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NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN A FIT OF ANGER AND FURY

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL
NUMBER 9
DANIEL 3:8-15

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The companions of Daniel had been tested in a very unusual way. It all came about because Nebuchadnezzar had a very severe attack of his old sin nature. Nebuchadnezzar had an old sin nature which faced a new problem, the problem of power lust and ego lust. The problem he faced was in the lust pattern. He had become drunk on approbation lust. As the most powerful man alive in the world and the head of the Chaldean Empire, he had become accustomed to hear others praise him as a great man. He was stimulated by the approbation lust of the words, "Thou art the head of gold." This really went to his head and he actually didn't hear anything else that Daniel said. His approbation lust had been stimulated to such an unusual point that Nebuchadnezzar cast all reason aside and decided not only to have a statue with a head of gold, but he decided to have a statue of gold throughout, from head to foot. Nebuchadnezzar was suffering from power lust. He had allowed his reason to be conquered with pride. Now there is nothing wrong with ego, which simply means we have self-consciousness. But when ego is allowed to become the main force in life, then it grows into pride and selfishness and approbation lust.

Now we have already studied Nebuchadnezzar's Ragtime Band and the emotion it created as all the people of the empire were asked to bow down and worship his golden image. In these next few verses we will face the dedication crisis.

DANIEL 3:8 "Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews." The three companions of Daniel refused to bow down to the image and this was more than some of the Chaldeans could stand. The Chaldeans were the most powerful people in the Babylonian Empire. They believed that they should have all the highest offices in the empire, but Daniel and his companions held four of the highest offices, and still they didn't bow down to the image. Now the Chaldeans didn't like this one bit. They wanted all the highest offices for themselves.

The Chaldeans looked on these four Jews as slaves. So we read in this verse that they came out in the open and accused these Jews. Now actually, these Chaldeans making this objection were very miserable people. They could not succeed themselves and they could not compete, so in the prejudice and pettiness they had to try to remove these Jews from their high offices. They needed to realize that just because these men were Jews, that didn't mean they did not have great leadership ability.

Keep in mind that Babylon was not a democracy, in fact, it was almost a dictatorship, with Nebuchadnezzar being the one great leader. Now he had certain capable men around him, and these four Jews were in some of the highest offices. These Chaldeans just couldn't stand this and they proposed to do something about it. Now the real difference between these Chaldeans and these three Jews was not a cultural or racial difference, but rather a spiritual difference. These three Jews were born again men, they had personally received Jesus Christ as Saviour. Bible doctrine had taught them that idolatry was wrong, so no matter what the sacrifice these Jewish men decided they would not bow down to the image.

DANIEL 3:9 "They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever." Here we see that these Chaldeans were buttering up Nebuchadnezzar and were trying to get on his good side. This gave them the ground for making their accusation against these Jews and thereby discredit them to Nebuchadnezzar.

DANIEL 3:10 "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 music, shall fall down and worship the golden image:" This is just a review of the Ragtime Band.

Don't worry about what people are thinking. Now let's see what Nebuchadnezzar was thinking.

DANIEL 3:13 "Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king." The dictator of the empire lost his temper. We read, "In his rage and fury." The principle is this--No one can rule or lead people if he flies into a rage just because something unpleasant hits his ears. Remember, every report needs to be checked out carefully to determine its validity. Don't get upset over reports that have not been carefully vindicated. Subjectivity is a very important mental attitude. When you hear reports about things that have been said, be sure to check out the source. It seems that so often people always have "unimpeachable sources." This is one prerequisite to being a gossip. You must always have an "unimpeachable source." Now life is too short for us to fly into a rage, just because we hear some wild report about something someone has said about us. Stay relaxed and don't get up tight about what someone else said that someone else said about you. Life is just too short to let things like this disturb you. So often anger and fury come from our own weakness and our own inability to stay calm under pressure. It is so easy to start a fire up in your mind. It couldn't be more devastating than if you were to take a blowtorch and open your mouth and just burn out your brains. That is what rage and fury means and that is what Nebuchadnezzar did here in our story.

There are two fires here. One in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar and one in the fiery furnace. Now sometime in life almost everyone is burned in one way or another by a literal fire. But to start your own fire up in your brain is just absolutely unnecessary and it inevitably leads to no happiness. You just can't allow yourself to fall apart over rumors and false reports. Now please notice that in our story everything that was said here about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was untrue. It is true that they didn't fall down and worship the image, but the reason was they were born again people and they knew that idolatry was wrong and that no born again man should ever fall down and worship anything other than God. The Word of God was more important to them than any command of Nebuchadnezzar. They ruled their provinces well because the Word of God was vital and real to them. These men were believers filled with Bible doctrine. Nebuchadnezzar was ordinarily a very fair and honorable man. You recall how fairly he treated Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was brilliant and fair minded usually. But in this incident we find him suffering from approbation lust and everyone was telling him how great he was and how his kingdom would abide forever and as a result of fat headed pride he had allowed things to get out of perspective. He had heard, "Thou art the head of gold" and it had completely turned his head. He had heard compliment after compliment about the great image he had made and about what a great band he had. So temporarily Nebuchadnezzar had lost his perspective and had become power mad. Anyone who really wanted to get ahead in the empire went up to Nebuchadnezzar and complimented him and told him how great he was and what a beautiful sword that was he was wearing. They were doing all they could do to flatter him and inflate his ego. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saved that kind of talk for the Lord. Although they did not fall down and worship the image, the implication of what they say is not true, and as a result of the false gossip and report, Nebuchadnezzar started a fire in his brain. Rage and fury is not the mental attitude for effective leadership. Real effective leaders must have objectivity at all times and an attitude of objectivity comes from Bible doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit in a life. These three men had stability and poise and these false reports didn't upset them one bit.

Because these three men were born again and because they lived by Bible doctrine, they had the best provinces in the empire and they didn't fall apart when they heard the vicious reports about themselves. They didn't bow to the giant image because they lived by the Word of God and not by some system of rationalism.

Now in verses 14-22 we have the crux of this matter--the challenge of Bible doctrine.

DANIEL 3:14 "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?" Here in this verse we see that Nebuchadnezzar held a brief trial. "It is true" is a mistranslation here and should read, "Is it on purpose?" In other words, he was asking them if their action not to bow down to the giant image a deliberate act. Now since Nebuchadnezzar was the king, why didn't he just throw them into the fiery furnace and be done with it? Well, the reason was this; He recognized the worth of these three men and he didn't want to do anything that would hurt his empire. He needed their administrative ability and didn't want to eliminate them unless it was absolutely necessary. So Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Did you do this on purpose?" He was going to give them an out. He wanted to save them if he could, and so he offered them this alternative. He thought it would be better to let them reflect on what they had done, and he was sure they would repent and bow down.

Now look at their position for a moment. They might have rationalized in this fashion--"It is better to be alive and serve the Lord, than to die over a trivial thing like bowing down to a dumb golden statue. This is just a statue of gold and we realize that just bowing down once won't hurt us too much. We want to live and serve the empire, so one bowing won't do too much harm." Now that sounds good, but remember, it was a compromise which rejected Bible doctrine. They knew their Bible and they knew the Bible said, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me."

This was a direct question from Nebuchadnezzar to these three men. But please notice, it was an unfair question and a leading question. It is like the question the trial lawyer would ask the accused, "When did you stop beating your wife?" The point is - if Nebuchadnezzar was willing to give them a free trial, then they must look at all the facts. And the facts behind this statement adds up to this--"Is it right for the government to force anyone to worship in any certain way at any time?" So these three men found themselves in a jam. If they said, "Yes, we did this on purpose," then they would go into the fiery furnace. If they said, "No, we didn't do this on purpose. Have the band play it again and we will bow down." And if they did this, it would be a distinct compromise of doctrine.

DANIEL 3:15 "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 music, 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?" Here is the decision. Nebuchadnezzar was going to give them one more chance. The band will play the dedication theme one more time and they will have another chance to bow down to the image. Notice that Nebuchadnezzar is placing emphasis on the image "I HAVE MADE." Now that alone ought to be enough incentive for them to fall down and worship the image. Nebuchadnezzar was saying in substance this--"I made that image so there ought not to be any question about falling down and worshipping before it."

Now you can see from this action that Nebuchadnezzar showed himself to be a weak man. All he wanted was outer conformity. He didn't care what they thought, just so they would fall down and worship. Now that is sloppy leadership. Outward conformity is always a weak act. Christianity says, "What you think is what counts." Nebuchadnezzar doesn't realize that this kind of thing can destroy his empire. He ignored mental attitude and relied on outer conformity. But remember, mental attitude is more important than conformity every single time. Quite often the smaller athlete will win out over the larger athlete simply because his mental attitude is right. Doctrine in the frontal lobe is really what counts. Here in our story these three men had the mental attitude which wins. Of course, the Devil always makes it easy for men to compromise.

Now there was one thing Nebuchadnezzar didn't realize. He didn't realize that these three men were in the Lord's hands and if the Lord wanted them to stay in Babylon and do their work and not bow down to the image, that there was not one single thing Nebuchadnezzar could do to harm them. But you see, Nebuchadnezzar was temporarily blinded by a lust for power. These three men were in the Lord's hands and they were perfectly safe.

Now some people go to church just to conform to ritual and habit. Then some attend church because they love the Lord. These three men in question fall into the latter group and they had the right mental attitude. Always remember, you take your mental attitude with you and Bible doctrine in the mind is more important than anything else in life.

So in verse 15 the issue is made perfectly clear. They would either bow down or be thrown into the fiery furnace. Evidently the big furnace was near the image, but not too close. The furnace was so constructed that the people could look through the bars and see what was going on inside the furnace. The band had no doubt just played ruffles and flourishes and "Hail to the image" and the time had arrived for Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego to bow down. What would they do? Bow or be burned? Which? Which would hurt the least, to bow down or to burn? That seemed to be the issue. But these three men had another issue--what does the Word of God say? They knew the answer to that question, for ever since they had been little children, they had been taught "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Nebuchadnezzar challenged that when he said, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Six Points On "Who Is That God"

1. In power mad lust Nebuchadnezzar assumed there was no power in the universe that could deliver them from his decree. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar believed his power was the final power.
2. Power lust here assumed the power of deity and here challenged the power of Almighty God. The true issue here was this--which is the true God, Nebuchadnezzar or Almighty God?
3. From this expression of the ego of Nebuchadnezzar, it is quite evident that he knew nothing of the grace and love of God. He had missed completely the message to be derived from the panorama of empires which God had tried to teach him from the image in his dream. But we know "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God..."
4. Nebuchadnezzar will find his ego challenged in two ways. First, by the delivery of the three men from the fiery furnace. Second, by the humiliation which will come to him which we will study two weeks from now.
5. These two events which will reorient Nebuchadnezzar will result in his salvation and his complete orientation to the grace of God and he will write a salvation tract which we will study in Chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar will go on positive volition and because of this, God will give him salvation information and he will be saved. His ego will be neutralized so he can eventually make a choice of Christ his Saviour. So here is a picture to show how fair God was with Nebuchadnezzar.

6. The last phrase of the Nebuchadnezzar tract is given in Daniel 4:37 "And those that walk in pride he is able to abase." Between God-consciousness and gospel hearing, there is quite often a lapse of time. And in that lapse of time, quite often ego and pride can obscure the issue. This is what happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

In the end, Nebuchadnezzar will have a red face. He will discover that he can't burn men who belong to Almighty God. And in the very next verse they will say to him, "We are not frightened in answering you."