counsel of God. So Nebuchadnezzar wants to make his dream statue real, but he wants to do it his way.

**Daniel 3:2-3 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. (3) Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.**

There are eight positions of leadership here, and we can be sure that all the important people from all over the empire would have been there to show their allegiance to the king. Satrap was an office just below the king, like a prince or vice-president.

**Daniel 3:4-7 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, (5) that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. (6) "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." (7) Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound**

**of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.**

So when the musical fanfare started, everyone in the area was supposed to bow down and worship this statue. Remember that for most of the people here, this would have been no big deal. They're polytheistic anyway, what's adding one more god to the list? Let's see, worship this idol, or burn in the furnace...hmmm, not a tough decision for most of the Babylonians. It was a big problem for the Jews, however.

Now obviously this is a crisis, the third crisis we've seen in the book. Every chapter in the book of Daniel is a crisis of some sort; one crisis after another of a believer living in Satan's world. In Daniel 3 we have the crisis of Nebuchadnezzar's state religion. The way things are going, this is a situation that we may face someday as Christians in the United States. Fortunately so far in our country we still have freedom of religion, at least in name. Other people in other parts of the world have not been so blessed. There are believers dying and rotting in prisons in various places in the world today. They perish and are imprisoned because they insist upon teaching the Word of God. There are probably more anti-Christian forces in the world at work today than ever before.

What is idolatry? It's simply replacing God with something that is in the creation, some process in the creation, something in our culture, it can be sex, it can be drugs, just culture itself, scientism, it can be all sorts of things.

In verse 5, notice that music is used in conjunction with the worship. Why? Music is the international language. Music would be perfectly understood no matter what language you spoke. Music is the tool of conveying the command to worship. Music is a manipulation device, in other words. You have to be careful because music still is being used as a manipulation device today. The Christian when he performs, when he writes and composes, ought to be very careful that he is not using his music to manipulate. Music is an aid to worship but it shouldn't deliberately try to put some little thoughts in people's minds.

This scene forebodes what will happen in the future when the anti-christ and false prophet come to power. It shows how easy it is to get large numbers of people to worship an idol when their lives are on the line.

**Daniel 3:8-12 For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. (9) They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever! (10) "You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. (11) "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. (12) "There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."**

The interesting thing is that not one mention is made of the presence of Daniel; we see Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego but nothing of Daniel. What has happened to Daniel? Daniel nowhere appears in chapter 3. Knowing his character, surely he did not bow down to the image either. Maybe he was away on business during this time. The Scripture doesn't tell us where Daniel has gone, we just know that he's not here and that introduces an interesting principle about chapter 3.

You'll find yourself in this situation as a believer. You may know a believer you respect, a believer that's mature, a Christian leader that you look up to and people will tend to cluster around that person. And when

God thinks that these believers have enough of the Word of God He will remove that person from them and then try a test on them to see whether they're leaning on the Word of God or whether in fact they are leaning upon the other person. You see, Christian friends who are mature, who are your leaders, people you respect very much can themselves be very dangerous idols for you. So therefore God will put you in a situation where you won't have the opportunity to have another more mature believer around to consult or cry on their shoulder. God will put you in these positions. These boys were put in such a position. They couldn't go in and say Daniel, what do we do now; we never faced this, that furnace is hot, what do we do? Daniel is gone, so all they can do is go directly to the Lord themselves.

God is not picking on these guys. He's trying to get them in a situation where they have got to depend upon the Lord and the Lord alone, like He is trying to work in your life, to get you in a position where you are not going to rely on some person, some gimmick, some investment, something else, that you are going to have to rely upon the Lord alone. And He'll engineer something to work it out, you can be sure of that, and He'll keep on engineering it until you learn the lesson. It's hard but there's a blessing in learning this lesson.

"There are certain Jews" and notice what it says, "whom you have appointed," in other words, you're to blame, you compromised with the Jews, three teenage boys didn't bow their knee, it's a big Jewish plot. That's always the way it is, some ridiculous thing like this. It always happens because Satan wants to erase the Jew from history because he knows that it's through the Jew and through Israel that that last kingdom is going to come back, and that's why Satan will try everything. He always wants to destroy Israel, weaken Israel, destroy the Jew from history, and if Satan could do that he would nullify the prophecies of the Bible.

**Daniel 3:13-15** Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. (14) Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? (15) "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

Nebuchadnezzar obviously was giving them a second chance to obey his decree, he didn't want to kill these young men. And what an ignorant question he's asking at the end of verse 15! He's about to get the answer to his question. Believers are subject to a government and it's laws, as long as they don't violate the laws of God. We can't be subject to a false god. When that happens, you have to choose one or the other. On their own these three young men, without Daniel around to help them, with no parents around to go to, with no teacher of the Word, there's no Jeremiah here, there's nobody to advise them, but they are willing to sizzle in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace if that is necessary, but they are not going to bow down to this foreign power.

**When you have idols that are combined with the government you introduce a crisis of separation of the worst sort. What are we to do as Christians? We are to pray for our nation, 1 Timothy 2, pray that the present state power not combine with idolatry. Where are some danger points on our present modern day scene of combining with idolatry? One is in the area of law, of depriving men from law and changing law into something that any man can do, it's flexible, there's no such thing as enduring principles of law because we have yielded to the god of upward development and chance, all is change, and so there's no steady principles any more. We're in danger of ourselves being jammed into a judicial system in which there are no enduring principles of right and wrong.** *Charles Clough*

Another place where we see this is an attempt to dictate to parents the education of children. There are many in the educational system who want to do this. Pray that it doesn't happen. Pray that the government be hindered in these areas, that these programs would be stopped so we don't have to face what Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are facing here. We see the handwriting on the wall, let's pray that God stops this from happening.

Nebuchadnezzar says at the end, "And who is that God, who is able to deliver you out of my hands?" Remember what he's saying here, is that I am in one to one correspondence with God. Didn't He give me a vision? I am the head of the kingdom. And the reply in verse 15 would seem to indicate that he's not identifying in his mind the God of Daniel with the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He's just saying is there another God who can bother me? I've been given the kingdom and no god is going to take it away from me. Again, remember his error, he's just about to get straightened out real fast. His error was that the God of Israel is like the gods of the world which operate through the state. That's the basis of verse 15. No God is going to bother this state government, this is set up, there's my statue, I have been decreed to be the conqueror of the world, haven't the dreams said that all power in heaven is given into my hands; there's no God that's going to bother me at this point. And so it's a challenge to God's character. Jesus Christ reacts to these kinds of challenges in history because ultimately the person behind these challenges is Satan.

**Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. (17) "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."**

In verse 16, these boys are not being insolent. They are recognizing the authority of the king. But why did they say they didn't need to give an answer? This may be due to several reasons, it may be due to the fact that for one thing it wouldn't have done any good, they realized they're working with a man who's falling apart, verse 13, you can't sit there and reason with this kind of an individual. But there's also a deeper reason, and again this shows a principle of working in the home or on the job, or in various situations you may find yourself in. Consistently through the Bible you will find a very interesting point that when unbelievers get to a point of the rejection of the authority of the Word, the believers in the situation zip it up and say nothing, and begin to act.

For example, do you remember what Jesus said to Pilate? When Jesus was before Pilate, Pilate said, what is truth? Jesus said nothing, He just sat there and looked at him, and Pilate threatened him, he said I have authority over you; and Jesus said nothing. It wouldn't have done any good at that point because they had already rejected the authority of the spoken word, they were beyond that point of reasoning and so the answer is silence. And that's what the boys are saying, we're not going to argue with you.

So Daniel 3:17-18 is the most beautiful expression of faith that these believers are using, and it also has a technique of divine guidance in it for us. No argument, just an announcement, it's done submissively, it's done not trying to deliberately antagonize him but it's a simple statement of defiance.

These men did not know God's will at this point, they weren't sure if he would deliver them or not, but they displayed the attitude every believer should have. This recalls Job's statement in Job 13:15 - "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him."

The principle here is maybe God will do this and maybe God will not. In other words, these boys do not know

for sure what God is going to do. This is very analogous to things you'll see in your Christian life all the time. You'll see a situation and you don't know what God is going to do in that situation. So what do you do when you don't know for sure? You do what these boys are doing, you operate on the known principles of Scripture and leave the results in the Lord's hands. You've got to go on the known, not the unknown. So you start with what you know from the Word of God, act on it and let the Lord pick up the pieces. If the world blows up because you trusted the Lord, let the world blow up, that's His problem, not yours. Your job is to obey the Word, submit to it in faith, and then you just trust the Lord with the rest of it. That's where you get the principle.

**Daniel 3:19-23 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. (20) He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. (21) Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. (22) For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. (23) But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.**

The concept of execution by a burning oven was used in Persia as late as 1662. In 1662 the Persians set up fiery furnaces once again to kill. It was during a time of great famine in Persia and the situation was that the government had imposed wage and price controls. And they threatened any grain merchant who sold his grain for more than the price control, they would put him in the fiery furnace; governmental power used to impose these kinds of things. The Persians always have used the fiery furnace, it's very much part of that area of the world.

If it was like most ancient smelting furnaces, it was probably built like a silo and made of brick, built into a mound or a hillside with draft openings at the lower end and a flue at the top. This furnace must have been a big one, that was built for executions. Apparently the victims were thrown in the opening at the top and you could see inside the openings at the bottom so you could view the executions. The king was so furious, that he had the fire made even hotter, maybe using oil. Instead of roasting the prisoners slowly, this would have killed them instantly, as you can see it did the men who threw them in just by getting too close. The king wanted them killed instantly.

Verse 21 notes some facts that you want to see, they are bound with their clothes on. Normally this was not the process. Nebuchadnezzar has done two things now out of his fierce anger that are going to rebound against him. One, he lost control of his emotions and he fired the furnace too hot. As one commentator said, if he wanted to torture somebody what you do is decrease the heat of the furnace and let them fry. That's the way the martyrs were done in the Middle Ages, they didn't burn them at the stake, all of them, they just lit a fire and held them up close to it, so you just burn slowly, you turn to toast first and then you burned up. That's the way you torture people.

You don't torture them by heating it up seven times, that's doing nothing except wrecking your furnace. So he's going to wreck his furnace; he's going to kill some of his soldiers, and furthermore this whole thing is going to be frustrating. He forgets to strip them because in most cases the prisoners were stripped and just dumped naked into the fire. So all the coats and everything is on and the ropes are placed over the clothing, you've got to see the picture. They are tied together, the ropes are tied around their clothes, so you've got linen in the clothes and linen in the rope, you've got cloth in both; now watch what happens.

**Daniel 3:24-27** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." (25) He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" (26) Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. (27) The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.

Now at this point in Christian tradition there's a gap between verses 23-24 and in the apocrypha there is a section written describing what happened before we get to verse 24. Now this is not the Word of God but it has a basis in ancient Christian tradition. If you have a Roman Catholic friend his Bible will be different from yours; his Bible will not go from verse 23 to 24, there will be a break in it. And there'll be two short sections of Scripture inserted between verse 23 and verse 24. Again, this is not the Word of God, we're not sure that this tradition preserved actually what happened, but what it does preserve is what believers thought about what happened, and that's enlightening. It is not necessarily what happened but what other believers in years gone by, before the time of Christ, thought did happen at this point. And it'll give you an idea of how they thought about angels; it'll give you an idea of how they thought about how God works.

"And they walked in the midst of the fire, praising God, and blessing the Lord. Then Azarias stood up, and prayed on this manner; and opening his mouth in the midst of the fire said, Blessed art thou, O Lord God of our fathers: thy name is worthy to be praised and glorified for evermore: For thou art righteous in all the things that thou hast done to us: yea, true are all thy works, thy ways are right, and all thy judgments truth." And he goes on and describes this, and then interestingly he makes this point, remember this is divine guidance in a prophet-less era. And sure enough, in The Prayer of Azariah, as he goes, he blesses the Lord for this, blesses the Lord for that, then he comes to this verse and he says at this time, no "prince, or prophet, or leader, or burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, or place to sacrifice before thee, and to find mercy. Nevertheless in a contrite heart and an humble spirit let us be accepted. Like as in the burnt offerings of rams and bullocks" etc.

And he goes through the prayer, and then it blends into another book which is called The Song of the Three Young Men. And I won't read it, except the introduction to it. And the introduction kind of fills in what probably happens when these three boys were led up that ladder to the top of the furnace and it tells you how they visualized the angel helping them.

"The king's servants who threw them in did not cease feeding the furnace fires below with naphtha, pitch, tow and brushwood," that shows you what they were using to fire it with. "And the flames streamed out above the furnace forty-nine cubits," that's fifty times one and a half, seventy-five feet the flames are shooting out the top of that thing, and it broke through the top of the furnace and burned the Chaldeans as they were going up. So what had happened was is that this was a masonry type furnace and the masonry was just cracking because of the tremendous heat, the flame just shot right out and got them. So apparently just as they dumped these boys in, the masonry cracked and let the heat out at them. "...it broke through and it burned the Chaldeans as they were going up. "But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and he drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace," where they were, "as though a moist wind were whistling through it. The fire did not touch them at all and caused them no pain or distress," so the fire never even touched them or hurt them."

Now we can't be sure that's what happened, but the Word of God tells us in Daniel 3:24 that something astounding did happen, "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished," now he's sitting out here, he probably has his chair set up so he can watch this, on the menu today are fried Jews, and he's going to try and murder them.

Now how could those boys that were bound with rope be loosened? Very simple, the fire burned the rope but didn't burn their clothes. The very pressure that Nebuchadnezzar built, which would be the fire, killed his men and burned the rope. Do "all things work together for good?" Of course; that fire worked together for good; it killed the soldiers and it burned the rope, the thing that was binding them was burned by the very thing that Nebuchadnezzar was going to use to kill them.

Between verse 25 and 26 is a time gap. How do we know? Because the fire calmed down to the point where he could come back to that furnace door. See the door of the furnace was tremendously hot, and Nebuchadnezzar is going to come up close to the door where he can shout inside. These furnaces are tremendously large, so the pitch and naphtha had burned up now, it's like a gasoline fire, it doesn't last that long, it flares up and then it dies away. It's died away now and now Nebuchadnezzar comes to the mouth and shouts inside the furnace.

And he calls their God the Most High God, he is still pagan, he was still not born again, God is merely the highest among the gods. It's polytheistic terminology. In verse 27, Nebuchadnezzar looks at them as they come out of the furnace, their clothes aren't burned, but their ropes are; and not even the smell of fire was on them. The fire does not touch them, this is the way God does miracles, it's as if they were never even in the furnace.

For the 2nd time Nebuchadnezzar sees a miracle of God. Some believe that the 4th man was the preincarnate Christ, but it was probably an angel, there really isn't any reason to believe it was Christ from the text. God did a miracle here for a purpose. Miracles happen in the Bible in order to glorify God and instruct people about His character. In this case God was vindicating Himself in front of the Babylonians. Because of Israel's constant problem of worshiping idols and rejecting the one true God, and the ease at which Babylon conquered Israel, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had no regard for Israel's God. This may be what God was referring to in Ezekiel 36:

**Ezekiel 36:20-23** "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' (21) "But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. (22) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. (23) "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."

While these words won't be completely fulfilled until the last days, God didn't wait until then to vindicate His name. He did something here that people all over Babylon would hear about. This was something incredible that happened that would get everyone's attention.

While we're on the subject of miracles, let's talk about why God does miracles sometimes and not others. We must always remember that God's will is very individualistic. What God does for one of His children does not mean He will do the same for another. And this doesn't mean He loves one more than the other, nor does it mean one is more godly than the other! For example, God chose to let the apostle James die, but

He delivered Peter (Acts 12:1-11). Both were godly men. Why didn't God send an angel to rescue James like He did Peter? Why did He allow John to live a long life, while Peter's life ended early (John 21:21-22)?

God chooses to act for His own reasons, according to His wisdom, sovereignty, and goodness. If those three men would have died in the furnace, it would have been the good and perfect will of God. But in this case, rescuing them was what was best for them, for the king, the people of Babylon, and what would bring the greatest glory to God.

**Daniel 3:29-30 "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." (30) Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.**

Nebuchadnezzar blesses God, and he now has his answer from verse 15. Once again, this is not a confession of faith, but an acknowledgement of God's power. He sees that this is not some 3rd rate deity, but must be one of the greatest of the gods. Isaiah 43:10-12 – this is what was required for an OT person to be saved. Nebuchadnezzar has not come to the point yet where he recognizes God as the one true God.

You see the act spoke to Nebuchadnezzar's heart far more forcibly than a lot of preaching. The boys just quietly did, they explained what they were doing and why they were doing it, and that was the end of it, no preaching, they just acted and they interpreted their action and told him why and let the chips fall. In the next chapter we'll see how this works on Nebuchadnezzar.

Now let's summarize chapter 3 under these principles that you can use in your Christian life.

1. When God works on a person it may take years to work on them; don't get discouraged; God is working. God can take years to close in on a person. You keep on praying, God will work with them, just don't panic.
2. When you are involved in a separation issue make the character of God the issue, not yourself. To the degree you fail to do this you fail to really work with the Holy Spirit. They can't get to you without going through Christ first. You hide behind Jesus Christ is what you're doing.
3. The most powerful witness in those situations is often an act of trust accompanied by an explanation. Wife may be a believer, husband unbeliever, husband doesn't know why all of a sudden his wife is doing something for him, and every once in a while, not enough to be preachy, the woman can offer an explanation. Why am I doing this? Because Jesus Christ tells me this is the way a woman ought to be in the home, that's why.
4. During times of the silence of God, you will not know which way to go and you're going to have to play it like these guys did, use a principle of Scripture and go from there, regardless of how much you don't know about details. You just take a principle of the Word of God and apply it and let the Lord take it from there. Don't worry if you can't know all the details, you won't know all the details because there's not a prophet around to tell you.
5. Some of your worst trials will come when you are isolated from the believers that can help you the most. Sometimes you will be tested and there will be no one around that is competent to help you, and that is deliberately designed to get you to stop trusting in people and start trusting the Lord and His Word. You've been exposed to the Word, you've taken in more and more doctrine, and now there's a situation where you're going to have to apply it.
6. God can save you out of any situation through the use of angelic agencies, Hebrews 1:14 is a good verse along with Daniel 3. Angelic agencies operate in the physical universe around us, we can't see them but they are the means that God often uses to deliver you. It goes all the way from automobile

wrecks to walking and simply falling on your head. There are all sorts of ways that God can protect you through angelic means.

7. If you put the Lord first you'll get your promotion. These boys were promoted. When they started this chapter they didn't even know if they were going to be alive by the end of the chapter, but they put their faith in God first and their jobs second. And they left their job in the hands of the Lord, and if their employer wanted to fire them, then he'd fire them; that's all right, but they are not going to abandon their testimony for God.

## Daniel 4

**Daniel 4:1-3 Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: (2) "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. (3) "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation.**

Nebuchadnezzar narrates this chapter, and you can see that something has changed him. He starts with his conclusions in these first three verses, and then relates what happened to him. This was 22 years later than the vision of the statue.

**Daniel 4:4 "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace.**

Things were good at this time, there was peace in the kingdom, Babylon was at the height of her glory, and Nebuchadnezzar had everything he could possibly want. He was completely protected and secure.

Archeology shows us that Babylon was a very impressive city. It had double walls extending 12 miles around the city. Each wall was 25 feet thick, they were 40 feet apart, and there were 360 towers along the walls 160 feet apart. The city was dominated by a 7-story ziggurat (step pyramid) 288 feet high. Nearly 60 million fired bricks were used in the construction of this huge tower, and on top of it was the temple of Marduk, containing a solid gold statue of Marduk weighing 52,000 pounds. Then there was the famous Ishtar Gate, 35 feet high, decorated with 557 animals in bright colors against a glazed blue background. A wide procession street ran through the gate to Nebuchadnezzar's palace. His throne room was 171 feet by 56 feet. At the northeast angle of the palace were the "hanging gardens", one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, which the king built for Amytis, his Median wife, as a reminder of her homeland.

Saddam Hussein rebuilt the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, and had plans to continue to rebuild the city, including Nebuchadnezzar's palace. America's invasion of Iraq stopped that construction, but President Bush asked several nations and the U.N. to contribute large sums to Iraqi building projects once the area is secured.

**Daniel 4:5-7 "I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. (6) "So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. (7) "Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.**

Despite the security of his armed fortress and many soldiers on guard, here is something that scared him. Why didn't he call Daniel this time? Maybe something had happened, maybe he forgot that Daniel could interpret dreams, who knows? Nebuchadnezzar was pretty old by this time, maybe he just forgot. So he calls in the native wise men instead, even tells them the dream, and they still can't interpret it.

**Daniel 4:8-9** "But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, (9) 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

Notice the king at this point still doesn't have a true understanding of Israel's God. He calls Daniel the chief of magicians, which makes it even more curious why he didn't call for Daniel. It could be that he was just afraid of Daniel's God or what the interpretation might be, that it would be negative.

### The Tall Tree dream

**Daniel 4:10-12** 'Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great. (11) 'The tree grew large and became strong And its height reached to the sky, And it was visible to the end of the whole earth. (12) 'Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, And the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, And all living creatures fed themselves from it.

We'll see that this tree is symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar and his empire (v. 22). The size and dominance of the tree indicates the greatness of the king. The abundance of the tree indicated the prosperity of the king and the empire, and the provision for the animals indicated the king's provision and protection for the many people that lived throughout Babylon. It's interesting that Ezekiel wrote at about the same time (570 BC) also using the imagery of a tree (Ezekiel 31:1-3, 5, 6, 10-12)

**Daniel 4:13-14** 'I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven. (14) 'He shouted out and spoke as follows: "Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit; Let the beasts flee from under it And the birds from its branches.

OK, well this looks bad for Babylon – the tree is to be chopped down! The word “watcher” emphasizes someone on guard, on alert. It is said to be “a holy one”, which tells us that it's an angel (Daniel 8:13, Zechariah 14:5). These are apparently angels whose job it is to watch what's happening on earth.

Do you see the significance of what's just happened? One angel has given an order to bring down a king, and the largest nation on earth at that time would go down temporarily; now the nation itself would be sustained because of God's grace, which we'll see in a moment. When you stop and see the crises of the world, and if you're going to think Biblically about the crises, you have the Middle East conflicts or you have something happen domestically in the United States, just back off from that a minute and think; these crises may well be due to similar angelic moves today. Why not? The angelic administration hasn't changed because Christ rose from the dead or because modern man in his humanistic psychology can't accept the view; too bad, the angels go right on existing anyway. They don't care whether we can't accept them; it doesn't cancel out their existence. So today's events may be due to the same kind of operation.

**Daniel 4:15-16** "Yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, But with a band of iron and bronze around it In the new grass of the field; And let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, And let him share with the beasts in the grass of the earth. (16) "Let his mind be changed from that of a man And let a beast's mind be given to him, And let seven periods of time pass over him.

Apparently, even though God is going to discipline this kingdom, there will be mercy, as the stump will be

left, and the band of iron could be indicating it will be kept from splitting or deteriorating. Then the dream changes from being about a tree to being about a man, Nebuchadnezzar himself, as we'll see later. The seven periods of time is the unit of time used in Daniel, each period equals one year. So this punishment will last seven years. This unit of time is important, as it will be used later on.

**Daniel 4:17 "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men."**

This sentence is by the decree of the "watchers." Now this doesn't deny God is sovereign, but it shows you the vast power that angelic agencies have. Angelic agencies sentence to doom entire nations; you're going to see another case of that in Daniel 10. So realize, as far as God is concerned in history, when you look at a map of the world, and you see the United States, Canada and so forth, the Biblical way to think is, on top of the boundaries of the United States, is another three dimensional boundary. And in that three dimensional boundary above the two dimensional map is the angelic boundary. That is definitely taught in this book, we'll see that later but here just realize that the angels have fantastic power in history.

There are several other points to observe; first, "that the living may know," so the purpose of various movements in history, this is also reflected in Acts 17:25-26, the purpose of movements in history is to maintain a maximum God-consciousness in the human race, whether it's one culture or another, God jockeys cultures and nations around, vying for power with war and peace. But behind it all is this constant scene being hammered home to man during the times of the Gentiles, that the living may know that God rules among men. How does this work? Frustrating human schemes, whether it's famine and food shortages, whether it's energy shortages, whatever it is, God is constantly at work to make us know that He rules in the kingdom of men.

Second, that He gives it to whomsoever He will, and that is the concept of His sovereignty. God is not determined by anything; you don't use brownie points to bargain with God. Ultimately history goes because God has said it will be this way, period. No one tells God which way to run history; we can petition Him but we don't order it. And He "bestows it on whom He wishes, and He sets it up over the lowliest of men." That last thing is to see that God is a God of grace. He will take the lowest person on the social totem pole and use them to develop His plan on earth. The idea is that God does not necessarily adhere to man's moral religious standards when He operates with these kingdoms.

God makes it clear in this verse why He is going to do this to Nebuchadnezzar. It is to teach the king a lesson – that it is God who is in charge, not Nebuchadnezzar. Now Daniel gives the interpretation.

**Daniel 4:18-19 'This is the dream which I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me its interpretation, inasmuch as none of the wise men of my kingdom is able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for a spirit of the holy gods is in you.' (19) 'Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was appalled for a while as his thoughts alarmed him. The king responded and said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation alarm you.' Belteshazzar replied, 'My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries!'**

Daniel was appalled by this dream, he was afraid to speak the interpretation of the dream. He may have been shocked by the way God was about to intervene. The world will be shocked when the next intervention of God occurs. There will be tremendous shock, men will be astonished, their thoughts will trouble them for the same reason; they are trapped in this uniformitarian human viewpoint and suddenly for God to intervene.... All the people that have been so self-confident in uniformitarian geology, in

evolutionary biology, will suddenly discover it's no longer just an academic debate whether catastrophism is true or not; they'll have the evidence in front of their face.

**Daniel 4:20-22** 'The tree that you saw, which became large and grew strong, whose height reached to the sky and was visible to all the earth (21) and whose foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt and in whose branches the birds of the sky lodged-- (22) it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.

In Matthew 13, Jesus uses the same concept of a tree symbol. If you are a little skeptical about whether the Bible can really be interpreted and you say well, if you take ten people and they interpret the Bible they'll come up with eleven interpretations, that may be true, but not in the basics. If it's really so hopeless that the Bible cannot be interpreted by man, what you are in effect saying is that it is useless to verbally communicate, in which case I would challenge you that anything you write is open to the same objection. If you object that the Scriptures can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways I will respond to you that anything you write can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways; does that stop you from writing? Because the newspaper can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways does that stop the newspaper editor from writing a daily edition? Because vocal words can be misinterpreted, does that stop you from talking to people? Not at all, so obviously you're insincere and hypocritical in the objection that Scripture cannot be interpreted accurately because you only apply that criterion when it comes to God's Word. Why aren't you honest and apply it to every area of communication? If you are going to be an honest skeptic be an honest one and don't talk and don't write, because after all, there might be a multiplicity of interpretations.

In Matthew 13:31 Jesus is illustrating mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 13:31-32** He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; (32) and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

Now that's a familiar parable of Jesus: the kingdom is pictured as a tree, and the birds come to rest in the tree. In Daniel 4 you see precisely the same imagery. There's no subjectivism here, there's no inaccuracy of interpretation, the tree symbol means a kingdom, the common Ancient Near Eastern symbol, and it was understood by anybody who was average intelligence in that day, that a tree represented a kingdom."

Daniel 4:20 is the same thing Jesus was pointing to in Matthew 13, the kingdom of God is there referring to a political future kingdom of God and in that political future kingdom of God there will be many citizens, just like there was in this kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. The birds are people; the birds and the fowl come to the branches and they have there their habitation.

**Daniel 4:23-25** 'In that the king saw an angelic watcher, a holy one, descending from heaven and saying, "Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground, but with a band of iron and bronze around it in the new grass of the field, and let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him," (24) this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: (25) that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.

Here's the "watcher" term again. We'll see something very startling in the 5th chapter, one which just blows the mind of most naturalistic historians, but here's what the Bible is saying: that there are angelic administrators in charge of specific areas on the earth. And God has His administrators, and Satan has His administrators. You have civilian leaders over a given geographical area and you have an angelic leader over that area, so there will be an angelic head over the United States, there will be an angelic head over Russia, there will be an angelic head over all the countries of the world where you have government established.

So simultaneous with Nebuchadnezzar's reign is the reign of a watcher, and the angelic being is acting, not for Nebuchadnezzar, but he is acting for God; he is watching how Nebuchadnezzar rules for God and out of this now we are going to get a principle of history. And this is still operational today. Today the angelic watchers are still ministering and the book of Daniel tells us where and why they intervene in history, we will never see them bodily but we can observe in the newspaper various changes, for example, in the fortunes of a political leader, we will observe changes in government, we can observe the effects.

So we have a watcher here along with Nebuchadnezzar. The watcher has gotten an order passed down from the throne room to remove Nebuchadnezzar. So this head angel comes down and he says all right, Nebuchadnezzar is going down, I've got an order from the Most High God. If you want to see what a meeting in the throne room looks like, read 1 Kings 22:19.

**Daniel 4:26-27** 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. (27) 'Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.'

The judgment here is not good, but the advice is good, Daniel is telling him that all this could be avoided. Daniel recommends that Nebuchadnezzar become a righteous person, but the king rejects this.

**Daniel 4:28-33** "All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. (29) "Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. (30) "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' (31) "While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, (32) and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' (33) "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

This is the fulfillment of the dream. Psychology has a name for this – zoanthropy – a person lives like an animal – but this wasn't a mental condition, it was something God did to him. Notice that the judgment didn't fall until 12 months later. God always gives time for people to change their ways.

Nebuchadnezzar was very proud of himself and his city, and when he spoke his proud words in verse 30, the predicted judgment came from God while the words were still in his mouth. Pride is a form of insanity, and now his internal madness became his external madness as well.

**Daniel 4:34-37** "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. (35) "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' (36) "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. (37) "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Nebuchadnezzar is restored to sanity and to the throne. Notice that it ended suddenly, just like it came suddenly, proving that this came from God. The phrase "raised my eyes toward heaven" means more than just looking into the sky. It means that this is when he finally acknowledged and submitted to the most high God. And, as God had said in verse 25, this is when the judgment ended. He was cured of his insanity, and of his pride.

Scholars are divided on whether Nebuchadnezzar came to true belief in God here or not, but I believe he did, just based on these verses. The things he said about God in verses 34-37 he would not be able to say about the Babylonian gods. This seems like a true conversion, but no one knows for sure. It is very possible that we will get to meet Nebuchadnezzar in heaven!

For the seven years he was away, no one took the throne of Babylon, that had to be an act of God. Daniel probably communicated to the leaders of Babylon that this condition was temporary. With his influence, we can assume he must have had something to do with helping keep the kingdom ready for Nebuchadnezzar during the seven year period.

We actually have some historic confirmation of this event. Nebuchadnezzar's name is strangely absent from all historical and governmental documents for a period of about four years, which coincides with the time of this reported illness. His name reappears shortly before his death.

### Questions from chapter 3 and 4

We are probably not tempted to bow down before a statue of gold, but what kinds of idolatry do believers today get trapped in?

How can we resist and avoid these kinds of idolatry in our personal lives?

God's will always aligns with His word and His plan, but is also tailored to individuals. What happens when we compare the way God deals with us and with others?

There is some debate whether Nebuchadnezzar was saved. As a Gentile, what did he need to believe in order to be saved? What do people need to believe today in order to be saved?

Chapter 4 places great emphasis on God's sovereignty. What is sovereignty? If God is sovereign, do we have "free will"? What difference does it make whether God is sovereign or not?