

The Book of Daniel¹⁷

Lesson 3

Daniel Chapter 3

Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold

585 BC

It is 585 BC, twenty years since Nebuchadnezzar installed Daniel as second-in-command of the Babylonian Kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar has spent most of the twenty years expanding his kingdom by conquering other countries, a fact that can be gleaned from the stories included in the books of II Kings, II Chronicles and Jeremiah.¹⁸ Archeology and Babylonian history record the magnificent buildings constructed by Nebuchadnezzar's organization during this time. The detailed records about the hanging gardens attached to the palace in the city of Babylon are of such credence that the structures are included in the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World. The Scriptures do not indicate Daniel's involvement in their construction, but, because he was second-in-command, they must have been completed under his direction and approval.

Just the year before, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar had attacked Jerusalem, breached its walls, destroyed the Temple, removed Zedekiah, the last king of the Southern Kingdom and taken many exiles with him as he returned to his capital city of Babylon. By this time, all the land that Nebuchadnezzar could conquer had been conquered and it was now time for him to enjoy his kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold

Daniel ^{3:1} Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Did Daniel oversee the building of Nebuchadnezzar's image of Gold? No one knows. Surely, Daniel knew of its construction because it was massive, 60 cubits by 6 cubits, or 100 feet tall and 10 feet wide.¹⁹ No one knows the details of the carving on this image. Is it the image of a man similar to the image he saw in the dream that Daniel interpreted for him twenty years before, or is it just an obelisk?²⁰ Most likely, because it is 100 feet tall and only 10 feet wide, it is an object similar to an obelisk. Also, the Scriptures do not indicate that it is a statue. It is probably a stone structure covered with gold leaf, similar to the cypress walls in Solomon's Temple.

¹⁷ All Scriptures in this lesson entitled "The Book of Daniel" are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright (C) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

¹⁸ 2 Kings 24 – 25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah, Chapters 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 43, 44, 46, 49, 50, 51, and 52.

¹⁹ Two cubit measurements were used in the Old Testament, the ordinary cubit and the short cubit. The ordinary cubit was the average length of a man's forearm from the tip of his middle finger to the elbow, 20 inches. The short cubit was the length of a man's forearm from the bottom of his middle finger to the elbow, 17 inches.

²⁰ A stone pillar used in worship in the ancient world. It is a four-sided structure constructed of stone, tapered to the top, and capped with a stone pyramid. It symbolized the rays of the rising sun.

Near Babylon is a flat area called the Plain of Dura. Still today, there are many mounds where pedestals once stood. An object built on that plain which stood 100 feet tall could be seen from the entire city of Babylon.

Image's Dedication

Daniel ^{3:2} Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent *word* to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ^{3:3} Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Once it is completed, Nebuchadnezzar calls for the men from seven leadership levels of his government organization to come and dedicate the image. The following chart shows the Babylonian office titles with modern day correlations.

| Babylonian Office | Modern Day Office |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Satraps | Governors |
| Prefects | Rulers over all the wise men of Babylon |
| Governors | Mayors |
| Counselors | Lawyers |
| Treasurers | Treasurers |
| Judges | Sheriffs |
| Magistrates | Judges |

Herald's Proclamation

Daniel ^{3:4} Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language, ^{3:5} that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. ^{3:6} "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

The herald's proclamation leaves no wiggle room for the inhabitants of Babylon; they must either bow or burn. The king demands worship of the image and no one is excluded.

People's Response

Daniel ^{3:7} Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Nebuchadnezzar's officers respond with their obedience to the command of the herald. They do not want to find themselves in the blazing fire.

Chaldean's Charge

Daniel ^{3:8} For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. ^{3:9} They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: " O king, live forever! ^{3:10} "You yourself, 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. ^{3:11} "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ^{3:12} "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 Chaldeans are the professional teachers of the magicians, sorcerers and conjurers. Had Daniel not asked Nebuchadnezzar to spare their lives when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the king might not have allowed the Chaldeans to exist in his kingdom any longer. Now twenty years later, these Chaldeans have forgotten the kindness of Daniel and his three friends toward them. However, we must not forget that Nebuchadnezzar put these four Hebrews in positions of authority over all the Chaldeans and other government positions and perhaps they have been waiting all these years to catch them in a situation so they can remove them from their positions of power.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are in the line of fire, but where is Daniel? The Bible does not answer that question. If Daniel had been present, he would have approached the king and asked permission not to worship the image, but these three simply disobey the order.

Nebuchadnezzar's Interrogation

Daniel ^{3:13} Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. ^{3:14} 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? ^{3:15} "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 will 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?"

Must we wonder why Nebuchadnezzar calls for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come stand before him? They are third in the line of leadership in his government. He has met with them in his war room. In his grand palace, their offices are next to his, according to ancient Babylonian literature. They are trusted officers of his administration and he is furious that they have disobeyed him. The king composes himself and when they arrive, he asks, "Is it true?" Nebuchadnezzar is going to give them a second chance to obey. "What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" he asks. They have an answer, but they will not respond to the king in the same manner as Daniel.

Hebrew's Answer

Daniel ^{3:16} Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ^{3:17} " 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. ^{3:18} " 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."

Daniel always responds to everyone with dignity and discernment. Such is not the case with the three Hebrews. They are disrespectful and blunt. Look at their words. "We do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter." He is the king. Their God had set Nebuchadnezzar up as king and gave him authority over everything within his sight. Yes, they need to give him an answer and it should be in a proper spirit at the proper time. Instead of reasoning with the king, they throw their God in his face and bluntly reject his god. Daniel had faced the same kind of problem in chapter 1 with food from the king's table and it was resolved. In chapter 2, Daniel faced the same kind of problem with the demand to kill him along with all the wise men, but Daniel made a request of the king and Nebuchadnezzar dealt kindly with him. Here, the three Hebrews respond with blatant and arrogant indifference to God's anointment of Nebuchadnezzar as king of the empire. What is wrong with their answer? Most likely, had they not said, "But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king," Nebuchadnezzar would have continued the dialog and they could have swayed him to their position. What is the problem with their answer? They are instructing the king without asking permission from the king. Daniel would ask permission and the king's favor would have fallen on him, but not so with these three.

Nebuchadnezzar's Demand

Daniel ^{3:19} 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. ^{3:20} And 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.

The king takes no orders from his subordinates. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are out of line. Their second chance is gone and the three see it in Nebuchadnezzar's face. "Heat the furnace seven times" hotter than normal, Nebuchadnezzar says. He tells his most valiant warriors to cast them into the furnace. Little does he know that he is actually sending his warriors to their deaths!

Fires's Flame

Daniel ^{3:21} 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. ^{3:22} 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.

Bound in the clothes that they are wearing, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are carried away to the furnace, but the heat overcomes the warriors and they die from its overpowering temperature.

Nebuchadnezzar's Astonishment

Daniel ^{3:23} But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up. ^{3:24} Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he responded and said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "Certainly, O king." ^{3:25} He answered and 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!"

Nebuchadnezzar cannot believe what he is seeing. He draws closer to the door and questions his high officials. He sees four men and "the fourth is like the son of the gods!" It is sad that most English translations use the phrase, "son of the gods." Almost all commentators and teachers try to make this phrase a reference to Jesus, the Son of God. It should read, "a Divine person." Perhaps it could be translated, "a Divine angel." Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar defines the fourth person in the fire in verse 28 of this same chapter saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants" Nebuchadnezzar sees an angel in the fire, a Divine person. A single angel is all that is needed to rescue these men; it is all that will be needed to keep the mouths of the lions shut when King Darius, needing to learn this same lesson, throws Daniel in the lion's den.

Nebuchadnezzar's Plea

Daniel ^{3:26} 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.

"... come out!" Nebuchadnezzar says, calling them out of the fire. What else could the king say to the men? They are walking around in the furnace unharmed. Perhaps they were waiting for the king's decree to call them out because it was by his decree they were cast into the fire. Whatever the case, Nebuchadnezzar is fully aware that they serve the "Most High God." No other god could perform such a miracle! Their God is greater than his god!

Official's Surprise

Daniel ^{3:27} And 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.

All the officials surround Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in awe; not even one hair on their heads "smells of fire."

Nebuchadnezzar's Response

Daniel ^{3:28} 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."

Nebuchadnezzar had thrown the men into the fire because they were guilty of "violating the king's command." Nebuchadnezzar intends harm, God intends good! God can take any situation and use it for His glory. His servant, the king, needs a reminder of Who He is as God of gods. God sends an angel to save the three Hebrews even though they have been disrespectful to the king. In spite of sin, God delivers them from the flame of the fire. Nebuchadnezzar is impressed that they are willing to give their lives instead of abandoning their trust in the true God and His commands that they had followed more than twenty years before in the Southern Kingdom. Why are these three the only ones to stay true to their God? By this time, there are thousands in exile in Babylon. Did they all fail to bow at the king's command? The thousands of Jews in exile are not invited to this dedication of the

image. Only Nebuchadnezzar's officials are sent the invitation, not the common people of the Babylonian kingdom or the exiles of all the kingdoms conquered by the king. Everyone invited is on the payroll of the king. They are all expected to obey his every command. Did Daniel obey the command? Because Daniel is not mentioned in the story, he is probably attending to business elsewhere in the kingdom. Had he been there, he would have questioned the king properly about the decree. Had he been there, it is very doubtful that the Chaldeans would have drawn the king's attention to the three men serving in the kingdom directly under Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar's Decree

Daniel ^{3:29} "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."

"... torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap" is the decree from Nebuchadnezzar against anyone who speaks a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The king had said these same words twenty years before when his wise men could not tell him his dream.²¹ When they could not answer him, he sent his bodyguard to slay the wise men and reduce their houses to a heap of rubbish. If he ever hears a word spoken against the God of the three Hebrews, he will, without a doubt, have that person killed along with his household.

Nebuchadnezzar stops short of saying that there is no other god but the God of the three Hebrews. Rather, he sees their God as being superior to all the other gods.

Chapter's Summary

Daniel ^{3:30} Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

The unknown recorder of this book summarizes Nebuchadnezzar's attitude towards Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Never again will they face the anger of the king. Never again will the king be swayed by the rhetoric of those in positions below them. They will prosper as long as Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon.

²¹ Daniel 2:5