

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Golden Image: The King Failed to Learn

*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. 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. 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. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 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: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 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. (Daniel 3:1-7)*

At the end of the second chapter, we'd expect to see Nebuchadnezzar worshipping with Daniel and his friends, but in fact we see quite the opposite in this chapter. He constructs a magnificent image and directs all his subjects to fall in worship before it. There is possibly a link between his dream and this image, but not a good one. In Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream each metal depicted a different empire. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, but that empire soon faded into the chest and arms of silver, Medo-Persia. And in turn Medo-Persia gave way to Greece, and Greece to Rome. These four empires cover the five hundred years from Daniel's era until the coming of Jesus in fulfillment of the many Old Testament prophecies.

Gold is far more valuable than silver, brass or iron, and Nebuchadnezzar with his representation of the golden head in his dream filled a superior role in the significance of the dream, at least from the human assessment of value. However, the Golden Empire abruptly ends in that dream. Given the fact that in Daniel's very next chapter we discover Nebuchadnezzar erecting a monument all of gold seems to indicate that the king was not content with his prophetic role as revealed in the dream. He wanted to be the head of an empire that lasted for ever, all of gold from head to foot. Did Nebuchadnezzar really think he could defy the God of Daniel? He would soon learn how futile his egotistical desires were.

Aside from an image all of gold, in contradiction to his place as revealed in the dream of the second chapter, the size of this image

seems ostentatious to say the least. Notice the measurements. Assuming the typical measurement of a cubit as eighteen inches, this image was ninety feet tall and nine feet wide. Imagine an image of this size, all of gold.

The king seems fiercely determined to set himself up, not only as a perpetual ruler of a perpetual kingdom, but he also left no space for options. Bow down and worship this image or face the fiery furnace, "Bow or burn."

Imagine yourself caught up in a godless culture that demands universal worship of its icon. You must either bow or face certain and torturous death by fire. Is your faith in God strong enough to keep you from buckling? You know God is stronger than the king and stronger than the king's fire, but you do not in fact know whether God will intervene or not. Hebrews 11:1-35 documents one hero of faith after another through the Old Testament. However, beginning with the thirty-sixth verse, we see a vastly different outcome.

*And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.... (Hebrews 11:36-37, KJV)*

Do not overlook that the tortures of these two verses are no less the product of victorious faith than the more obvious victories of the first thirty-five verses.

If you face the threat of a pagan king, you have no way of knowing whether you will be numbered among those victorious saints in the first thirty-five verses of Hebrews eleven, or if you will be numbered with those equally victorious saints in verses thirty-six and thirty-seven.

There are no guarantees that our walk of faith shall deliver us from the trials of life. Sometimes our faith delivers us *in those trials*. So how do you react to the pagan edict to bow and worship what you know to be nothing more than a piece of gold, not in any way a god deserving of worship? Do you bow and save your bold faith for another day? Or do you resist and face the uncertainty of the king's threat? Will your faith deliver you from or in the trial? It is indeed a bold faith that faces these two options and holds firm regardless of the outcome.

This scenario surfaces a significant Biblical issue that puts our faith to the test. Consider this passage.

*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.* (Psalm 76:10, KJV)

Fatalistic teachers—in fact any purveyor of major error—must tamper with God's Book before they can rationalize tampering with God's truth. The common interpretation of this verse by fatalists is this. Every depraved act of sinful man shall always praise God. These are the only acts that God either causes or permits. Any other act considered by sinful man God shall simply prevent from occurring at all. This view hopelessly corrupts the moral character of God. When Paul confronted this sinister notion (Romans 3:1-8), he called it a slanderous report, an inexcusable distortion of what he really taught. But he also affirmed the moral character of God issue. He affirmed that, if in fact God "orchestrated" man's sin to promote divine righteousness, then God, not sinful man, should face trial and punishment for the sin. The verse does not state that the remainder of wrath shall be prevented from occurring. To "restrain" something does not mean to prevent it from occurring or existing. To restrain something is to prevent it from crossing a certain boundary. Simply stated, the verse states an obvious truth. At times God intervenes in the affairs of humans whose wrath is aimed against Him, and turns the very wrathful designs of men into a matter that praises Him. At other times, for the protection of His beloved people, human wrath may well be intended to destroy godly people from the face of the earth, but God restrains or frustrates angry man's intentions. Two clear points guard this verse against the fatalistic interpretation to which it is often tortured. The

verse specifically deals with the wrath of man, not with every act of evil, sinful men that occurs. Secondly, other acts of wrath in fact do occur, but what occurs may well be the result of God's intervention that limits what the angry sinner's intent really was. Nothing about this verse teaches that God uses every act of sinful man that occurs for his glory, or He prevents it from occurring at all.

Another point to consider regarding this verse appears in principle in the following verse:

*He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.* (Psalm 46:9, KJV)

Are we to conclude from this verse that God always, at all times makes wars to cease, breaks bows, cuts spears asunder, and burns chariots? Look around you. Consider all the wars that are going on in our world today. Evil men and modern weapons of war are wrecking havoc against untold numbers of people and cultures. The verse affirms what God can do, and what He in fact does on certain occasions, but it in no way states a universal principle of God's actions.

*For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (James 1:20)

Are we to conclude from this verse, when compared with Psalm 76:10, that acts of man's wrath that distinctly do not work God's righteousness always and under all circumstances praise Him? When an interpretation of one passage renders another passage nonsensical, we need to revisit the first passage and revise our interpretation to find harmony between them.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold and the threat of the fiery furnace, God shall turn Nebuchadnezzar's wrath to praise Him. However, as we survey the history of both Old Testament saints and the countless faithful Christians who faced similar threats, and remained faithful in the heat of the threat, we discover that many have been burned in torturous deaths for their faith, precisely the point made in Hebrews 11:36-37. God didn't step in and end the persecution. He didn't deliver His saints *from* the fire; He delivered them *in* it.

Regardless of the outcome, God is no less God than if He had intervened and delivered His suffering children. And we witness frequent episodes of man's wrath that in no way praises God. Nor do we observe a universal divine prevention of wrath from occurring any more than we witness divine intervention and the destruction

of weapons of war every time humans consider engaging in war.

The point of Scripture is clear. God is the sovereign Ruler of this world. However, His rule does not intervene or orchestrate every act of depraved humans that might or does occur. At times He intervenes and turns man's wrath to His praise. At other times He may restrain man's angry intent and cut vain man's evil intentions short of their goal. At other times He does not intervene, but He always measures the conduct of sinful humans and at the Last Judgment He shall demonstrate His true authority by justly issuing the command to punish every act of sin that shall come before His Judgment Seat on that day.

*For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14, KJV)*

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
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