



Daniel

דניאל

Chapter 3

KEEPING YOUR FAITH WHEN THINGS HEAT UP

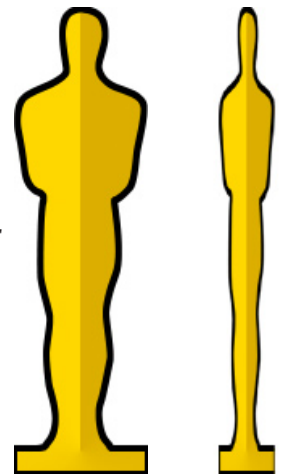
Daniel and his three friends, filled with grace and mercy, have saved the life of every official wise man of Babylon. Are they grateful?

As we find so often in life, our faith in God doesn't remove us from strife but often seems to thrust us into the midst of it. The account in Daniel's third chapter is an inspiring example of how we can respond when life isn't fair in our faith.

DANIEL 3:1

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

- Daniel does not specify what the giant statue was an image of. Scholars have argued over this for generations. For a number of reasons, it is highly unlikely that this was an image of Nebuchadnezzar.
- The extreme dimensions of this gold-covered image do not allow it to be the image of a man unless it was distorted so much that it would be an irreverent likeness. It is exceptionally tall and narrow, measuring almost 9 stories high and just 9 feet in width -- a tenth as wide as it is high. Even the narrow Oscar award, if enlarged to such a height would be 28 feet wide. So what are the possibilities?
- Except in Egypt (and later in Rome) it was considered blasphemy for any man -- even the king -- to set himself up to be equal to a god. Kings would associate themselves with the gods, but only as men assigned to carry out their duties. The name Nebuchadnezzar makes him the "protector of Nebo's boundaries." He is not equal to Nebo, but acts as his personal deputy in this role. This brings the king glory and honor similar to that given to the gods. In essence, the people worship their gods through the king.
- Stelae have been found from that time period showing people worshiping large statues while the king stands nearby. This way the king is given honors that are



Some say this was a statue of Nebuchadnezzar. That's impossible given the dimensions. The skinny Oscar statue (left) is 28% as wide as it is high. Shown on the right is a statue of a person measuring 10% as wide as it is high. This was obviously an image of something other than a man.



Chapter 3

generally given to the gods, but by personally distancing himself he avoids making himself equal to the gods.

- An Assyrian practice called for an image of a weapon of their kings to be set up as an object to be honored as a symbol of loyalty to the king and the gods. Failure to worship the object was considered insubordination. Participation showed acceptance of the deity and of the king's authority as a representative of that deity. It was a ritual that required people to honor the king as a god without requiring the king to set himself up as a god. A clever loophole in essence that accomplished the same thing.
- Historical records from that time period show that Nebuchadnezzar was dealing with a major civil uprising in 576BC, which would be around the time of this event. If these events were indeed related, it is reasonable to assume that the requirement to pledge allegiance to the gods of the king was designed to create the appearance of national unity.
- Although Dura simply means "enclosed by a wall" and many cities had the word attached to their name, most historians agree that the location of this statue was about six miles south of Babylon.

DANIEL 3:2-3

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the satraps, prefects, governors, captains, treasurers, judges, counsellors and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Then the satraps, prefects, governors, captains, treasurers, judges, counsellors and all the rulers of the provinces were gathered together for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image.

- We read this passage so quickly we forget that building the statue involved a huge period of time. Weeks of planning were followed by assignments of work detail to laborers. Building a statue nearly 9 stories high takes a bit of time. Design was followed by construction, followed by gold-leaf application. Once the completion date approached, the king would have sent invitations to military officers and top officials of all kinds to attend the dedication party from across the empire. This would have likely involved three or four weeks notice. So in total a few months were probably needed to make this come together. All of this designed to establish allegiance to the gods or chief god of the Babylonians *through* the king.
- Satraps were provincial governors looking after major divisions of the empire.
- Prefects were similar to governors, but they were responsible for conquered cities.



Chapter 3

- Governors were civil administrators over provinces.
- That the proclamation and invitation extended to so many officials, and that they are specifically named, indicates that this was an empire-wide ordinance, not just a local issue.

DANIEL 3:4-6

Then a herald cried aloud, “To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at whatever time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

- Archeologists have found a brick-making furnace that appears to have been used for executions. It served two duties as a huge, sophisticated facility measuring a city block on each side. The bricks of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire were so well made that even today they remain in excellent condition. They were used for hundreds of years as construction materials after the decline of the city of Babylon. One of the reasons is the sophisticated design of the firing furnaces.
- The Aramaic does indeed say “instantly” or “immediately” which is a clear reference to the immediacy of the punishment. The furnace was ready to go and there may have been some preparation already established in anticipation of any non-compliance.
- Note the inclusive reference to peoples (racial groups), nations (the nations making up the empire) and languages (the conquered nations with different first tongues). Not only is this further evidence that this was an empire-wide proclamation, but these high officials represented the rest of the empire. Their allegiance would demonstrate that they would carry the message to every corner of the Babylonian empire, thus ensuring unity for Nebuchadnezzar through a state-imposed religion.

DANIEL 3:7

So 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. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music,



Chapter 3

all the people, nations and languages fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

- Exactly six instruments are mentioned by name. Six is the number of man, often used by Scripture to demonstrate incompleteness and imperfection or rebellion (unfortunately some English translations do not include the final instrument, which was *pipe*, an ancient form of bagpipe).
- We see that there was immediate compliance by the huge group assembled before this huge statue. There is no doubt that they were expected to worship in synchronized fashion, their heads touching the ground simultaneously. A vast sea of people bowing in unison. It would have been an impressive sight.
- Yet among this mass of compliance were three men who did not bow down. They refused to follow the pattern dictated by the world around them and stood their ground. Scripture doesn't tell us where Daniel was, but it is often thought that he was on the dais with the king and was thus not required to bow himself.

DANIEL 3:8

At that time certain Chaldeans came forward, and accused the Jews.

- Some Bibles use Chaldeans, which is both a term of nationality and title. Many Bibles use other terms, the most popular being “astrologers.” The description refers to wise men in charge of studying and recording the position of the stars, a highly sophisticated process in that culture. It does not refer to astrologers as we think of them today. They were more akin to astronomers, actually. These were wise men like Daniel, but they did engage in a sort of divination practice by trying to interpret heavenly things as signs from the gods.
- It is most likely that these men came forward on the evening of the same day of the official dedication. As chief officials, the three men accused would have been present at the dedication ceremony.

DANIEL 3:9-12

⁹ They said to king Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever.

¹⁰ You, O king, have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the golden image,

¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship is to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.



Chapter 3

¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon -- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego -- these men, O king, pay no attention to you. They neither serve your gods nor worship the golden image you set up.”

- The phrase “live forever” is just an early version of our modern-day “long live the king.”
- Why repeat the proclamation? The whole thing looks like a legal proceeding designed to give the king no room to maneuver. They wanted to make sure these guys were punished as the decree called for.
- Notice the accusation against the Jews. There is a clear tone of anti-Semitism.
- There are three accusations made here. First, that they pay no attention to Nebuchadnezzar’s commands (this one specifically but the Aramaic covers a broader sense). This is, of course, patently false and he would know it. The second is proof of the first: that they don’t serve the gods of Babylon (notice that they call them the king’s gods). The third is that they don’t worship the image (note again how it is referred to as the king’s project). The last two accusations are true.

DANIEL 3:13-15

Then Nebuchadnezzar, furious with rage, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Now if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I have made when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, horn, pipe and all kinds of music; well and good. But if you do not, you will be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Then what God shall deliver you out of my hands?”

- Although Nebuchadnezzar is burning with rage, it may be directed partly to those who put him up to this ridiculous situation. He may realize that they planned this and used him as a pawn in their game. From what we’ve already seen of his ego, this would not sit well with him. If his fury were directed only to the three men, he would probably not have called them in for a second chance, though it is possible.
- Nebuchadnezzar asks if these accusations are true. Notice that he ignores the first one made, because he knows it was ridiculously false. He deals only with the last two of the three claims.



Chapter 3

- The proclamation did not give room for a second-chance interview with the king. This is a very unusual move designed to give them a chance to put this whole incident behind them. They can comply now, (most likely in the presence of the accusers), or he has no choice but to fulfil the punishment described.
- Notice the interesting question posed by Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't argue with the religious beliefs of these three Jews, but cast doubt on their validity in an effort to get his way.
- This Babylonian king is a man who seeks power and control in all situations. In his effort to have his way here, it seems that the king has forgotten about the God of Daniel, the true God who has already proved Himself to the king earlier.

DANIEL 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter.

If we are thrown into the burning fiery furnace, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But even if he doesn't, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up."

- What great faith is shown here! These men do not even attempt to defend their faith or their right to believe in God. They do not argue with the king. They humbly give the situation entirely to God. They are implying that He will deal with the king personally. Note too that they don't push God into a corner. While they are confident that He will rescue them, they give Him room to save them or not.

DANIEL 3:19-23

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious, and his facial features were changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal.

²⁰ And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace.

²¹ So these men were bound in their coats, pants, head gear and their other garments and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.



Daniel
דניאל

Chapter 3

²² Because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flames of the fire killed the men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, firmly bound, fell down into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

- Finally, the king snaps completely. He hates being powerless, and this humility and trust in someone greater than Nebuchadnezzar is too much for him. He becomes so enraged that his facial features contort and he flies completely out of control. A temper tantrum by a king.
- How do you heat a brick-firing furnace seven times hotter than usual? The normal firing temperature is about 1000 degrees Celsius. The most they could have achieved was 1500° which is only 50% hotter. Notice that nobody argues with the tyrant. They pretend to follow his orders.
- Nebuchadnezzar orders the fire made seven times hotter than normal -- something quite impossible to do -- and then commands that the strongest and most valiant men in his military (probably from his personal guard) to bind the men and throw them into the furnace.
- The three men were tightly bound, clothes and all, as they were thrown into the fiery furnace. This should have made quite a spectacle in the furnace as the clothes were expected to burst into flame almost immediately.
- The flames raged well above their normal temperatures as slaves compressed the huge bellows to create additional heat in a frantic attempt to appease the king. A back draft hit the party as they opened a roof-top door, killing the soldiers.

DANIEL 3:24-26

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king leaped to his feet astonished, and said to his counsellors, "Did not we throw three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

He answered, "Look! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire.



Chapter 3

- The men are no longer bound but walking around. Having them bound was clearly part of God's plan so that He could get Nebuchadnezzar's attention more dramatically. Imagine the scene: three men walking around, unharmed, with someone shining with supernatural light that even a pagan king understood!
- Obviously the fourth being is an angel, but some Bible teachers think it could be a 'Theophony,' an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. That is a possibility, but we shouldn't make too much of the king's reference to one "like a son of the gods." Some try to turn that statement into "one like the Son of God" to give it special significance. It is unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar, the Gentile and pagan king of a pagan nation that worshipped a plethora of gods, would have referenced the angel in a way that positioned him as Messiah, the Son of the one and only God.
- Nebuchadnezzar calls for them to come out. It's interesting that he didn't call for the fourth one to come with them. The being with these men must have been so remarkable that no doubt was left in his mind. It was not a vision or mirage of light, but something very real and powerful beyond imagination. The fourth figure probably scared the wits out of the king.

DANIEL 3:27

And the satraps, prefects, governors and king's counsellors gathered together around these men. They saw that the fire had no power to harm their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed, neither were their coats scorched, nor any smell of fire upon them.

- All these officials from across the kingdom were still in Babylon, seeing with their own eyes something beyond human understanding, on the very day that the king proclaims allegiance to gods that had never proved themselves in any way! They would take this story to every corner of the empire!

DANIEL 3:28-29

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him. They have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God.

Therefore I make a decree, "That the people of every nation and language which speak anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be made into limbs, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other God that can save in a way like this."



Chapter 3

- We laugh when we read this decree because we see the human weakness in the king that we can all identify with. He immediately resorts to old habits and wants to apply his usual techniques of brute strength to the situation. Impulsive as ever, the king now turns his attention to the hooligans who put him up to the whole charade. No doubt he is well aware that it was a setup and he now makes sure that it is put behind him by establishing a severe punishment for any further accusations against the Jews.
- Nebuchadnezzar was not a guy who fooled around, or waffled when his preconceptions were tested. He quickly adapted and recognized that the God of the Hebrews was stronger than his own gods. Other tyrant leaders we are familiar with, like Hitler, probably would not have immediately acknowledged God publicly the way Nebuchadnezzar did.
- The king was clearly aware of angels and their significance. Where did he learn this? From Daniel?
- Though some Bibles use the phrase “cut into pieces,” the Aramaic does not refer to cutting instruments. This phrase is the same used in chapter 2. The punishment was to be “torn limb from limb” which probably referred to a form of punishment where the victim was tied hands and feet to four trees. When the binding holding the trees together was unloosed the trees would fly apart, ripping the body into pieces.
- The reference to turning the house into a dungheap or pile of rubble is actually quite rough: in the Aramaic it literally means turning their houses into outhouses, places where dung is gathered.

DANIEL 3:30

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

- These men were already high officials, so the promotions must have been quite significant.
- In their positions, these men would be even more influential in talking about the God of the Hebrews. Nebuchadnezzar did not seem at all concerned about the impact they would have on his attempt to unify the nation in a religious sense.
- Nobody knows what became of the statue. Presumably it was quickly abandoned, stripped of its gold covering, then left to decay on the Plain of Dura.