

Did Daniel Accept Worship from Nebuchadnezzar?

Daniel 2:46-49; Hebrews 2:11

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When the Apostle Peter went to the home of Cornelius to preach to the Gentiles gathered there, Cornelius prostrated himself at the feet of Peter “and worshipped him” (Acts 10:25). Peter quickly responded, “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). Likewise, when the Apostle John fell down and worshipped an angel, the angel responded by saying, “See thou do it not” (Revelation 19:10). It would appear that John was so overwhelmed that he forgot himself; nevertheless, he was promptly corrected by the angel. We are not only commanded in the Second Commandment not to make any graven image, but also commanded not to bow down before any graven image as a religious act (which condemns all religious bowing before anyone or any religious image).

This being the case, what are we to think about the worship offered to Daniel by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2? Was Daniel afraid to correct the king or is there reason to believe from the text that Daniel bore a faithful testimony to the king and did not accept the worship that was offered to him? No doubt skeptics would love to find in this passage a gross moral contradiction in the life of Daniel (a man of God). Let us consider our text to see whether such an accusation against Daniel is justified. The main points from our text are: (1) The King Offers Daniel Worship (Daniel 2:46); (2) The King Honors the Lord Who Revealed the Dream (Daniel 2:47); (3) The King Honors Daniel and His Friends (Daniel 2:48-49).

I. The King Offers Daniel Worship (Daniel 2:46).

A. A Brief Review

1. King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream during the night and was unable to remember the dream. He called for all the wise men in Babylon and demanded they tell him what he had dreamed and its interpretation. They stalled and told the king that no one on earth could reveal the dream and that no king had ever demanded such a thing from his wise men. Nebuchadnezzar was overcome with anger and issued a decree that all of the wise men in Babylon be cut to pieces. As the wise men were being gathered for execution, they came to Daniel’s door and Daniel asked for a personal audience before the king which was granted. Daniel promised the king that he would return with the dream and its interpretation, which he did after God heard his fervent prayer.

2. Before revealing to the king the dream and its interpretation, Daniel made very clear that he was just a man and that it was the one true God of heaven that had revealed the dream and its interpretation to him (Daniel 2:28-30).

3. Daniel proceeded to reveal that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of this great human image that was composed of various metals: (1) the head of gold (Babylonian kingdom); (2) the chest and arms of silver (Medo/Persian kingdom); (3) belly and thighs of brass (Grecian kingdom); (4) legs of iron (United Roman kingdom); (5) feet and toes of iron mixed with clay (Divided Roman kingdom).

4. Finally, a stone supernaturally cut out of a mountain without hands (Christ and His kingdom) struck the image in the feet of iron mixed with clay and toppled the mighty image and crushed it to dust, so that the wind blew away all of the kingdoms that had resisted Christ. The stone (Christ’s kingdom) grows until it filled the whole earth.

B. Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to the revelation of the dream.

1. He was so overwhelmed at what Daniel had revealed to him that he fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel (Daniel 2:46). This was unheard of: the mightiest king in the world at that time

worshipping a young man in his late teens that had been taken captive from Jerusalem—the master worshipping the servant? The king knew he had just witnessed that which was miraculous and supernatural. His first, yet sinful, reaction was to worship the messenger—not the Lord God who revealed the dream to Daniel (Paul and Barnabas encountered the same thing in Lystra when he healed one who was lame from birth, Acts 14:11).

2. Next, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that sacrifice and incense be offered to Daniel as a further token of worship (Daniel 2:46). Paul and Barnabas likewise experienced the same thing (Acts 14:13).

3. But the reaction of Paul and Barnabas was clearly to refuse this worship, pointing to God, the Creator of heaven and earth, as the Healer, who only should be worshipped (Acts 14:14-15).

4. Jesus certainly received such worship (Matthew 14:33). We are commanded to worship Him because He is God (Hebrews 1:6). Since we are to worship God alone (as Jesus declared in Matthew 4:10), Jesus was either sinfully accepting worship that belonged only to the Father, or He was God. Since He was sinless, He received worship as God.

5. But as we look at our text we do not explicitly read that Daniel resisted or refused the worship of Nebuchadnezzar. Why not? Did he sinfully and silently accept the king's worship?

a. Daniel had not accepted the food offered to idols in Daniel 1. Daniel had borne a faithful testimony to the king (Daniel 2:28). He made clear to the king that he possessed not the knowledge/wisdom to reveal the dream (Daniel 2:30). We read that the king commanded that sacrifice and incense be offered to Daniel, but not that it happened. Did something prevent it from happening? Daniel could not physically prevent the king from bowing down to him and worshipping him, but he could bear a faithful testimony. Did he? Or was he silent?

b. Let us consider what likely happened.

II. The King Honors the Lord Who Revealed the Dream (Daniel 2:47).

A. Nebuchadnezzar goes from worshipping Daniel in Daniel 2:46 to honoring (at least with his words) the one true living God. What brought about this change to focus on God rather than on Daniel?

1. Note this: "The king ANSWERED unto Daniel." Though the express words of Daniel are not stated to which the king answered, it is implied that Daniel did respond to the king's worshipping of him. It would surely be strange that the king ANSWERED UNTO DANIEL unless Daniel had said something to the king between verses 26 and 27.

2. There is a hint in Daniel 2:47 what Daniel had said to the king: "Of a truth it is" The king seems to be agreeing with Daniel as to what Daniel had said to him in refusing his worship. The godly testimony of Daniel turned the king's worship of him to the Lord God alone.

3. In what we know about Daniel from Daniel 1 and from Daniel 6 (in which he was willing to suffer the wrath of the king in order to obey the Lord God), it would have been completely out of character for Daniel to have said nothing and to silently accept the king's worship.

4. Does this not teach us to be careful in what we receive by way of reports about others? Skeptics will be very quick to condemn Daniel at this point—accuse him of a grievous sin. Not that the godly cannot fall, but let us not be quick to receive a false report unless there is the confirmation of two or three credible witnesses (Matthew 7:12). Just as we ought to carefully search to clear Daniel's name in this case, let us seek to do the same for one another, rather than quickly receive an evil report (the love of Christ "thinketh no evil" 1 Corinthians 13:5).

B. Having said that, what are we to think about Nebuchadnezzar's testimony here in Daniel 2:47. Is it credible? There's certainly truth in what he says. Has this pagan king become a true believer?

1. He professes that Daniel's God (not his God) is a God of gods (the highest among many

gods—chief god) and a Lord of kings (rules over kings, even heathen kings—which is more than many Christians are willing to say about God’s rule over kings and nations at the present time). Nebuchadnezzar is even saying that God rules in some sense over him (referring to the kings and kingdoms in the image). God has humbled the king, and gives the king insight to profess this truth (Proverbs 21:1).

2. However, this is a profession concerning Daniel’s God (not his own God), and is simply a profession of the exaltation of Daniel’s God above other gods (not a profession of faith in the one true living God alone). He did not forsake idolatry. This is evidenced in the next chapter when King Nebuchadnezzar sets up an enormous image of gold (perhaps of himself) and commands all those in Babylon to bow down and worship it. The evidence of a true profession of faith is not in mere words, but is in the loving obedience to the doctrine, worship, and commandments of Jesus Christ. Nebuchadnezzar had a faithful, godly, learned prophet among him, but he did not renounce his idolatry, trust in the Lord alone, seek God’s forgiveness, and walk in loving obedience to Him.

III. The King Honors Daniel and His Friends (Daniel 2:48-49).

A. As God sovereignly bestowed honor and promotion upon Joseph through Pharaoh, so He did with Daniel through Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord used heathen rulers to bless and prosper His people (and He still does so). God made Daniel a greater man than Nebuchadnezzar could ever do. What makes a person great? Is it wealth, power, popularity, or exaltation by man? No. Our greatness is determined by who we serve—ourselves, our dreams, our possessions will all perish—our Great God and Savior who rules over all (Matthew 6:24).

B. Daniel was appointed to be ruler over the whole province of Babylon—no doubt the most important province—it was the capital and throne of the king. He was also appointed to be chief of the governors over all of the wise men in likely guiding their studies and training men to be true wise men in serving God. Perhaps it was in this very school that the Magi were educated that followed the star to Bethlehem to worship Him who was born King of God’s people (Matthew 2:1-2). From where did this knowledge come? Not from astrology, but from a study of Scripture (Numbers 24:17; Micah 5:2).

C. Finally, note that Daniel did not forget his faithful friends who had stood with him through their separation from family and home in Jerusalem, who were with him in not eating the food offered to idols, and who united with him in prayer that God would reveal the dream to Daniel and spare their lives.

1. A very human (yet sinful) reaction would have been to receive all of the gifts and promotion from the king for himself alone, but he was not ashamed to be identified with his dear brethren. If they stood together with him in trials, Daniel would not forget them when he was promoted. It was as though Daniel brought his friends up to the winner’s stand with him. When we are promoted, do we forget or remember who were all those who helped us to get there? Do lift one another up, or are we constantly putting one another down? Do we forget or remember that it was God who has ultimately promoted us (Psalm 75:5-7)? Or do we speak and act as if we did it all on our own? Daniel was not ashamed of his brethren once he was promoted.

2. Neither is the Lord Jesus ashamed to call us His brethren in spite of all the shameful things we have done (Hebrews 2:11). Jesus won the victory for us over the guilt, condemnation, and power of sin. He brought us up to stand with Him on the winner’s stand—He won the race and did not forget us. We who were slaves to sin, naked in having no righteousness that God would accept, deserving the eternal condemnation of a holy God. We who were utterly shameful due to our sin, He was not ashamed of, but suffered the wrath of His Father that He might become the firstborn among many brethren. He brought us to the winner’s stand with Him. Let us bring others to the winner’s stand with us and glorify the God who promotes us, rather than standing alone and acting as if we were a god to be praised.

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