

TOPIC: "The Fiery Furnace" - Daniel 3

What a dramatic story this is! Imagine three Jewish men daring to defy the ruler of the world, and daring to be different from the thousands of people in Babylon! Though this event took place over 2000 years ago in far-off Babylon, it has some important lessons for us today.

I. THE PRACTICAL LESSON

There is a 20-year interval between this chapter and the events in chapter 2. As you can see, Nebuchadnezzar's heart has not changed one bit. He admitted in 2:46-47 that Jehovah God was a great god, but this truth never really got to his heart. He praised Daniel and Daniel's God, but he did not repent of his sins and trust in Him. As a result, the king tried to force the entire empire to be idol-worshippers, which, in the long run, actually meant worshipping the king. After all, was he not the "head of gold" in the image he saw in his dream (2:38)? Then why not make an entire image of gold (probably wood covered with gold) and glorify the king even more? This is the way the human heart operates when God is not honored: man glorifies himself and tries to make everybody worship him.

Naturally, the three Jewish officers could not follow the king's orders. Romans 13 tells believers to obey rulers and laws, but Acts 5:29 and 4:19 make it clear that no Christian is to disobey the Lord by obeying the government. When the government tries to control our conscience and tell us how to worship, we obey God rather than men regardless of the cost. It was not easy for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to stand their ground when everybody else bowed down when the music played; but they refused to budge. Some of the other wise men (vs. 8) took this as an opportunity to accuse the Jews, and the king was enraged when he heard that his decree had been disobeyed. Knowing that the three men were good men (and friends of Daniel), he gave them another chance; but they remained firm. They would rather burn than turn! So, into the furnace they went, bound with their own clothing. Three promises stand out in this story:

1. The promise of persecution - Christians should expect the furnace of persecution if they live lives dedicated to Christ. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," wrote Peter (I Pt. 4:12ff). The world hates us, and Satan sees to it that the furnace gets "stoked up" seven times hotter! Of course, the three Jews could have made excuses and gone along with the crowd; but they were made of better stuff! They stood with one another and with the Lord, trusting God to glorify Himself either by their life or by their death. Christian, expect persecution; God promised it (Phil. 1:29; Jn. 15:18-20).

2. The promise of preservation. God will never forsake His own when they go through the fiery trial. He may not keep us out of the furnace, but He will go with us and bring us through for His glory. When the king looked into the furnace, he saw four men - and one of them was Jesus Christ! Reach Isa. 43:2 for God's promise to you. Christ walked with them; He loosed their bonds; He kept them from being harmed; in fact, they did not even smell of the fire when they came out (vs. 27). The secret? Their faith - Heb. 11:34.

3. The promise of promotion. These men were actually better off for having gone through the fire! For one thing, it gave them opportunity to walk with Christ and suffer with Him. It is worth danger and trial to know how near the Lord can be to us. The fire set them free from their bonds, just as suffering for Christ today gives us joyful liberty and freedom from sin and the world. Their experience glorified God before others (I Cor. 6:19-20); and the king promoted them and gave them honors. First the suffering, then the glory (see I Pt. 5:1 and 10-11).

## II. THE DOCTRINAL LESSON

In the Bible, "Babylon" is more than a city or an empire; it represents a system. It is God's name for Satan's system in this world. Babylon started in Gen. 10:10; it was the work of Nimrod, that "mighty rebel against the Lord." Babylon stands for man's rebellion against the Lord and man's substitutes for what the Lord gives us. In Gen. 11 we see Babel in its rebellion against God, man's attempt at worldwide unity politically and religiously. This is what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to accomplish with his great image; he wanted to unify his kingdom under one government and one religion. But this whole scheme is man-centered; there is no place for God at all! And it centers around gold. This whole Babylonian system is Satan's counterfeit, opposing God's truth, and seeking to capture the hearts, minds, and bodies of men. Actually, the name "bab-el" means "the gate of God." It pretends to be the way to heaven! In truth, it is the way to hell.

We see the final development of this false system in Revelation 17-18, the material, cultural, and religious systems of the world all united in one world federation. God will permit this "one world" system to grow, and then He will destroy it once for all. It is important that you know the difference between God's truth and Satan's lies, between true Christianity and Satan's "religions." True believers are not to be a part of this worldly system (Rev. 18:4-5). Like the three Hebrews, we must take our stand against Babylon and witness for the truth of God's Word.

## III. THE PROPHETIC LESSON

We have here a wonderful picture of events in the last days. Note, first of all, that Daniel was not present when these things took place. Undoubtedly he was away on official business for the king, and the king took advantage of his absence to erect his wicked idol. This illustrates the rapture of the church: when the church is out of the world, then Satan will be able to carry out his diabolical plans for enslaving the minds and bodies of men.

II Thess. 2 and Rev. 13 both make it clear that Satan is going to have a "heyday" after the Christians are raptured and taken to heaven. For one thing, he will raise up a world ruler, the Anti-Christ, who (like Nebuchadnezzar) will conquer the nations and establish a totalitarian government. The church will be gone, but there will be 144,000 Jewish believers sealed by the Lord and protected from Satan's devices (Rev. 7:1-8 and 14:1-5). The Anti-Christ will set up his own image and force the world to worship it (see Rev. 13), but the faithful Jews will not bow down. Like the Hebrews in Babylon, the 144,000 will serve God and God will protect them. It is interesting to note that the image of King Nebuchadnezzar is identified with the number 6 (60 cubits high, 6 cubits wide; and there are six instruments in the band, Dan. 3:1 and 5); and the image of Anti-Christ is identified with his number, 666 (Rev. 13:18). It is this image that Jesus called "the abomination of desolation" in Mt. 24:15-22.

So, we see in Dan. 3 a prophetic forecast of Israel during the tribulation period, after the church has been raptured. Nebuchadnezzar represents the Anti-Christ; his image represents the image of Anti-Christ that he will erect; and the three Hebrews represent the believing Jews, the 144,000, who will be protected during the tribulation. It is likely that these Jews will read Daniel 3 and understand it and know that their God will go into the furnace of tribulation with them and bring them out again for His glory.

Every day we can see our present world moving toward unification. There are scores of organizations and agreements that bind nations together these days. We have a world government in the United Nations; a world bank; a world court; and a World Council of Churches. Soon we will see the development of a "United States of Europe," and the leader of that organization will become the last world dictator, the Anti-Christ! The stage is set. "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh!" Before Jesus returns, we Christians may have to go through the "furnace of fire," but we need not fear, for He is with us. And far better to go through a furnace of fire than to live in a lake of fire for all eternity!

TOPIC: "The Tree Dream" - Daniel 4

This chapter is actually an official Babylonian document, written by the king himself! It is the story of his conversion, and what a story it is. Keep in mind that it was written seven years after the experience itself, so that vss. 1-3 and 37 are Nebuchadnezzar's public testimony of what God did to Him and for him. We will consider those verses at the end of our study. Now for the account of the king's dream.

I. THE DREAM RECEIVED - 4:4-28

It was at a time of peace and prosperity that God sent this dream to the king, for this dream was really a divine warning to him that his sins were going to catch up with him at last. He was secure, but it was a false security, similar to the one Jesus pictured in the parable of the rich farmer (Lk. 12:15-21). It is when this wicked world is resting in "peace and safety" that God's judgment will fall (I Thess. 5:3). The only true safety and rest is in Jesus Christ.

The dream was this: he saw a huge tree that overshadowed the entire earth, with the birds and animals taking refuge under it; and he heard an angelic voice say, "Cut down the tree!" The tree was cut down, but the stump was left in the wet grass, with a band of iron about it, for "seven times." Needless to say, the king was greatly disturbed by this dream, especially since he had received another dream in the early years of his kingdom, and it dealt with the future of his reign.

The king summoned his wise men, but they were unable to explain the dream! Remember their boast in 2:6. "Show us the dream and we will explain it." Well, the king did show them this dream and they could not explain it! The worldly-wise make their boast of great wisdom, but they cannot understand or explain the things of God (I Cor. 2:14-15). The king knew that only one man could solve the problem - Daniel, the man of God. So he called him to his throne and related to him the dream that had perplexed him. Nebuchadnezzar had power, riches, and glory, but he was unable to unlock the future. The poorest Christian is far richer than he, because we have in the Word the program for the future.

II. THE DREAM REVEALED - 4:19-27

Once again, God used Daniel as his "light in the darkness," for He revealed to him the meaning of the dream. But the revelation struck the prophet dumb for an hour! That must have been the longest hour of waiting in the king's history! It was plain to Daniel that the message of the dream was a sobering one. He did not take it lightly or deliver it in a careless fashion. A true prophet is always in sympathy with his message; he feels the burden of it and delivers God's Word faithfully. Many people have the idea that spiritual wisdom and knowledge always lead to joy and speaking, when many times they lead to sorrow and silence. See Dan. 10:1-3 for Daniel's reaction to the truth about the 70 years of captivity.

The explanation is not difficult to grasp. The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and his mighty kingdom (20-22). God often uses the figure of a tree to picture a kingdom; Ezek. 31 is an example, and so is Mt. 13:31-32. A tree is a good symbol of an earthly kingdom because it is rooted in the earth and depends on the earth for its food and stability. The other nations that looked to Babylon for protection and provision are pictured by the beasts and birds lodging in and under the tree. Certainly Babylon had become a great and powerful kingdom! But it was not for Nebuchadnezzar to boast, because God had given him his throne and his kingdom. That was the lesson the monarch was to learn - the hard way.

"The watcher and holy one" is, of course, an angel of God, appointed to work in the kingdom of Babylon. Dan. 9:10 and 10:4-20 inform us that the angels are very active in the affairs of the nations of the world. The angel announced, "Cut down the tree - get King Nebuchadnezzar off the throne!" What an experience he was going

to have! He would actually cease to live like a man and would live like a beast for seven years. The tree would be cut down, and the iron band would restrain its growth; but the judgment would not be permanent. After seven years, Nebuchadnezzar would become human again, his reason would return, and he would ascend his throne in great glory.

Why was God working this way in the king's life? To teach him humility. You will remember that in the king's "image dream" he was pictured as the head of gold; and in ch. 3, the king had made an entire image of gold to attract worship and praise to himself. Well, God was going to show this proud monarch that he was actually a beast at heart. In fact, in ch. 7, Daniel is going to have a vision that shows that all the empires are nothing but wild beasts! Daniel warned the king to repent and change his ways. "Break off your sins," he begged, "and perhaps the Lord will give you forgiveness and time to serve Him." After all, God had spoken to the king on two different occasions - the dream of ch. 2 and furnace episode in ch. 3 - and it is dangerous to turn a deaf ear to God.

### III. THE DREAM REALIZED - 28-36

It happened! God gave Nebuchadnezzar a whole year to consider the warning and turn from his sins, but the king paid no heed. In fact, he became more and more proud of his achievements. See Eccl. 8:11 and Prov. 29:1. But there came a day when judgment fell and the true beastly nature of the king was revealed for all to see. Men drove him from his palace and he lived for seven years like a beast of the field, eating grass like the oxen. When God wants to humble a proud king, He can do it quickly and thoroughly.

But it did not last forever. After seven years, Nebuchadnezzar was converted. The first step (the king tells us) was, "I lifted up mind eyes to heaven" (vs. 34). It is too bad he had not looked to heaven long before this! "I blessed God - I praised God!" That certainly sounds like a man whose life has been changed by faith in the Lord! The king had learned his lesson: he was nothing and God was everything. Read vs. 34-35 to see how much practical doctrine Nebuchadnezzar learned through this humbling experience. It is too bad that the proud rulers of this present world do not learn that they are nothing and God is everything. Vs. 17 states the lesson clearly: "The Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men..."

Now back to vs. 1-3. Here is this mighty dictator addressing all the peoples of the world and sending them peace! Nebuchadnezzar certainly was not known for his peaceful activities, because he was a cruel man of war. Vs. 1 reads almost like a NT epistle from Peter or Paul. Note how in vs. 2-3 he gives all the glory to God and ascribes greatness to the Lord. This, again, was very unlike this heathen dictator; for just seven years before he had been saying, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built!" He was boasting about his power and his majesty, with not a syllable of praise or gratitude to God. Well, all that is changed now; because the king writes an official document giving personal witness to what God had done for him. Vs. 37 is the grand climax: "I praise and extol and honor" - not Nebuchadnezzar - but "the King of heaven!"

"Those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (vs. 37). Do we not have in this chapter a foreview of what will happen to the nations in the latter days? Just about the time they will be boasting of their greatness and glory, God will send seven years of awful judgment upon them and bring them low. Then at the end of that tribulation period, Christ will return to earth and establish His kingdom. The nations that have trusted Him will enter into the glorious kingdom; the others will be cast out. Like Nebuchadnezzar, they will be converted from their pride and unbelief and will enjoy the blessing and glory of God. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time" (I Pt. 5:6).

## APPENDIX M

### AN OUTLINE

#### *Of The Book of Daniel*

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- I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING: God's Elevation Of Daniel And His Friends In The Court At Babylon (1:1-21)**
  - A. Nebuchadnezzar's Siege of Jerusalem and the Deportation to Babylon (1:1-2)
  - B. Nebuchadnezzar's Attempt to Reprogram Daniel and His Friends (1:3-7)
  - C. Daniel's Resolve Not to Compromise His Faith (1:8-16)
  - D. God's Elevation of Daniel and His Friends (1:17-21)
  
- II. THE ARAMAIC SECTION: The Demonstration of God's Sovereignty Over the Gentile Nations That Israel Was Being Subjected To (2:1-7:28)**
  - A. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Four-Part Image, and the Eventual Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom (2:1-49)
    - 1. The Inability of the Babylonian "Wise Men" To Interpret the King's Dream (2:1-13)
    - 2. Daniel's Intercession and Prayer (2:14-23)
    - 3. Daniel Presented to King Nebuchadnezzar (2:24-30)
    - 4. Daniel Reveals the Dream and Its Interpretation (2:31-45)
      - a. Daniel's Declaration of the Dream (2:31-35)
      - b. Daniel's Interpretation of the Dream (2:36-45)
    - 5. Nebuchadnezzar's Response To Daniel's Disclosure (2:46-49)
  - B. God's Deliverance of Daniel's Three Friends Who Refuse to Worship the Image of Gold (3:1-30)
    - 1. Nebuchadnezzar's Decree Demanding Worship Before the Statue of Gold (3:1-7)
    - 2. The Jews are Accused of Defying the King's Orders (3:8-12)
    - 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Angry Interrogation of Daniel's Three Friends (3:13-18)

4. Nebuchadnezzar's Wrathful Order to Throw the Three Into the Furnace (3:19-23)
5. God's Divine Protection Upon the Three in the Furnace (3:24-27)
6. Nebuchadnezzar's Decree to Honor the God of Heaven (3:28-30)
- C. God's Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar, To Whom is Revealed the Dream of the Great Tree (4:1-37)
  1. An Introduction to Nebuchadnezzar's Decree Made After His Humbling (4:1-3)
  2. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Search for An Interpreter (4:4-9)
  3. Nebuchadnezzar's Disclosure of the Dream to Daniel (4:10-18)
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  5. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and the Fulfillment of the Dream (4:28-33)
  6. Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration and Humble Praise for God (4:34-37)
- D. God's Humbling of Belshazzar, To Whom is Revealed the Handwriting on the Wall (5:1-30)
  1. Belshazzar's Insolence at the Feast (5:1-4)
  2. Belshazzar's Perplexion Upon Seeing the Inscription (5:5-9)
  3. The Queen Mother's Recommendation to Call in Daniel (5:10-12)
  4. Belshazzar's Offer to Reward Daniel for Interpreting (5:13-16)
  5. Daniel's Response to Belshazzar (5:17-28)
    - a. Daniel's Confrontation of Belshazzar's Arrogance (5:17-23)
    - b. Daniel's Explanation of the Meaning of the Inscription (5:24-28)
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  1. The Conspiracy Against Daniel (6:1-9)
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  3. Daniel's Deliverance and The Punishment of His Enemies (6:18-24)
  4. Darius's Testimony to God's Sovereignty (6:25-28)
- F. Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts From the Sea, and the Eventual Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom (7:1-28)
  1. The Visions Given to Daniel (7:1-14)
    - a. Vision of the Four Beasts (7:1-8)
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**III. THE HEBREW SECTION: The Revelation of God's Plan to Ultimately Rescue Israel, But Not Until She Has First Suffered At the Hands of Both Antiochus and the Antichrist (8:1–12:13)**

- A. The Vision of the Ram and the Goat: Anticipated Persecution by Antiochus (8:1-27)
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- B. The Vision of the 70 "Weeks" Prophecy: God's Time-table for Israel (9:1-27)
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