

Genesis 1:26-28

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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HUMANISM'S ICON The Covenant in Daniel Three by Ray R Sutton

The great crisis of modern worship is the **object** of worship. This was driven home to me once again when I recently visited California on Church-related business. I was staying about five blocks from the famous Crystal Cathedral, the glass church on the edge of a geological fault. Nevertheless, I could practically see the thing from my window. So I took the "crystal plunge" and went with a few friends to take a look.

I'll never forget my first impression. If you don't know, the church structure itself is like a huge box with the crystal tower next to it. As I walked up to the building, I realized for the first time that the glass in the walls of the church is not normal, "see throughable" glass; it is mirrored glass. Get the picture? When a person steps up to this cathedral, he sees **himself**, a perfect outworking, tragically so, of "Schuller theology."

Robert Schuller is very self-conscious about the emphasis of his ministry. He thinks the first Reformation occurred when the Church focused on the depravity of man. He believes a "second" Reformation is being fueled by his new emphasis, the worth of man. He is convinced that the way to lead people into a true dependence on God is by making them appreciate themselves – better, depend on themselves. Quite a drift from the great preachers of the historic Church, but you can see and hear this theology worked out, "reflected?", at the Crystal Cathedral.

I was stunned as I looked at this modern icon of steel and mirrors. Granted, I was having to peer into my own ugly face as I pondered the side of the church. But I guess that's it. I didn't go to the cathedral to see myself; I went to see God, even though I should have known better when I walked onto the Crystal Cathedral's property.

In contrast to this glass monument, however, the ancient and great cathedrals of the world are all **transcendent** in their architecture, pointing to God. They make a person think not of the man who made or drew the cathedral; they cause the observer to meditate on the majesty of God, drawing the person away from himself and to God in total contrast to the Schuller's tribute to humanity that forces the opposite effect by causing the person to view himself in the walls of the Church. If ever there were a symbol of the Twentieth Century's religion, it has to be the Crystal Cathedral, Humanism's **Icon**!!

Erecting great statues to humanity and not to God is nothing new. History is full of examples, especially Biblical history, believe it or not. Scripture tells of the Tower of Babel and other great towers, none of which have been allowed to survive. Not too long ago, one of those travelling artifact shows came through our part of the country; this one was carrying around samples of the remains from some of the pyramids in ancient Egypt. I distinctly remem-

ber standing in front of a huge golden necklace that had been worn by some Egyptian princess and thinking, "How interesting that very few artifacts are preserved from the Biblical culture, except for one thing, a book, the Holy **Scriptures**." True enough. Egypt left us its pyramids, but the people of God left us the Word of God.

Even in Scripture, though, there are some notable humanistic statues, the most interesting of which concerns the third chapter of the Book of Daniel. Before discussing it, however, consider the context and flow of the book up to this point.

Daniel's Test

In the first two chapters, Daniel and his friends faced the issues of Word and Sacrament, the Word verbal and the Word made visible (sacrament). In chapter one, they faced the trial of food or sacrament.¹ They would take no oath but the one to renew their covenant with God. In chapter two, they (actually Daniel) faced the trial of revelation. He was the only one who could interpret the revelation given to the pagan king. He was the one to whom the pagan had to turn for truth.

Thus, the friends of God – Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, and Daniel – were given the keys to the kingdom in the first two chapters. Keys unlock and close. Word and Sacrament open and shut doors. The Word verbal opens the door and the Word visual in the form of food can shut the door if one is sent from the table or fails to pass the tests associated with the table. The first two chapters reveal that the keys belong to the people of God. The unbeliever and his kingdom are dependent on the people of God.

Chapter three presents another test in the form of worship. The challenge is whether or not Daniel and his friends will adopt a new form of worship. They will not. They refuse to give themselves over to a man-centered, entertainment form of worship. They pay a big price, and they end up being put to the test.

Before we summarize the chapter, we should observe a very important lesson about testing in general. In chapter one, Daniel and his friends were tested. In chapter two, Daniel is primarily the one who is put to the test. In chapter three, the three friends are put to the test. First, there seems to be a pattern from the group to the individual. What happens to the larger body starts to happen to individuals. I have observed that testing to the body at large is re-enforced on the individual level. For example, if the local congregation is being slandered, you can almost guarantee that this same type of trial will come to the individ-

1. Sacrament comes from the Latin, *sacramentum*, meaning *oath*. Originally, a *sacramentum* was used for inducting soldiers into the Roman army.

ual. The whole is not simply the sum of its parts. The body of Christ is greater than the individuals and that is why what happens to the Church as a whole is so important. Individuals cannot escape the whole. For this reason, the larger body to which one attaches himself is extremely important. He is shaped and molded by the larger body perhaps in ways that are not beneficial if the larger body has serious defects.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which the body of Christ is the sum of its parts; it is not any better than the individuals represented therein. Thus, the individuals must be tested that the whole body might be improved.

Second, the progression of tests teach the principle that one man's test is another man's lesson. Daniel's friends were mere observers in Daniel two. They were called upon to stand another-but-related test in Daniel three. All through the Scriptures, we see this pattern: observer first, follower second. This is true in the Gospels, but perhaps the best example is the Apostle Paul. As Saul, he observed the martyrdom of Stephen; the deacon's robes were laid at his feet. As Paul, however, he became a witness. God always gives us an opportunity to live for a while as observers. ~~Sooner or~~ later, He calls us to be **witnesses**. In Daniel three, the friends of Daniel move from the status of observer to witness.

Also, whatever flaws one observes in another who is tested will probably come out in the observers' test. God allows us to see flaws in others for an important reason: not that we might gossip, slander, or get the upper hand but that we might be better prepared for the fiery test to come in our lives. We are often so blind that we never make the connection – what I am observing in others is being allowed because I have the same weakness and will therefore be tested in the same area. We are usually just this spiritually insensitive. Thankfully, Daniel's friends were sensitive to the work of the Spirit of God in their lives. They passed the test!

Just as we have seen in the first two chapters, there will be a basic fivefold pattern: court, conflict, wisdom, test, transfer. This enables us to see an interesting unfolding of progress. Each stage in the fivefold pattern will be similar, but there will be an advancement over each phase in the previous chapters. For example, the final transfer in chapter three will give to the people of God more than the transfer in chapter two. However, there is also progression in the tests. They intensify as well. In chapter three, the test is greater and the judgment of a death in a fiery furnace is more intense as well.

Transcendence: Idol in the Court (3:1-7)

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. 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. 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. Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, 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. But whoever does not fall

down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. . . .

The Biblical covenant always begins with a **transcendent** theme. In Deuteronomy, the covenant starts by identifying God and His word. Here in Daniel three, the covenant sequence opens with a call to worship. Except, the transcendence is not presented in terms of God but man. Nebuchadnezzar raises an idol and requires the whole world to worship him. He repeats the fall, where man tried for the first time to become, reversed transcendence. Instead of finding the transcendence of God imaged in himself, he tried to become the reality, God. In a perverted sort of way, therefore, Daniel three starts the covenant pattern with transcendence, humanistic transcendence, which of course is false transcendence.

Nebuchadnezzar made a giant statue of himself (3:1). All indications are that this statue represented him. It was made of gold, which we are told in the previous chapter symbolized him (2:37). The height is expressed in dimensions of a number that symbolizes man himself, six, for man was made on the sixth day. To be precise, the number has two sixes in it, sixty by six, or six-six, one short of the famous man of sin number, six-six-six. This number represents man never coming to fulfillment in the number seven, the number for God. Yet, this six-six number does not come to completion in an evil sense. In the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar will convert. Nevertheless, the Bible text wants us to see that Nebuchadnezzar is worshipping the wrong thing from his dream of Daniel two, showing his hardness of heart. The dream did teach that he was the head of gold, a great king. But the point of the dream was that the kingdom of gold would bring down the whole kingdom of man, dating all the way from Nebuchadnezzar's empire. The king worships himself instead of God by putting himself in the middle of the worship.

Nebuchadnezzar's perversity stands out when the dimensions of the statue are considered. A human's dimensions are one to five. These dimensions are one to ten, implying that the statue is a long cylindrical object, perhaps a giant phallic symbol (male sex organ). This was common in the ancient world, especially in alloccultic Maypole ceremonies, where a sex orgy occurs surrounding a pole sticking from the ground, symbolizing that life flows from the male sex organ. This is nothing short of an extremely graphic display of man-centered religion, power from within man himself.

Nebuchadnezzar is extremely self-conscious of his idolatry. He calls for the entire empire to make a solemn oath to the statue (3:2-7). He attempts to mimic Biblical worship. He calls for the same musical instruments that were normally used in the temple. He demands that everyone bow, as they would have done in the temple. He even attaches a death sanction, a fiery death, imitating hell itself. Nebuchadnezzar puts himself in the place of God.

In this passage, we see the most fundamental principle of man-centered worship: **MAN IS IN THE CENTER AND NOT GOD**. At the time of the Reformation, the priest stood in the center. Today, the preacher stands in the center. Historically, a cross and the communion table have been the center of worship, symbolizing Christ on his throne. What's *even* worse is that in many evangelical churches, the minister's pulpit is in the center above the communion table which is on a lower level directly in front of the pulpit. The message is subtle but it explains the problem of the modern church: **MAN IN THE CENTER**. And, if the preacher is not in the center then the choir has the predominant position. Historically, this was never allowed in the church. The choir was to the side, facing the center if the choir was at the front; many times the choir was in the

back. Wherever the choir or the preacher, however, they are not supposed to be in the center. Christ reserves this privilege for He is the one who is to be worshiped.

Hierarchy: The Conflict of Lords (3:8-12)

For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever! You yourself, 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. But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. 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 second aspect of the Biblical covenant has to do with hierarchy. At its heart, this segment of the covenant talks about the restructuring of one realm into God's, the coming and establishment of the kingdom. For this reason, the actual representatives whom God displaces or whom He uses take a prominent position in the development of the passage. This is the case in Deuteronomy where the Biblical representatives are discussed first; then follows a description of the displaced kingdom and kingdom leaders (Deuteronomy 1:15-4).

In a similar fashion, the second part of each of the early chapters of Daniel provides information about the conflict of representatives: Nebuchadnezzar's advisors versus Daniel and his friends; in this case, Daniel's friends are only in view. Thus, the second part of the covenant sequence in Daniel three follows the normal pattern of covenant with a hierarchical theme.

The king's officials report that Daniel's friends will not worship the statue. They are servants of the state attacking servants of the Lord who have been elevated to positions of leadership. Daniel's God put them there and they are not about to enter into covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. As in the situation with Pharaoh of Egypt, the issue is worship.

Please observe that the king directly tied worship of himself to the State. This is statist religion. In the first century A. D., it appeared under the name of Caesar worship. Many Christians died because they would not worship the State as god. Our society is on the edge of Caesar worship. The average man expects the State to do everything for him: marry, educate his children, take care of him when he's unable or will not care for himself, and bury him. Daniel's friends will have none of this religion of the State.

Ethics: The Revelation (3:13-18)

Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. 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? 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 will 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?"

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this. 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. 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."

The third part of the covenant contains the ethical terms of the covenant arrangement. These terms should be viewed as the standard of fidelity, or faithfulness to the suzerain; they are not simply a bunch of dos and don'ts. They concretize a trust between suzerain and vassal. In Deuteronomy, the Ten Commandments are restated in expanded detail. They are the terms of faithfulness between the Great Suzerain, God, and His vassals, Israel.

Consistent with the third aspect of a Biblical covenant, as well as the pattern in the first chapters in Daniel, the third section of Daniel three presents two types of wisdom, which is nothing less than a reflection of two types of laws, since wisdom is the application of the law (Proverbs 1:8). Nebuchadnezzar's wisdom is for Daniel's friends to worship the idol, thereby escaping immediate death. He and his counselors believed that life came by worshipping a deified man. The three friends, on the other hand, lived by another standard, faith in God. As an outworking of their faith and one of the terms of their covenant with God, they were not allowed to worship graven images, the second commandment (Exodus 20:4). Thus, they refused to bow to the image, realizing full well that they would have to suffer the consequences for their obedience to God's law. They believed that life resulted from faithfulness even if it resulted in death in this life.

The revelation given to the young men is a commitment to believe God even though they do not know the outcome. That is, they are not given new revelation. They are forced to live on past revelation. The message in this chapter, as opposed to the last one where new revelation was given, is that past revelation is enough for the servant of God. God doesn't always tell us what He is going to do. He doesn't have to. And, our faith should not depend on it.

The answer to the king is remarkable. Daniel's friends reaffirm their commitment to the Lord God regardless of the outcome. Their faith, in other words, is not dependent on the effects of their faith. They will believe in God whether they live or die!

Oath: The Test (3:19-27)

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. And he commanded certain valiant warriors who were in the army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. 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. 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. But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he responded and said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "Certainly, O king." He answered and 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!" Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he re-

sponded 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. And 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.

The fourth part of the Biblical covenant speaks of the application of sanctions. In Deuteronomy, the nation of Israel takes an oath, calling down God's sanctions of blessing and cursing on them. In Daniel, the fourth part of the third chapter is a test of sanctions: the king's versus God's. The humanistic king tries to apply a *curses* sanction, but God overcomes the curse of man by His *blessing* sanction.

The faith of Daniel's friends is put to the test. They are *throw* into the fiery furnace. The king makes the flames so hot that his own men are killed in the process of trying to *destroy* the people of God, a fundamental message of the Scripture. This is not the first time that the unbeliever has *burned* himself attempting to burn the people of God. Nor is it the last attempt.

Daniel's friends are bound and put into the fire. The text describes a fourth person in the flame. This is not the testimony of a sympathetic witness. Nebuchadnezzar's own people see the fourth person. This is none other than the pre-Incarnate Christ. He is the only one whose glory is great enough to protect God's people from the manmade hell of this humanistic king. When Daniel's friends emerge from the fire, they are specifically described as not having even the *smell* of fire. Their clothes are not burned. Only the ropes placed on them by the Babylonians are destroyed. What is the emphasis? God is in control of hell, not man. Anything that the Hebrews wore into the fire and belonged to them was protected by God. They were freed from the fire of man in the hand of God. Thus, God is in control.

Succession: The Transfer (3:28-30)

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put

their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their *bodies* so as not to serve or *worship* any god except their own God. 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. Then the king cause Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

The final phase of the Biblical covenant always describes the succession of inheritance, normally done by the laying on of hands from the previous generation for a transfer of blessing. The **blessing** was the key to inheritance! in the Deuteronomic covenant, Moses gives Joshua his blessing, making him the heir of his position. So it is in the final part of the third chapter of Daniel. The king **blesse**s Israel by means of his blessing on Daniel's friends. By blessing them, they become the *heirs*, *graphically* worked out by the king's sanction of protection and their personal prosperity.

The king blesses Israel's God, but He *is* not *willing* to convert. He does not refer to the Lord as his God. In the Old Covenant, there is no way for a *gentile* to enter the covenant apart from circumcision, meaning he must *become* an Israelite.

The end of the test is the *salvation* of God's people and the destruction of the wicked. Once again, we see that the king's test results in his being forced to elevate the people of God into a position of leadership. He offers protection of the Biblical religion, which I believe is the correct role of the State. According to the New Testament, the pagan magistrate is literally to be a servant of the Lord (Romans 13:1). He is supposed to be God's avenger, specific Old Testament language for the nearest of kin. Yet, in the New Testament, the pagan magistrate should protect God's religion. He is not supposed to protect any other belief system. Nebuchadnezzar **allowed** other religions. But he only protected the Biblical one. This is the *model* for how the pagan gentile rulers are supposed to rule in the New Covenant era. They are not to coerce people to believe, but if they will keep God's *people* (the Bride) from harm, evangelism will be *allowed* maximum success (i Timothy 2:2ff.).