

Daniel Lesson 3 Lecture

Daniel 3

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them Exodus 20:4-5a

- The focus of Daniel 3 is God's power, which is stronger than death.
- The story gives courage to God's people in the face of insurmountable odds.
- Finally, the story serves as a reminder of the Exodus 20 prohibition against worshipping other gods or idols.
 - Daniel and his 3 friends had been exiled from Jerusalem while Jehoiakim was on the throne. Jehoiakim had "done evil in the sight of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 36:5)
 - The people of Judah were paying lip service to God in the Temple but also worshipping Baal, Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Molech, and Astarte (the goddess of heaven).
 - God was going to punish all of Judah for its idol worship when Jerusalem is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and its citizens taken into exile.
- What can we say about the image?
 - An image/statue that was 90 feet high and 9 feet wide would have towered over many Babylonian buildings. This golden image was 9 to 11 stories tall.
 - The plain of Dura has not been precisely located. Daniel 3 states that Dura was in the province of Babylon. It's possible that the plain was close enough to the city of Babylon that its residents could see the statue from the top of Babylon's city walls.
 - The image was likely wood or brick, covered with gold plate. It's possible that the fiery furnace of Daniel 3 was used to make the bricks for the statue or smelt the gold for its covering.
 - Scholars have deliberated about whether the image was mounted on a pedestal, thus giving it its impressive height, or whether it was actually a 90-foot-high image.

- The latter group of scholars point to the Colossus of Rhodes, built during the subsequent Persian period in 280 BC, as an example of a comparable statue. The Colossus of Rhodes was 108 feet tall.
- Is the image of a god or is it Nebuchadnezzar? Tremper Longman points out that it was rare for a Mesopotamian king to be declared divine and that there is no evidence that Nebuchadnezzar had done so.
- But does the question really matter? For Daniel's 3 friends, the seemingly simple act of bowing down to an image, will reduce their God to just another deity among the Babylonian pantheon of gods. God's attributes of power, authority, and presence will be diminished by careless idol worship.
- Paul states the risks well in Romans 1:21-22:
 - For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Romans 1:21-23
- Nebuchadnezzar clearly intended for the dedication of the statue to be a public spectacle.
- He ordered every official of every province of Babylon to attend, prostrate themselves, and worship the image. Recall that the Babylonian empire at this time extended from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. It included the conquered nations of Assyria, Syria, Phoenicia, Philistia, Judah, Moab, and Edom.
- Also present were a large orchestra, soldiers, and people of many different languages and nations.
- John Calvin points out in his commentary on Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar orders an outward worship observance of the image. He doesn't order a verbal profession of belief in the image or the deity it represents. But then, isn't this just a slippery slope for the Jews on the plain of Dura? It isn't that far from an outward observance to full idolatry. And we are reminded of Jesus' words on the definition of the sin of adultery and its slippery slope:
 - But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28

- Imagine the king's order to the musicians. Everyone present falls down to worship the image. 3 men are left standing among the sea of prostrate individuals. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego know their Scripture. They had heard the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) read aloud when it had been discovered during King Josiah's reign. Deuteronomy chapter 5 includes a 2nd list of the 10 Commandments.
- These 3 men performed quiet defiance in the face of a fiery death.
- Depending on your translation, Daniel 3:8 uses the word astrologers or Chaldeans for the name of the Jews' accusers.
- The Chaldeans were a social class of highly educated people who were remembered for their studies in astronomy and astrology. Nebuchadnezzar may have been a Chaldean.
- Clearly, this group of accusers was jealous of the favors bestowed upon Daniel and his 3 friends, as well as their meteoric rise in power.
- Notice the 3 young men's language when challenged by Nebuchadnezzar.
 - God has the ability to save them, but God may choose to let them be burned to death.
 - In the *Sixfold Commentary Upon Daniel*, Andrew Willet says the following:
 - "It is in God's hand and in his choice whether to deliver his saints from temporal danger or to translate them to immortality. He best knows what is fit for everyone."
 - Whatever happens, they will not worship the golden image.
 - Notice also that they won't serve the king's gods either. Thus, they express their future plans, should they survive the fiery furnace.
- The 3 men are clearly willing to be martyrs to their faith.
- Nebuchadnezzar has taunted the men. "What god will be able to rescue you out of my hand?" (Daniel 3:15c)
- He quickly discovers that a big "g" God can rescue the men.
- God has the last word and the last laugh. Deuteronomy 32:39 twists Nebuchadnezzar's words around:

- See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.
- Next, there is the question regarding the 4th man in the furnace with Daniel's 3 friends.
 - Notice that Nebuchadnezzar himself is not sure who the 4th person is. He calls him "a son of the gods" in verse 25 and "an angel of God" in verse 28.
 - Scholars disagree on whether the 4th person was an angel or an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. Regardless of one's opinion, the point of the passage is that God sent someone to rescue his people. John Calvin said that "God saved the men in the fire, not from the fire."
- The final lesson we should learn from Daniel 3 is where our allegiance lies and what our duty is.
 - When Paul and the apostles were called before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest in Jerusalem, they said in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than human beings!"
 - And here is what Peter reminded his readers in 1 Peter 2:11-12:
 - Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

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1. Read Daniel 3:1-7.
 - a. How big was the image?
 - b. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar erected the image?
 - c. Do you think the image was of Nebuchadnezzar or some other god? Why?
 - d. Who would have been included among the people summoned in Daniel 3:2? (Hint: Daniel 2:49.)
 - e. What do you think was the point of summoning the diverse people to the dedication of the image?
 - f. What were the people directed to do?
 - g. What was the penalty for failing to do so?
2. According to Daniel 3: 8-12:
 - a. Who denounced the Jews?

- b. What were their complaints about the Jews?
 - c. What were the motivations behind their denouncement?
 - d. Which 3 Jews were impacted by this?
 - e. Cite a Scripture which supports the 3 men's actions.
 - f. Where do you think Daniel was? (Hint: Daniel 2:49).
3. Read Daniel 3: 13-18.
- a. What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction?
 - b. Why did he have this reaction?
 - c. What do you think Nebuchadnezzar meant by his taunt in verse 15c?
 - d. What do the 3 men reply to Nebuchadnezzar?

- e. Read Psalm 18:47-48, Psalm 112:6-8, Isaiah 43: 1-3, and Jeremiah 1:8. How do these verses speak to the 3 men's confidence?
 - f. Are the 3 men absolutely confident that God will save them from death?
4. Read Daniel 3: 19-23.
- a. How does Nebuchadnezzar react this time?
 - b. What does he order?
 - c. Describe how the 3 Jews were thrown into the fire. Which descriptions don't make sense?
 - d. What happened to some of the king's soldiers?
5. According to Daniel 3: 24-30:
- a. What does Nebuchadnezzar see when he peers into the furnace?

- b. How are the people described in verse 25?
 - c. In verse 26, what title is given to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
 - d. When the 3 men came out of the furnace, how did they look?
 - e. In verse 25, the 4th man is described as “a son of the gods.” In verse 28, the 4th man is described as an angel. In your opinion, who do you think the 4th man was?
 - f. Does it matter if the 4th man is an angel or a son of the gods?
 - g. Who sent the 4th man?
 - h. What does Nebuchadnezzar say next about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
 - i. What does Nebuchadnezzar decree?
 - j. What happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego next?
6. Did you notice what names Nebuchadnezzar and the astrologers used for the 3 Jews in this chapter? What significance do you place on this?
7. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar became a convert to the Hebrew God at this point? Why or why not?
8. How were the other exiled Jews impacted by the events in this chapter?

9. What does this chapter teach us about modern idolatry?

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1. Read Daniel 3:1-7.

a. How big was the image?

The image was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. This would be 90 feet high and nine feet wide in US measurements.

b. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar erected the image?

- He wanted others to bow down and worship his greatness and superiority.

- He wanted a public display of the peoples' loyalty to him.

c. Do you think the image was of Nebuchadnezzar or some other god? Why?

- I think he was reminded of his recent dream and wanted to make a statue of himself to show how great he was.
- It is not clear who the image represented, but Daniel 3: 18 suggests that this image of gold was not a god.
 - But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

d. Who would have been included among the people summoned in Daniel 3:2?

(Hint: Daniel 2:49.)

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have been included as they were provincial officials.

e. What do you think was the point of summoning the diverse people to the dedication of the image?

Nebuchadnezzar is calling all those in positions of power to worship the image and demonstrate their reverence for him.

f. What were the people directed to do?

As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Daniel 3:5

- g. What was the penalty for failing to do so?
Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. Daniel 3:6

2. According to Daniel 3: 8-12:

- a. Who denounced the Jews?
At this time some astrologers (or Chaldeans) came forward and denounced the Jews. Daniel 3:8
- b. What were their complaints about the Jews?
Your Majesty has 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 image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 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, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold** you have set up. Daniel 3:10-12
- c. What were the motivations behind their denouncement?
- Jealousy
 - They did not like reporting to Daniel, so they wanted to get his friends in trouble.
 - They did not like the fact that Daniel's 3 friends had been appointed administrators over the province of Babylon.
 - They were used to being the leaders in the community.
- d. Which 3 Jews were impacted by this?
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
- e. Cite a Scripture which supports the 3 men's actions.
You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them Exodus 20:3-5
- f. Where do you think Daniel was? (Hint: Daniel 2:49).
Daniel was in Babylon.

3. Read Daniel 3: 13-18.

- a. What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction?

Nebuchadnezzar was furious with rage.

- b. Why did he have this reaction?

He expected everyone to obey his order without exceptions.

- c. What do you think Nebuchadnezzar meant by his taunt in verse 15c?

- Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand? Daniel 3:15
- Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten that he called Yahweh "God of gods" and "Lord of kings." He did not believe that Yahweh could rescue the 3 men from death in a blazing furnace.

- d. What do the 3 men reply to Nebuchadnezzar?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. Daniel 3:16-18

- e. Read Psalm 18:47-48, Psalm 112:6-8, Isaiah 43: 1-3, and Jeremiah 1:8. How do these verses speak to the 3 men's confidence?

- **He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, ⁴⁸ who saves me from my enemies.** You exalted me above my foes; **from a violent man you rescued me.** Psalms 18:47-48
- **Surely the righteous will never be shaken;** they will be remembered forever. ⁷ They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. ⁸ **Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.** Psalms 112:6-8
- But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ² 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.** ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Isaiah 43:1-3

- **Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,”** declares the LORD. Jeremiah 1:8

- f. Are the 3 men absolutely confident that God will save them from death?
No. They know God can rescue them if that is God’s will. Their statements demonstrate their faith in God.

4. Read Daniel 3: 19-23.

- a. How does Nebuchadnezzar react this time?
Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. Daniel 3:19
- b. What does he order?
He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. Daniel 3:19-20
- c. Describe how the 3 Jews were thrown into the fire. Which descriptions don’t make sense?
- He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual Daniel 3:19
 - So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. Daniel 3:21
 - 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Daniel 3:22-23
 - What is the point of making the furnace 7 times hotter? It was already hot enough to make bricks or smelt gold.
 - They threw the men into the furnace, clothes and all. They were likely richly dressed.
 - The soldiers were burned up outside the furnace, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not burned up.

- d. What happened to some of the king's soldiers?

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, Daniel 3:22

5. According to Daniel 3: 24-30:

- a. What does Nebuchadnezzar see when he peers into the furnace?

He sees 4 men in the furnace.

- b. How are the people described in verse 25?

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." Daniel 3:25

- c. In verse 26, what title is given to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Servants of the Most High God

- d. When the 3 men came out of the furnace, how did they look?

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. Daniel 3:27

- e. In verse 25, the 4th man is described as "a son of the gods." In verse 28, the 4th man is described as an angel. In your opinion, who do you think the 4th man was?

It is not clear from the verses if this was an angel or an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.

- f. Does it matter if the 4th man is an angel or a son of the gods?

No, it doesn't matter. God sent his representative to protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

- g. Who sent the 4th man?

God

- h. What does Nebuchadnezzar say next about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

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. Daniel 3:28

- i. What does Nebuchadnezzar decree?
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. Daniel 3:29
 - j. What happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego next?
Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:30
6. Did you notice what names Nebuchadnezzar and the astrologers used for the 3 Jews in this chapter? What significance do you place on this?
Nebuchadnezzar and the astrologers used the Babylonian names for the 3 men. This was to emphasize their Babylonian status and to again separate them from their Jewish heritage.
7. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar became a convert to the Hebrew God at this point? Why or why not?
No. Yahweh is the God of the Hebrews and he's very powerful. Nebuchadnezzar understands why the 3 men would serve such a powerful God, but he doesn't acknowledge Yahweh as the one true God to worship alone.
8. How were the other exiled Jews impacted by the events in this chapter?
The other exiled Jews would have felt it safe to worship Yahweh without repercussions, because no one could speak against their God without suffering death and the destruction of their homes.
9. What does this chapter teach us about modern idolatry?
 - Modern idolatry may look different than the idolatry of Babylon, which focused on worshipping images. However, modern idolatry still means that we are worshipping something other than God Almighty, be it self, money, power, sex, drugs, or something else.
 - Believers can take a stand against idolatry.
 - We should not fear taking a stand against idolatry.
 - God will protect believers if we take a stand against idolatry. Even if we die, we know that "to be absent from the body is to be with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)