

Daniel 2:46

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.

Analysis

Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. This verse presents a striking—and troubling—response to God's revelation. Nebuchadnezzar's prostration and worship represent a misplaced reaction: awed by the message, he inappropriately directs worship toward the messenger rather than the divine Message-Giver. The king's action reveals both spiritual insight (recognizing supernatural revelation) and spiritual confusion (failing to direct worship properly).

The Aramaic verb שָׁגַד (segad, worship/prostrate) is the same term used for worship of God or idols throughout Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar's command to offer מנחה (minchah, grain/meal offering) and נִיחוֹת (nichochin, incense/sweet odors)—terms for ritual worship in Israel—indicates he treated Daniel with divine honors. This represents fundamental category confusion: honoring God's servant with worship reserved for God alone.

Daniel's response goes unrecorded, but we can infer from his consistent character (chapters 1, 6, 10) that he redirected glory to God. Later, when Cornelius prostrated before Peter, Peter explicitly refused worship: 'Stand up; I myself also am a man' (Acts 10:26). Similarly, Revelation 19:10 records an angel refusing John's worship: 'See thou do it not...worship God.' True servants of God refuse misdirected worship.

From a Reformed perspective, this incident illustrates humanity's fallen tendency toward idolatry—we readily worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Even when confronted with divine truth, our default impulse is to direct reverence toward tangible, visible mediators rather than the invisible God. This underscores the need for biblical revelation to correct our worship instincts.

Theologically, this foreshadows Christ's unique mediatorial role. Unlike prophets who refused worship, Jesus accepted it—because He is God incarnate. When Thomas worshiped Christ as 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28), Jesus didn't refuse but commended faith. This distinction proves Christ's deity: He alone is worthy of worship as both God and man.

Historical Context

In ancient Near Eastern culture, prostration before rulers was customary—subjects regularly 'fell on their faces' before kings as a sign of submission and respect. However, Nebuchadnezzar's actions exceeded political homage. Commanding oblations and incense indicated religious worship, treatment reserved for deities. This wasn't merely honoring a court official but ascribing divine status.

Mesopotamian polytheism readily deified humans. Kings claimed divine descent or status; successful administrators were sometimes venerated as semi-divine. Nebuchadnezzar likely operated within this worldview—perceiving Daniel as possessing divine essence or being an avatar of the gods. His declaration in verse 47 ('your God is a God of gods') shows emerging recognition of Yahweh's supremacy, yet his worship of Daniel reveals incomplete understanding.

For Jewish exiles witnessing this scene, the moment was fraught with tension. God's prophetic interpreter received honors that might compromise monotheistic witness. Yet Daniel's consistent faithfulness throughout the book suggests he immediately redirected glory to God, perhaps educating the king about proper worship (though Scripture doesn't record this explicitly).

Church history records parallel moments. Throughout centuries, Christians have faced temptations to accept inappropriate honors or allow personality cults. The medieval veneration of saints sometimes blurred lines between honor and worship. Reformation emphasis on 'soli Deo gloria' (glory to God alone) sought to correct this, insisting all honor flow ultimately to God.

In the Roman world of the early church, imperial cult worship was mandatory—citizens were required to burn incense to the emperor's genius (divine essence). Christians' refusal sparked persecution: they honored emperors appropriately but refused worship belonging to God alone. Daniel's precedent encouraged this faithful witness.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. Why do humans so readily direct worship toward visible mediators rather than the invisible God?
2. How do we distinguish between appropriate honor/respect for spiritual leaders and inappropriate veneration that crosses into idolatry?
3. What does Daniel's likely refusal of worship teach us about handling praise, recognition, or success in ministry?
4. In what subtle ways might contemporary Christians allow 'worship' of leaders, celebrities, or influencers rather than God alone?
5. How does this incident foreshadow Christ's unique role as the one mediator worthy of worship (being both God and man)?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא־דָּנֵי אֶל אֶנְפָּה וְהִי עַל נְפָל נְבֻכְּדָנֵצָר מֶלֶךְ אֶבֶן אֶדְן

Then **the king** **Nebuchadnezzar** **fell** **upon** **his face** **Daniel**

H116

H4430

H5020

H5308

H5922

H600

H1841

אָמַר רַב יְהֹוָה וְמִנְחָה

and worshipped **an oblation** **and sweet odours** **and commanded**

H5457

H4504

H5208

H560

לְנַעַת כָּה לְתַה:

that they should offer

H0

H5260

Additional Cross-References

Acts 14:13 (Parallel theme): Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

Acts 10:25 (Worship): And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

Ezra 6:10 (Kingdom): That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

Revelation 22:8 (Worship): And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

Revelation 19:10 (Worship): And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Leviticus 26:31 (Parallel theme): And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours.

