

Daniel

Chapter Three

- **The Image of Gold and the Fiery Furnace**

The Image of Gold and the Fiery Furnace

Verses 1-30

Daniel 3 contains no prophecies but this simple well-known story of faith has challenged millions of Christians to live a life for God. Through the years, Christian martyrs have died by being burned at the stake; this chapter however is the only record we have of servants of God being thrown into a fire as execution.

Verse 1

“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.”

Some may be a bit surprised at Nebuchadnezzar’s reversion to pagan idolatry and his order of torture, after his testimony in 2:47. As we see again later in this chapter, despite his emotional outburst in 2:47, Nebuchadnezzar did not forsake his pagan deities or pagan worship; he just added Daniel’s God to the list of gods to be worshipped.

“Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide...”
It is estimated a statue this large would be seen from fifty miles away. The word used for image is “*tselm*” which means “the likeness of something living”. This “*image of gold*” was probably a reproduction of Nebuchadnezzar himself, (his pride will be dealt with in chapter 4). Assyrians, Babylonians and Greeks were all fond of statues – especially ones that produced an “awe” response from those who see it for the first time. This was the same site as the tower of Babel in Genesis.

To help put the size of this image in perspective one can think of how they feel when they stand in front of the Jefferson or Lincoln Memorials in Washington, D.C.

Verses 2-3

“He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.”

To dedicate this image, everyone on the federal payroll was to show up. No options, no exclusions. This statue was probably made of wood and then overlaid with gold. That was a common method of building such an object. However, this image takes on something of the character of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

Exodus 37:25-26

“They made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high —its horns of one piece with it. ²⁶ They overlaid the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and made a gold molding around it.

Isaiah 40:19

“As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.”

Jeremiah 10:1-10

“Hear what the LORD says to you, O house of Israel. ² This is what the LORD says: “Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. ³ For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. ⁴ They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. ⁵ Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.” ⁶ No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. ⁷ Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you. ⁸ They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. ⁹ Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the craftsman and goldsmith have made is then dressed in blue and purple— all made by skilled workers. ¹⁰ But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.

Verses 4-5

“Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.”

Just as Daniel’s list of public officials in the previous verse, the list of musical instruments here is probably not exhaustive of all that were available. One note of interest, within this list of musical instruments, the zither, harp, pipes are the only Greek words used in Daniel.

Music is an important part of a worship service, however the sound of these instruments were now used to produce idolatry. When heard, everyone must “*fall down and worship the image of gold*”. There was no allowance for personal worship.

Verse 6

“Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

Does the threat in verse 6 contrast with the proclamation of chapter 2? Not when one considers this is a king with a huge temper problem. His decree for torture and death can happen on a whim. If one cannot tell me my dream, they will be torn to pieces. Here if one does not bow down and worship this idol they will be thrown into a furnace – IMMEDIATELY!

Verse 7

“Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

The phrase “*men of every language*” probably speaks of any foreign dignitaries who in some way serve in the Babylonian court. With this edict, we can only imagine the sight of the entire assembly falling down in mass prostrate at the sound of the first musical note – all except three young Jewish boys, probably the only Jews present, which to the shock and anger of the rest, remain standing.

Verses 8-11

“At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

“At this time some astrologers” those who were saved by Daniel’s actions, “*came forward and denounced the Jews*”, which means slander and accusation. Jealousy and personal animosity were allowed to become public.

Three accusations were made against these three young men...

- They held no regard for the king himself
- They did not serve the king’s god
- They failed to worship the image of gold

Their actions were not as much an act of rebellion against this king as it was an act of obedience to the one true King.

Verse 12

“But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

In ancient cultures the worship of deities (religion) was tied together with the affairs of the state (politics). With that understanding, refusal to bow down would be considered an act of treason. The statue was designed for the direct worship of Nebuchadnezzar.

However, the three Jewish young men were simply obeying Old Testament law:

Deuteronomy 5:7-9

“You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of

those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Verses 13-14

“Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?”

The offense was so great that Nebuchadnezzar flew into a fit of rage. The king probably could not believe that anyone especially three men as brilliant as these three, would defy his edict and in reality, be committing suicide. Nebuchadnezzar was so perplexed that he summoned them – perhaps their refusal was a misunderstanding?

Verse 15

“Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

Just so their actions were not an act of ignorance, the king recited it all again. Nebuchadnezzar’s respect for Daniel’s God had not changed his theology. He challenged them, *“what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”*

150 years earlier a king made a similar mistake. Sennacherib was so taken back by Hezekiah’s refusal to hand over Jerusalem, he challenged the God of Israel and in one single night he lost 185,000 fighting men when they were slaughtered by an angel (2 Kings 19).

Verse 16

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.”

These men addressed the king with a bold statement but when they addressed him, they also skipped the popular *“O king, live forever”* greeting and merely addressed him by his name.

Their message was clear. Contrary to Nebuchadnezzar’s viewpoint he was not in control of their lives. They did not have to consider the consequences of this king but of the Living God.

Exodus 20:3-6

“You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of

those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Verse 17

“we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.”

God could deliver them from any blazing furnace, not just the one Nebuchadnezzar intended to use.

There is a theology lesson in verses 17-18. That is – there is a difference between God’s power and God’s will. Verse 17 proclaims God’s complete ability to deliver these men, in any way He chose to do so. Verse 18 raises the question of whether or not He makes that choice.

Verse 18

“But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

- Miracle or no miracle
- Deliverance or death

Neither factored into their decision. Whatever God did or did not do was up to Him and they would accept the outcome. They were going to do the best they could do – which was all they could do – the rest was up to God. Regardless of the outcome these young men were going to serve God not an idol.

The ultimate display of Godly courage is not to die with the expectation that God will somehow intervene at the last moment but rather to live or die with complete confidence that God is going to do what God is going to do.

*** The book of Daniel’s theme is the sovereignty of God*** whether it is in the lives of His people, the affairs of a nation, or world events – Godly courage stands out, see Psalm 118:6-7 and Hebrews 13:6.

Psalm 118:6-7

“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.”

Hebrews 13:6

“So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

Verse 19

“Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual.”

A king who was already furious became even more furious; he raged! A furnace, which was already hot became hotter. One could imagine how his angry emotions would cause his fists to clench and his face to distort; his pride had been dealt a blow. He then gives the foolish order to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual – as if this would increase the torment! He should have cooled the furnace seven times less if he really wanted to torture them.

Verses 20-21

“and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.”

No more debate. No more opportunity to insult the king. Nebuchadnezzar “commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army” to carry out the execution. They were grabbed exactly as they were dressed and tossed immediately into the fire. (Daniel will elaborate this point, what they were wearing, shortly).

Verses 22-23

“The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.”

This is obviously a miracle. The three young men would not have survived in a normal furnace, but in this case the flames were so hot that even the soldiers carrying out the execution order were killed by being too close to the heat at the edge of the furnace.

Archeologists have found that furnaces in Mesopotamian were shaped like the old-fashioned glass milk bottles. There were usually two small holes for the insertion of pipes, when heat needed to be greater than the flute or chimney would produce.

Verses 24-25

“Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, O king.” He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

Instantly the king “*leaped to his feet in amazement*” because his mind could not comprehend what his eyes were seeing. Men who should be dead were alive and walking around in the fire! Men who were tied now were unbound. Although the heat was so

severe it killed the soldiers who threw the men in, they now stood in the fire unharmed and instead of three now there were four of them!

The fourth looked like “*a son of the gods*” the KJV reads “*the Son of God.*” Like the Roman soldier at the Cross, Nebuchadnezzar merely acknowledged a form of Deity. We can only guess what Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fourth man to come to the conclusion that he did. It is doubtful that he would have had the insight to understand that he was in the presence of the Son of God. The pre-incarnate Christ...

- Just as God appeared in the garden to Adam and Eve
 - Just as when He walked with Enoch
 - Just as when he wrestled with Jacob
- Just as when He spoke to Moses in a burning bush

Knowing the prophetic message of Daniel some scholars see symbolism between this scene in Daniel and the Great Tribulation period.

- The fiery furnace represents the suffering that will occur
 - Nebuchadnezzar represents the antichrist
- The gold image represents the abomination of desolation
- The three Hebrews represent the remnant which will be sealed
- Just as Jesus was there in the fire, He will be there with His saints who go through the trial of the Tribulation.

Verse 26

“Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,”

This king suffered from mood swings – now he wanted deliverance as badly as he wanted destruction just moments before.

Nebuchadnezzar no longer asked, “*what God will be able to rescue you from my hand?*” (3:15) “*So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire*” unscathed. The fourth man disappeared; the king’s order to come out had no effect on Him.

Verse 27

“and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.”

Now we learned why Daniel mentioned their clothing in verse 21. This blazing furnace, as hot as an angry king could make it, did nothing to them or their clothing. Not a hair was singed, not a thread burned. There was not even the smell of fire. What was the only thing missing? The material that was used to tie their hands and feet!

This should remind us of Isaiah 43:1-3

“But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;”

Verse 28

“Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.”

Nebuchadnezzar now wanted to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego just as he once wanted to worship the God of Daniel. He probably still had no clue who or what that might be, he could just grasp the reality of the moment. Their God just did a miracle and they are the *living* proof of it.

Notice now Nebuchadnezzar changed his statement from it being the Son of God in the fire with them to an angel of God.

Verses 29-30

“Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

An absolute monarch like Nebuchadnezzar could not restrain himself from issuing decrees. Notice he still did not turn away from his own gods but just prohibited anyone in Babylon from saying anything against the God of the three Hebrews. There were still other gods in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

Lessons for every Christian can be learned from this chapter. In spite of separating from parents, in spite of peer pressure, in spite of immorality all around, in spite of corrupt influences in the workplace, when the hour of testing comes people (even young people) have the ability to show a commitment and love for a God who is faithful to His people even when they are in captivity. A God who is ready and able to deliver those who put their trust in Him.

Verse 18 sums up chapter 3 very well – Spiritual courage trusts and obeys God!

Complete commitment – we do not need to defend ourselves (3:16)

Complete confidence – the God we serve is able to save us (3:17)

Complete courage – even if He does not ... we will not serve other gods (3:18)

Complete conviction – willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except the One True God (3:28)