

**Daniel 3 continued ...**

Last week we looked at Daniel 3:1–7 where king Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold image “on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.” It seems that government officials of every rank were required to attend the dedication ceremony. As part of that ceremony, all the officials were required to fall down and worship the image at the sound of music. Any that failed to obey were to be thrown into a nearby (presumably) furnace and burned to death. So far, at least through verse 7, all the officials paid homage to Nebuchadnezzar and complied with the request. All the officials ... except ...

**Daniel 3:8–12**

<sup>3</sup> For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> "You, 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. <sup>11</sup> "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. <sup>12</sup> "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 verb used here in the Aramaic (brought charges against) is a common expression that literally means *to eat the flesh of any one* ... we might say in English ... “they chewed them out.” But the point being, these Chaldeans brought charges against the Jews. In the Greek, the verb is διαβάλλω, which we recognize means “to accuse.” They remind the king that he made a decree and that there are those in the crowd of officials that are not obeying his order to worship at the sound of the music. Why did the accusers feel the need to expose Daniel’s friends to the king?

Could be lots of reasons. For one, the Jews were from a nation that would be expected to be in subjugation to Babylon, not hold a position of leadership within the government. Perhaps these Chaldeans saw an opportunity to advance their own positions in the kingdom if the Jews could be gotten rid of. There may even be a veiled slander at Nebuchadnezzar himself, though we assume they said this very carefully and tactfully, that brings into question the king’s wisdom in having these Jews occupy high levels in his kingdom. There are certain Jews ... “whom you have appointed ...” Further, the Chaldeans actually call out the individuals by name. With that many people at the dedication, why would the Chaldeans not just say “Hey king, some officials are not bowing down.” They were careful to mention that they were Jews ... and they called them out by name.

The only explanation that makes any sense is that these Chaldeans were indeed resentful toward the Jews. No doubt they all understood the unique nature of the religious beliefs of the Jews. Babylonians were polytheistic, Jews are monotheistic. The Chaldeans were willing to display their allegiance to the Babylonian gods publicly; but for a Jew to do that would be a violation of the Law of Moses. What is at the heart of antisemitism like this? Do you not think that Daniel and his friends instructed the Chaldeans concerning the Old Testament scriptures, which absolutely depict the nation of Israel as being unique among all the nations? Her charter was to never intermingle or intermarry with the rest of the nations. That can cause a certain amount of resentment toward the Jews. Given Israel’s unique position among the nations of the earth, what is the obligation of all other nations toward the Jews? We as a Gentile nation are to accept God’s divine will and respect the Jewish nation as the one that God has chosen to bring our Savior! This is why there are blessing and curses within the Abrahamic covenant for the nations. We as the United States are to recognize Israel’s unique place in the plan of God and behave accordingly. Why do the nations hate the Jews? One simple word ... jealousy ... .. onward ...

Now, the Chaldeans brought three separate complaints against Daniel’s friends. First, it is argued that the Jews disregarded the king himself. The Greek is a little ambiguous in some of the texts. One says “they don’t fear you” and another says “they don’t obey you.” Whatever the exact translation of this verb, it is clear that the Chaldeans were trying to convey that the Jews were not paying due respect to the king of Babylon.

Second, the charge is made that the Jewish teens do not serve the king’s gods. Given the events of Daniel 1 and 2, this was not even necessary to repeat; everyone there would know that the Jews did not worship or serve the gods of Babylon. It is almost as if the Chaldeans were again emphasizing that the Jews were disrespecting the king, precisely because they do not serve the gods that the king serves. Finally, the charge is made that the Jews refuse to worship the image. Again, since the king

commanded it, this is a direct appeal to the king's authority. Now did Nebuchadnezzar know that the Jews did not serve the gods of Babylon, of course. But the Chaldeans are certainly slanting the accusations toward the Jews to make the king think that they are specifically rejecting his authority. This is a subtle but important point. Did the Jews, specifically Daniel's friends, accept that God had placed them under the rulership of Babylon? Yes. Did they understand why they were in exile under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel certainly understands that clearly (Daniel's prayer in chapter 9). And we will see that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response to the king did not involve overthrow of the government. It only involved rejecting a demand that the king had no right to make of the Jews. This is the classic case where the government exceeds its God-given authority and believers are expected to obey God rather than the government.

### Daniel 3:13–15

3<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. 14 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? 15 "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 do 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?"

We already know king Nebuchadnezzar had a hot temper. But notice that he did not immediately throw them into the furnace. There is some tension in the text here. We know the king has a hot temper; but here he seems to give Daniel's friends a few moments of leeway. He carefully reiterates his command to the Jewish teens, perhaps believing they simply did not understand what they were being asked to do. That's possible, but it seems more likely that the king was not totally trusting of these accusers. From chapter 1 it seems like Nebuchadnezzar was fairly distrusting of most of his wise men. Or it may be that the king is recalling their previous service in chapters 1 and 2 and, out of respect, gives them another chance.

But then Nebuchadnezzar makes a serious mistake and directly challenges the Lord God the Almighty. Remember Sennacherib, king of Assyria, challenged the Lord God in 2 Chron. 32.

32<sup>13</sup> 'Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands able at all to deliver their land from my hand? 14 'Who *was there* among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed who could deliver his people out of my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? 15 'Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you like this, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?'"

Recall that Sennacherib, the commander of the Assyrian army, woke up the next morning and had no army to command. Things usually don't end well for someone who directly challenges Yahweh. This statement by Nebuchadnezzar follows along the same lines. "What god is there" is the rendering of the NASB while the KJV has "who is the god." Either of these translations convey the same sentiment by Nebuchadnezzar; namely, "no god delivered you out of my hand when I conquered your nation ... and no god will deliver you now." That is quite a bold statement by Nebuchadnezzar. It should have shaken the young Jews as potentially the last words they would ever hear on this earth. But they displayed a level of courage well beyond their years and they remained unshaken. Consider their response to the most powerful man on the earth ...

### Daniel 3:16–18

3<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 "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. 18 "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 word translated "this matter" surely can be literally rendered "this decree, edict." They basically told the king ... "we do not have to explain ourselves as to why we did not and will not bow down ..." They then tell Nebuchadnezzar that there IS a God who can deliver them out of the king's hand ... and they were confident He could ... and would. Nevertheless, Daniel's friends acknowledged that perhaps God would not deliver them according to His own good purpose. And rather than try to rationalize away this situation, they simply delivered the bold truth to the king ... even if God does not save them from the fire, they will not serve his gods nor will they worship the image that he set up. This may be the boldest confrontation recorded in scripture ...

perhaps Elijah and the prophets of Baal notwithstanding, yet, their address to Nebuchadnezzar “O king” shows the respect to him due his rulership.

Many well-intentioned believers should take note of the Jewish teen’s response to the king. They did not protest, they did not riot, they didn’t call for the overthrow of the government. They simply refused to obey an edict that directly contradicted the law of God. I think this should be a believers first course of action when confronted with a clear violation of scripture. We are called to submit ourselves to governing authorities; but there are sometimes cases where “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Let’s ask ourselves a little side question at this point. Why do you suppose the three teens “hedged their bet” by saying ... even if He does not ...? Could they be certain that the Lord would save them? No, they could not be certain. But even more so, is it possible that they understood God’s sovereign plan for the exile of the nation of Israel? They knew that their own capture and deportation to Babylon was part of God’s plan, though it was a trial for them. They did not presume that the Lord would definitely save them because He did not save them from exile. This really is true faith. If God does not heal you; are you still going to serve Him. If you don’t get that promotion at work; are you still going to serve Him. Etc. etc. No matter what your circumstances in live, whether good or bad at times, God is still your Lord and you should serve Him though you don’t fully understand what His purpose is in your life sometimes. Enough jibber jabber ...

### **Daniel 3:19–23**

3<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> He commanded certain valiant warriors who *were* in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast *them* into the furnace of blazing fire. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up.

Then the king blew a gasket. He was filled with rage against Daniel’s friends. What does it mean his facial expression changed? Perhaps he was expectantly neutral as he asked them to reconsider, but now he was furious and it showed in his face. Did you ever know someone who turns beet red when they get mad? This is what we are to envision here. Steam coming out of his ears. He was smoking hot about this and he commanded some of that heat from his ears be directed at the furnace. Curious why the number 7 was used here. Was Nebuchadnezzar commanding that some kind of thermometer be used to set the temperature of the furnace exactly seven times hotter than nominal temperature? Or perhaps dump 7 times more fuel into the furnace than is usually used? Lol, probably not. “Seven times hotter” is probably an idiom of the time meaning ... “as hot as you can make it!”

Now, in verse 20 it appears Nebuchadnezzar uses some of his best soldiers to cast the young Jews into the oven. Perhaps in his anger he should have thought that decision out a little more carefully. Those soldiers were killed as they put Daniel’s friends into the opening at the top of the furnace. No doubt the flame and heat emanating from the opening was too hot for a human to survive. Try to envision what happened here. These soldiers tied up the Jews; then they carried them up to the opening in the top of the furnace, they threw them in ... and it is probably then that a flame shot out of the opening and fried the soldiers instantly. If you have ever build a rocket stove while camping, the airflow can emulate a jet engine whereby the cool air is sucked into the furnace and it picks up speed as the fire heats it very quickly and it shoots out the top.

Daniel then provides a little detail ... he says they “fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.” Normally, that is a detail that would be unnecessary in the present circumstance. But they were tied up, they were in the fire, and now we are going to see the miracle that God performs in saving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. One final detail that Daniel mentions that is unusual (for this kind of execution) is that the men were thrown in with all their clothes on. Their clothing was not stripped from them before being thrown in, which was the usual method. It turns out that the being tied up and clothed is important to the details of what happens next.

### Daniel 3:19–23

<sup>324</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." <sup>25</sup> He 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!" <sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.

In verse 24 we have a translation issue and an identity issue. The translation is straightforward ... it is very uncertain how to render the Aramaic that is translated in the NASB as "like a son of the gods." The Aramaic *elahn* (similar to *Elohim* in Hebrew) can only be plural, according to many commentators. But there are those who disagree concerning the ancient Aramaic. Should it be 'son of God' or 'son of gods?' If you look at a few different translations you will see that scholars are not united on how this should be rendered. I think the NASB gets it right based on one main piece of circumstantial evidence. How likely is it that, given Nebuchadnezzar's polytheistic worldview, he would understand that the singular Son of God is meant here? IMO, not very likely. It appears from the background and context here that Nebuchadnezzar is looking at something that he describes as 'god-like' in his appearance and he uses the term angel later.

Now, what is the identity of this fourth individual? There are two possibilities here. One, the fourth personage in the furnace was an angelic being. To Nebuchadnezzar, an angel could look like a god-like being. He later mentions (verse 28) that the angel saved them. Also, it will later be the case that an angel comes to rescue Daniel in the Lion's Den.

The second possibility is that the fourth individual is the Lord Jesus Christ preincarnate. Why would we say this. There are many references in the OT to a personage called the Angel of the Lord. This Angel of the Lord speaks in the first person for God and often times receives worship. For this reason, most expositors believe this is the preincarnate representation of the second person of the trinity, the Lord Jesus Himself.

Nebuchadnezzar then comes to the opening of the furnace (its cool there) and shouts for Daniel's friends to come out and he uses the term Most High God for Yahweh. Did Nebuchadnezzar finally renounce his polytheistic beliefs and acknowledge the One True God? Given the events in the next chapter this is a definite NO. His understanding at this point would be at best "the highest god among the numerous Babylonian gods. If the Lord God is indeed metering out revelation of Himself to Nebuchadnezzar little by little, it is clear that it is not yet sufficient to bring him to saving faith. Perhaps in the next chapter!

Now the obvious answer to Nebuchadnezzar's question "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" has been thoroughly answered; and the king acknowledges that the God of Daniel's friends can. So much so that the exclamation of verse 27 is highlighted. Not burned, hair not singed, clothes not burned up, not even the smell of fire on them.

### Daniel 3:28–30

<sup>328</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> "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." <sup>30</sup> Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's praise of the God of Daniel appears genuine, as well as his praise of his friend's faith. He acknowledges that the three disobeyed the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than worship falsely. What was the king's motivation for issuing a decree for blaspheming the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego? Perhaps he was fearful of God after seeing how He delivered Daniel's friends; he did say no other god could do that. Or perhaps this was meant to offer some kind of restitution to Daniel's friends and their standing before the other government officials. There are several lessons to be learned from Daniel chapter 3. We shall take the time to mention them before moving on to chapter 4. See you in 3 weeks!