

Daniel Chapter 3

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Introduction:

This chapter reports an incident about Daniel's three buddies, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel himself is absent from the scene - perhaps gone on official business. This absence may even account for the event being planned and staged. Daniel wasn't present to deflect the plan.

(3:1.) King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

- While **King Nebuchadnezzar** received the message from the One God of Heaven in chapter 2, he was still a worshiper of many gods (polytheist) in daily practice.
- This image of gold was 90' high and 9' wide. It was probably overlaid with gold and located southeast of the city of Babylon.
- **Nebuchadnezzar's** motive is not stated. It is quite possible that, overcome with pride because of his conquests and influenced by Daniel's identification of him as the head of gold of the great dream-image, the king erected this image to do honor to his gods for victory as well as to do honor to himself.

(2.) Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers,



treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up.

- All of the public **officials** were required to come for the dedication of this monstrosity. This guaranteed a large and enthusiastic attendance from political types whose jobs -- and their heads -- were at stake. It would also have a strong bonding and unifying effect on the entire empire.

(3.) So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

- As easily predicted, all of the leaders throughout the realm came. The inns of Babylon were full. It was time for the party to begin.
- Such a dedication would have a great psychological effect upon **officials** and people of the empire and the **king**. It would bind the empire together in patriotic and religious bonds.
- **Paul Butler** writes:

In those days practically all nations believed that success in military conquests was attributable to the power of the victor's gods over the gods of the vanquished. If a nation had prevailed over another nation, the thing that happened behind the scenes was that the victorious nation's gods had prevailed over the defeated. The king was merely expecting men to do what men naturally expected to do -- pay homage to Babylon's god for many victories.

(4.) Then a herald shouted out, "People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king's command! (5.) When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. (6.) Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

- **Worship** of this image was required by everyone present (vs. 5). It was not the plan here to negate anyone's religion. Rather, the plan was for everyone to join in the worship of a national shrine.
- **Instruments:**

- **Horn:** made from an animals horn.
- **Flute:** A whistle-like instrument with a shrill sound.
- **Zither:** A stringed instrument like a harp.
- **Lyre:** A triangular instrument with short strings.
- **Harp:** A stringed instrument.
- **Pipes:** Thought to be like a bagpipe.

The people of the city of Babylon loved music. Hear what the Jewish captives said:

For our captors demanded a song from us. Our tormentors insisted on a joyful hymn: "Sing us one of those songs of Jerusalem!" But how can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a pagan land? (Psalms 137:3-4 NLT)

- The penalty for not bowing down was clearly stated: quick transportation to a **blazing furnace** (vs. 6). Since no one had come for the purpose of their own cremation, everyone did as required and **worship**ed the image.
- The **furnace** was probably a brick kiln. Much construction of the time was of brick.

(7.) So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

- Provincial administrators were summoned to the dedicatory ceremony. In a society accustomed to a multiplicity of gods and varied cult ceremonies, the only people who would have taken offense at bowing to an idol would have been the Jews.

(8.) But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. (9.) They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Long live the king! (10.) You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments.

- The advisers to **the king** had been offended by the rapid advancement of the young **Jewish** men. Here was their chance to eliminate them. Under pretense of loyalty to the king, they were anxious to rid themselves of formidable rivals.
- The cunning **astrologers** repeated the exact words of the herald (verse 4). In case Nebuchadnezzar was thinking about something else or was slightly inebriated, the evidence did not rely on his memory, but his ears (vs. 10).
- The young Jewish governors (2:49) would not bow down because the God of Heaven does not allow this. The first commandment says clearly:

You must not have any other god but Me. "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.

(Exodus 20:3-4 NLT)

(11.) That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. (12.) But there are some Jews -- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego -- whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up."

- The astrologers thought, "Strike while the furnace is hot." They have the perfect case. Will Nebuchadnezzar keep his word? If he doesn't, his ability to rule will be in question.
- These ingrates were not recognizing that it was Daniel who had saved their hides at a point in the past. Chapter 2:24.
- The complaint was that the Jews did not have a proper ecumenical spirit (vs.12).

(13.) Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, (14.) Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? (15.) I will

give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"

- Then **Nebuchadnezzar** was enraged by this challenge to his supreme authority. The monarch that ruled the world could not rule his own rage.
- The astrologers were busy acting as police to be sure their counterparts did not escape. In fairness, **Nebuchadnezzar** questioned the three Jewish compatriots to be certain that there was not a misunderstanding (vs. 14). He did not want to lose valuable administrators, so he even gave them a second **chance**.
- **Matthew Henry:**
 “And, because he knew they buoyed themselves up in their refusal with a confidence in their God, he insolently set him a defiance: ‘And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Let him, if he can.’” -
- It was now *turn* or *burn* for **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**.

(16.) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. (17.) If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. (18.) But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

- The three did not seek to dissuade the king (vs. 16). Rational answers are useless against overwrought emotions.
- They believed that God would deliver them but if He chose not to, they still would not worship **Nebuchadnezzar's** idol. Their faith in God was rooted in the message of the past. God had **rescued** Israel from Egypt and they knew it.

- They did not commit God to a certain course of action (vs. 17-18). In verse 14, **Nebuchadnezzar** has spoken of *my god*. In their response, these men spoke of **the God whom we serve** (vs. 17). This was a struggle between deities.

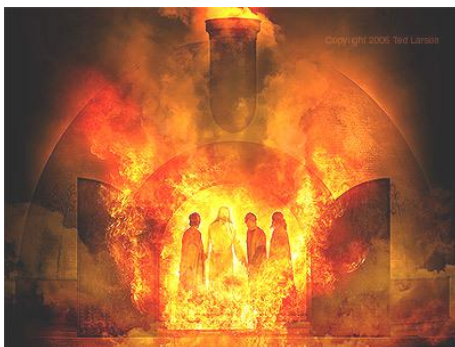
(19.) Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. (20.) Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

- Such a challenge to the greatest man on earth would not go unpunished. “Get the furnace hotter than usual.” **Nebuchadnezzar** would cremate these government employees to show who was in charge.
- After ordering a hotter furnace, he had the most prominent of his military men throw them in (vs. 20).

(21.) So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. (22.) And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. (23.) So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

- They were thrown in fully clothed to make the first few moments of pain even worse. They may have been clothed in their official regalia of office. The furnace was **hot**, but the king was **hotter**.
- The prominent military men died just getting the **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** into **the furnace**.
- **Paul Butler** observes:
The fact that the soldiers were burned to death instantly when they merely came close to the flames and the fact that the Hebrew men did not even have the smell of smoke upon them makes this miracle most outstanding.
- Excuses they did not make:

- We will fall down but not actually "worship" the idol.
- We won't become idol worshippers, but will worship it this one time, and then ask God for forgiveness.
- The king has absolute power, and we must obey him. God will understand.
- The king appointed us -- we owe this to him.
- This is a foreign land, so God will excuse us for following the customs of the land.
- Our ancestors set up idols in God's temple! This isn't half as bad!
- We're not hurting anybody.
- If we get ourselves killed and some pagans take our high positions, they won't help our people in exile!



— Adapted from the

Life Application Study Bible, NIV.

(24.) But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?" "Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied. (25.) "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"

- **Nebuchadnezzar** was watching to make sure his orders were carried out. After all, his orders to worship his idol had been refused by these three Jewish rebels.
- He saw something **amazing**. The three were not down or **bound**, but **walking around** in the furnace **unharmed** (vs. 25). And there is a **fourth** in there who looks like a deity. **Nebuchadnezzar** also called him an *angel* in verse 28.

- God had not delivered the Hebrews FROM the furnace, but IN the furnace.
- We must quote **Paul Butler** again:

It is so astonishing he is incredulous. He asks his counselors for confirmation of the number of men cast into that inferno for he has counted an extra one. He sees, in fact, six amazing things.

 - (1) he sees not three but four;
 - (2) they are not bound but free;
 - (3) they are not lying down or standing still but walking about;
 - (4) they are not being consumed by the fire but are unhurt;
 - (5) the appearance of the fourth was like unto a son of the gods;
 - (6) they were not frantically searching for a way of escape, but were evidently calmly resigned to let their God handle the situation.

(26.) Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. (27.) Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke!

- **Nebuchadnezzar** approached on the upwind side. The king called them out, quickly acknowledging the **Most High God** (vs. 26). It had been demonstrated again that **Nebuchadnezzar** was not the top authority on earth. This time, the three obeyed the king and emerged from the furnace (vs. 26).

- Besides **Nebuchadnezzar**, the **officials** of the land saw the miracle and experienced its evidence (vs. 27).
- **Paul Butler** writes:

“Daniel wants to be understood by his future readers that a large body of reliable witnesses satisfied themselves as to the perfect deliverance from certain death experience by these three Hebrew men. Deliverance was so complete and supernatural that their clothing did not even smell of fire or smoke. Under natural circumstances one who has been anywhere near a fire will bear the odor of smoke on his person or clothing.”

(28.) Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent His angel to rescue His servants who trusted in Him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. (29.) Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or

nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!"

- The great polytheist now acknowledges **God** and admits a miracle (vs. 28). Further, he **praised God** -- presumably he spoke highly of Him (vs. 28). He knows now that he is not the greatest power in the universe!
- It is important to note that **Nebuchadnezzar** ascribed their deliverance to their **trust** (faith) (vs. 28). He is catching on! Further, he knows why the miracle occurred (vs. 28). The young men had refused to violate the first commandment.
- A new law is put in place throughout his empire. It is illegal to say anything against the God of the three Hebrews (vs. 28).
- **... no other god** shows that **Nebuchadnezzar** is still a polytheist.

(30.) Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

- The three Jewish young men actually got **promotions** for their courage.
- God has been magnified publicly in Babylon, a great king has been humbled before his subjects, and decrees have been handed down that the God of the captive Jewish population is of greater honor than any of Babylon's mighty deities.

Concluding the chapter, we have read about three young men who were far from their homeland and away from their families, but they persisted in doing what God would have them do. They were threatened with a horrid death, but they stood for God anyway. As poets have said, they wouldn't bow, they wouldn't budge and they didn't burn. After their decisions, a representative from heaven also appeared in the furnace.

In our time, as believers, we have an added layer of help -- the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said after His resurrection that He will be with us always.

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20 NLT)

The words about *the end of the age* show that the promise was not just for the apostles who were listening. Every believer is included. The way He does that is by His Spirit living within us.

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NLT)

So every baptized believer has the Holy Spirit. And one purpose of the Spirit is to give us inner strength to say *yes* and *no* at the right times. Hear Paul:

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit.

(Ephesians 3:14-16 NLT)

MUSIC BOX

Come, let us sing to the LORD! (Psalms 95:1 NLT)

Verse	Links:
17	<i>He is Able to Deliver Thee.</i> bitly.ws/oqMs
25	<i>Fourth Man In The Fire</i> shorturl.at/biC69
28	<i>I Came Here to Stay</i> http://bitly.ws/orbf