

Daniel 3
November 15, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is “faith?” [Complete trust in God, Heb 11:1, “Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”]

We have been admiring the strong faith of Daniel and his three companions. They refused to eat meat and drink the wine while they were in training. We watched them come together in bold prayer to ask God to reveal King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to them along with the interpretation. Their faith was so rock solid that they *believed* that God would answer them. In both scenarios, God showed up in a mighty way.

Q: Don’t we all want to believe that when it comes down to life or death, we would not defy our allegiance to God and accept whatever consequences come from that – even if that meant death?

I am going to guess none of us have faced a threat of death for making a stand for Christ. Our faith has not been tested at that level.

Transition: We come to today’s text in which Daniel’s three friends find their faith tested again. As we go through this Bible passage, *I think you’ll agree that you CAN stand strong for Christ in any set of circumstances BY sharing the same **BELIEFS** about God as expressed by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.* Invite the class to look for BELIEFS.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Dan 3:1-7 The Occasion of Making an Image of Gold]

V.1:

- King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

V.2:

- He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.

V.3:

- So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

V.4:

- Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language:

V.5:

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

V.6:

- Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

V.7:

- Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: Let’s make sure we understand what’s going on here. Why do you think King N made an image of gold? [Re-visit the dream in Chp 2 – he was the “head of gold” in the image he saw in his dream.]

Q v.5: What were all the people groups in Babylon required to do as soon as they heard all the instruments playing music? [Fall down and worship the image of gold that King N has set up. He was demanding a public display of recognition and submission to his absolute authority in the Babylonian empire.]

Q v.6: What was the penalty if anyone did not worship the image of gold? [They would immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.]

Point of Interest: Nebuchadnezzar probably chose this means of punishment not only because it was a horrifying way to die but because it was convenient. A huge kiln would necessarily have been available to smelt metal for the gold plating and for manufacturing the bricks to construct the base and possibly the inner parts of the statue itself.

[Read Dan 3:8-12 The Accusation Against the Three Jews]

V.8:

- At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.

V.9:

- They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever!

V.10:

- You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,

V.11:

- and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

V.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, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Process Observations/Questions:

So the herald had commanded all the people who had gathered in Dura to fall down and worship this huge image of gold upon hearing all the music. It was probably pretty noticeable to see 99.9% of all the people fall down and worship and notice anyone who was still standing!

Q v.12: What was the accusation and who brought it? [The astrologers were the accusers. The accusation was that “some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”]

Q v.8: Notice that the astrologers “denounced” these three Jews. What is meant by “denounced?” [The word translated **denounced** is strong, meaning “**to tear in pieces**” - a phrase suggesting severe hatred and bitter language. The accusation was intended to destroy the accused.]

Q: What do you think was motivating the accusers to call out the three young Jewish men? [They were evidently motivated by jealousy for they referred to the fact that **Nebuchadnezzar** had set **some Jews ... over the affairs of the province of Babylon** (3:12; cf. 2:49). The jealousy evidently sprang from the king’s recognition of the unusual ability of these men (1:20). Subjugated peoples, such as the Jewish captives, were normally relegated to positions of servitude, not elevated to authority in a realm. So the high positions of “some Jews” seem to reflect a resentment toward the Jewish people and toward their religious practices that caused them to act so very differently from the rest of the world.]

Q: Why do you think Daniel’s name was never mentioned as one of the accused Jews? [Since Daniel was appointed to a higher office, his responsibilities as “ruler over the entire province of Babylon and chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon” likely required his presence at the palace (2:48).]

[Read Dan 3:13-18 Their Demonstration of Faith in God]

V.13:

- Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

V.14:

- and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?”

V.15:

- Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

V.16:

- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, **we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.**

V.17:

- If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, **the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.**

V.18:

- **But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”**

Process Observations/Questions:

I have suggested that all of us can stand strong for Christ in any set of circumstances by sharing the same **BELIEFS** about God as expressed by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Q: What beliefs come out as the three young men interact with King N?

- We don't need to defend ourselves since God is able to rescue us. (v.16) No apology was to be given for their stand. This was not a "proud reply." Their minds were made up.
- God is able to save our lives, even in a fiery furnace.
- God will rescue us from authorities who are trying to kill us (in this case, King N)
- God is sovereign – the three young men acknowledged that God may choose not to rescue them. But that's OK! Although no doubt existed in the minds of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego about the ability of their God to deliver them, they humbly accepted the fact that God does not always choose to intervene miraculously in human circumstances, even on behalf of his servants. Thus the Hebrews believed that their God *could*, but not necessarily that he *would*, spare their lives.
- God is the one, true living God. Thus, they will not bow down to serve any other gods.

Transition: Now that we have identified their beliefs about God, let's see what we can learn about God when we're facing trials and persecution. Let's read the rest of this chapter.

[Read Dan 3:19-30 The Three Young Men Are Vindicated for their Faith in God]

V.19:

- Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual

V.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.

V.21:

- So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

V.22:

- 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,

V.23:

- and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

V.24:

- Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king."

V.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."

V.26:

- Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,

V.27:

- and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. 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.

V.28:

- 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.

V.29:

- 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.”

V.30:

- Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Process Observations/Questions:

Observation v.19: When we read that King N became furious and his “attitude toward them changed,” you need to know that it literally means “**the image of his face was changed,**” referring to the king’s facial expression. His countenance became harsh and flushed with anger.

Q v.25: Who was the fourth who joined the three men in the fiery furnace? [The pre-incarnate Christ Jesus.]

Q: As you process this passage, what do you learn about God? [God is always with us no matter what our circumstances are. We are never alone.]

Q v.28-30: What lesson do you think King N learned? [The king was now convinced that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was truly great, “the Most High God.”]

Q: Since God was the “Most High God,” how did King N modify his edict among the people? [As a result the king decreed that **the God** of the three young men was to be held in honor and that anyone who dishonored this God would lose their life.]

If time permits, share the prophetic lesson of this passage: We have here a 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.

Second Thessalonians 2 and Rev. 13 both make it clear that Satan will have a “heyday” after the Christians are raptured and taken to heaven. For one thing, he will raise up a world ruler, the

Antichrist, 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; 14:1–5). The Antichrist 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 six (sixty cubits high, six cubits wide, Dan. 3:1), and the image of Antichrist is identified with his number, 666 (Rev. 13:18). It is this image that Jesus called “the abomination of desolation” in Matt. 24:15–22.

So, Dan. 3 is a prophetic forecast of Israel during the tribulation period, after the church has been raptured. Nebuchadnezzar represents the Antichrist; his image represents the image of Antichrist 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.

LOOK:

Q: Do you have a fireproof faith? Do you believe that your faith can get you through fire? If you share the BELIEFS of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, I think you can say “Yes!”

- A fireproof faith obeys God and accepts the consequences.
- A fireproof faith trusts God despite the circumstances.
- A fireproof faith trusts God no matter the outcome.
- A fireproof faith waits on God for the rescue.

Here is a pertinent lesson for believers today. Does God have all power? Yes. Is God able to deliver believers from all problems and trials? Yes. But does God deliver believers from all trials? No. God may allow trials to come into our lives to build character or for a number of other reasons (Rom 5:3-5). The purpose for trials may not always be understood, but God simply asks that we trust him—even when it is not easy. As Job, who endured incredible suffering, exclaimed, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). Although God does not guarantee that his followers will never suffer or experience death, he does promise always to be with them.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Da 3)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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 2,000 years ago in far-off Babylon, it has lessons for us today.

I. The Practical Lesson

There is a twenty-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 worshiping 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 human beings, regardless of the cost. It was not easy for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to stand their ground as everybody else bowed down when the music played, but they refused to budge. Some of the other wise men (v. 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:

A. The promise of persecution.

Christians should expect the furnace of persecution if they are wholly dedicated to Christ. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 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. Instead, 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; John 15:18–20).

B. 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. Read Isa. 43:2 for God's promise to you. When the king looked into the furnace, he saw four men—and one of them was Jesus Christ. 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 (v. 27). The secret? Their faith—Heb. 11:30–34.

C. 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 from sin and the world. Their experience glorified God before others (1 Cor. 6:19–20), and the king promoted them and gave them honors. First the suffering, then the glory (see 1 Peter 5:1, 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 our rebellion against the Lord and our substitutes for what the Lord gives us. In Gen. 11 we see Babel in its rebellion against God, a human 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 was man-centered; there was no place for God at all. And it centered around gold. This whole Babylonian system is Satan’s counterfeit, opposing God’s truth, and seeking to capture the hearts, minds, and bodies of people. 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 Hebrew men, we must take our stand against Babylon and bear witness to the truth of God’s Word.

III. The Prophetic Lesson

We have here a 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.

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Every day we can see our present world moving toward unification. There are hundreds of organizations and agreements that bind nations together these days. There will one day be a “United States of Europe,” and the leader of that organization will become the last world dictator, the Antichrist. The stage is set. “The coming of the Lord draws 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.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1337–1341). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

B. The image of Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 3)

1. THE ERECTION of the image (3:1–7)

3:1. The effect of the revelation given to **Nebuchadnezzar** about his significant role in Gentile history (2:37–38) is discerned from his response in the events recorded in chapter 3. Identified as the head of gold (2:38), Nebuchadnezzar then caused **an image of gold** to be erected! (3:1) When he erected this image is not known. It had to follow the events recorded in chapter 2 because Daniel’s three companions were in a position of authority (3:12) to which they had been appointed (2:49).

The Septuagint adds in 3:1 that this event occurred in Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th year (587), one year before the fall of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 25:8). Since the final destruction of Jerusalem was the culmination of Nebuchadnezzar’s conquests, that inference may well be true. However, a consideration of Daniel 3 seems to indicate that the events recorded there took place nearer the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar’s long reign. The events associated with the king’s erecting the image suggest that he wanted to unify his empire and consolidate his authority as ruler. The image was to become the unifying center of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom.

The Aramaic word translated “image” (*ṣelēm*) is related to the Hebrew word for image (*ṣelem*). A general term, it allows for the image to have been in a human form (perhaps like the statue the king saw in his dream), though it does not require it. Perhaps sometime earlier Nebuchadnezzar had seen an Egyptian obelisk, on which were recorded the exploits of one of the pharaohs, and wanted to record his own conquests that way. The dimensions of the image would be fitting for an obelisk, for it was **90 feet high** (about the height of a present-day eight-story building) and only **9 feet wide**. This 10-to-1 ratio of height to width does not fit an image in human form, for it would be too slender. However, the Babylonians often distorted the human

figure in constructing their images. Or perhaps the image was in proper human proportions but was set on a pedestal to make it more imposing.

Regardless of the image's form, it was an awesome sight (cf. 2:31), both because of its height and because of the gold of which it was constructed. The size and weight of the image seem to preclude that the image was of solid gold. It must have been overlaid with gold. Without doubt the use of gold in this image was inspired by Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream (2:32, 38).

The image was **set up ... on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon**. Dura was a common name in Mesopotamia for any place that was enclosed by mountains or a wall. "The province of Babylon" (cf. 2:48) seems to require a location close to the city of Babylon itself from which Nebuchadnezzar ruled his kingdom. Archeologists have uncovered a large square made of brick some six miles southeast of Babylon, which may have been the base for this image. Since this base is in the center of a wide plain, the image's height would have been impressive. Also its proximity to Babylon would have served as a suitable rallying point for the king's officials.

3:2–3. Nebuchadnezzar **summoned** eight classes of officials **to the dedication of the image**. This may suggest that the image was intended to symbolize the empire and its unity under Nebuchadnezzar's authority. The officers referred to in verse 2 are listed again in verse 3 and four of them in verse 27, thus emphasizing the political implications of this incident.

The **satraps** were chief representatives of the king, the **prefects** were military commanders, and the **governors** were civil administrators. The **advisers** were counselors to those in governmental authority. The **treasurers** administered the funds of the kingdom, the **judges** were administrators of the law, and the **magistrates** passed judgment in keeping with the law. The **other provincial officials** were probably subordinates of the satraps. This list of officers probably included all who served in any official capacity under **Nebuchadnezzar**.

On the possibility that Zedekiah, Judah's last king, was summoned to Babylon for this occasion see comments on Jeremiah 51:59.

To see so many officials stand before the image in Dura in Nebuchadnezzar's presence to swear their allegiance to him must have been impressive.

3:4–6. In demanding that these officials **fall down** before **the image of gold ... Nebuchadnezzar** was demanding a public display of recognition and submission to his absolute authority in the kingdom.

The fact that the officials were commanded not only to fall down before the image, but also to **worship** it, indicates that the image had religious as well as political significance. Since no specific god is mentioned, it may be inferred that Nebuchadnezzar was not honoring one of the gods of Babylon, but rather was instituting a new form of religious worship with this image as the center. Nebuchadnezzar purposed to establish a unified government and also a unified religion. The king constituted himself as both head of state and head of religion. All who served under him were to recognize both his political and religious authority.

The officials summoned by Nebuchadnezzar to assemble in the plains of Dura had not been told why they were called. When they were all assembled, the king's **herald** then announced that the officials were to recognize Nebuchadnezzar's political and religious power. The herald addressed the officials as **peoples, nations, and men of every language** (cf. v. 7; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14), apparently considering the officials as representatives of the peoples over whom they ruled. So the officials' act of obedience signified submission not only by the officials themselves, but also by those peoples they ruled.

Elaborate preparations in the construction of the image of gold made the occasion aesthetically appealing. To this was added musical accompaniment to make the occasion emotionally moving. The orchestra included wind instruments (the **horn** and **pipes**; cf. 3:10, 15), a reed instrument (the **flute**), and stringed instruments (**zither, lyre, harp**). Some critics argue that since the names of some of these instruments were Greek, the book was written later, in the time of the Grecian Empire. But communication between Greece and the Near East had been carried on for years before the Greek conquest by Alexander (see comments under “Date and Authorship” in the *Introduction*).

Failure to comply to the command to worship the image was penalized by sudden death, being **thrown into a blazing furnace**. The severity of the penalty indicates that submission on the part of every official was obligatory.

3:7. Overwhelmed by the king’s command, the awesomeness of the image, and the sound of the **music**, the assembled officials **fell down and worshiped the image of gold**. In this way the officials and the peoples they represented recognized the political and religious authority of **Nebuchadnezzar**.

2. THE ACCUSATION AGAINST THE JEWS (3:8–12)

3:8–12. No indication is given of the size of the multitude that assembled on this occasion. But because it included all the kingdom’s officials (vv. 2–3) it must have been huge. **Some** court advisers (**astrologers**; cf. comments on 1:17) were quick to bring an accusation against **the Jews**. The word translated **denounced** is strong, meaning “to tear in pieces.” The accusation was severe, intended to destroy the accused. The accusers were evidently motivated by jealousy for they referred to the fact that **Nebuchadnezzar** had set **some Jews ... over the affairs of the province of Babylon** (3:12; cf. 2:49). The jealousy evidently sprang from the king’s recognition of the unusual ability of these men (1:20). Subjugated peoples, such as the Jewish captives, were normally relegated to positions of servitude, not elevated to authority in a realm. So the high positions of “some Jews” were resented.

The counselors evidently sought to curry favor from the **king** by contrasting the three Jews’ refusal to bow to **the image** with their own **worship** of it. Interestingly they accused Daniel’s three friends—**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**—but not Daniel. Since Daniel was appointed to a higher office (2:48) he may not have been required to attend (cf. comments on 4:8) or perhaps he may have been elsewhere in the empire carrying out his duties. Or maybe the astrologers did not dare accuse Daniel, who was present but like the other three did not bow. Whatever the reason for his not being mentioned, Daniel’s dedication to his God and submission to the Law certainly precluded his bowing before the image.

3. THE FAITH OF THE ACCUSED (3:13–18)

3:13–15. How significant this event was to **Nebuchadnezzar** is seen by his response to the astrologers’ accusation of the three noncompliant Jews (vv. 9–12). When he heard that the three refused to bow, he became **furious with rage** (cf. v. 19; 2:12). The high esteem with which these men had previously been held by Nebuchadnezzar (1:20) did not exempt them from submission to his authority. Nebuchadnezzar did not pass an immediate judgment on the three but asked them if the accusation against them were **true**. He gave them another opportunity to bow before **the image**. By doing so they could prove the falsehood of the accusation (or show a changed attitude).

The king impressed on them the importance of such submission, warning them that the penalty for rebellion (being **thrown ... into a blazing furnace**; cf. 3:6) would be carried out **immediately**. Nebuchadnezzar considered himself above all gods, for he asked, **What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?** Again this shows that he claimed absolute authority in both political and religious realms. He was challenging any god to circumvent his authority. The matter then became a conflict between Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh, the God of Daniel's companions.

3:16–18. The three showed absolute confidence in God, stating that their God was greater than **Nebuchadnezzar** and was **able to** deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar's judgment in a display of His superior power. Their words, **the God we serve** (cf. 6:16, 20), show they recognized that God's authority was greater than the authority claimed by Nebuchadnezzar. Though they were employed by Nebuchadnezzar (2:49), they "served" Yahweh.

Their God demanded implicit obedience and had forbidden them to worship any other gods. One who obeys God is not presuming when he expects God to protect and deliver him. Obeying God was more important than life to these three, so **if** God chose **not** to deliver them, they would still obey Him. Therefore they refused to **serve** Nebuchadnezzar's **gods (or worship the image** he made, possibly meaning to worship *him* as god) even if it meant they would die.

4. THE DELIVERANCE BY GOD (3:19–30)

3:19. In spite of the high regard with which **Nebuchadnezzar** had held these three (1:20), he determined to demonstrate his authority by ordering their immediate execution. This would serve as a lesson to any others who might consider rebelling against his political and religious authority. In a fit of anger (cf. 2:12; 3:13) Nebuchadnezzar had **the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual**. A low fire would have increased their torture by extending the duration of the punishment. A hotter fire would be expected to kill them instantly. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to display publicly the cost of rebelling against his authority.

3:20–23. The king ordered **some of his strongest soldiers ... to tie up** the three **and throw them into the blazing furnace**. The furnace was probably constructed with an opening in the top, through which fuel could be fed, and an opening in the lower side from which ashes could be taken. **Soldiers** threw or lowered the **three ... into the blazing furnace**. It was customary to remove the clothing of those being executed, but because of the haste in which the king wanted his command carried out (**the king's command was ... urgent**) this practice was not followed this time. **The flames** leaping through the top opening of the furnace **killed the men who had thrown** the three into the fire.

3:24–26a. **Nebuchadnezzar** was watching the proceedings intently from a safe distance. As he peered into the furnace, probably through the lower opening, what he saw amazed him. The men who had been **tied up** were **walking around in the** furnace, **unbound**. And instead of seeing **three men** in the furnace, he saw **four**, and he said **the fourth** was **like a son of the gods**. This One was probably the preincarnate Christ (cf. comments on Gen. 16:13). Though Nebuchadnezzar did not know of the Son of God, he did recognize that the Person appearing with the three looked supernatural.

Nebuchadnezzar ... approached as near as he dared to **the opening of the ... furnace** so that his command could be heard. He ordered the three to **come out** of the furnace and to approach him. In giving this order he called them **servants of the Most High God**. Thus Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the God these three faithfully served (cf. Dan. 3:17) is truly God. The term "the Most High (lit., the Highest) God" or "the Most High" occurs 13 times in

Daniel, more than in any other book except Psalms. Of those 13 occurrences 7 pertain to Nebuchadnezzar (3:26; 4:2, 17, 24–25, 32, 34) and 2 to Belshazzar (5:18, 21). The other 4 are in chapter 7 (7:18, 22, 25, 27).

This was a remarkable admission by Nebuchadnezzar. Up to then he had believed that his Babylonian gods were superior to Yahweh (though he had once acknowledged the greatness of Yahweh, 2:47). After all, he had taken captives from Judah and vessels from the Jews' temple. But his gods could not deliver anyone alive from a furnace! (cf. 3:29) As the three had predicted, their God (Yahweh) was able to deliver them from the furnace (v. 17). Though the king recognized the unusual nature of Yahweh, he did not acknowledge Him as *his* God.

3:26b–27. When the three walked **out of the fire** and were carefully examined, Nebuchadnezzar's officials (cf. comments on v. 2) saw that the **bodies** of the three men were unharmed, their clothing unaffected, and that the **smell of fire** was not even on their clothes.

3:28–30. In view of the evidence presented to him, **Nebuchadnezzar** declared that this was an act of **the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who had sent His angel** (cf. v. 25) to rescue the three who served this God (cf. v. 17). Nebuchadnezzar was moved by the devotion of the three to their **God** (he knew **they trusted in Him**), even though it entailed their disobeying the king and jeopardizing **their own lives**.

As a result the king decreed that **the God** of the three young men was to be held in honor and that anyone who dishonored this God would lose his life (he would **be cut in pieces** and his house would be burned to **rubble**; cf. 2:5). **The king** then honored **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** by promoting them to positions of greater honor and power in the kingdom.

This historical incident seems to have prophetic significance as well. In the coming Tribulation a Gentile ruler (7:8) will demand for himself the worship that belongs to God (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:8). Any who refuse to acknowledge his right to receive worship will be killed (Rev. 13:15). Assuming political and religious power, he will oppress Israel (Rev. 13:7). Most of the people in the world, including many in Israel, will submit to and worship him. But a small remnant in Israel, like the three in Daniel's day, will refuse. Many who will not worship the Antichrist will be severely punished; some will be martyred for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ. But a few will be delivered from those persecutions by the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming.

In the forthcoming Tribulation period God will do for this believing remnant what He did for Daniel's three companions. They withstood the decree of the king, and though they were not exempted from suffering and oppression they were delivered out of it by the God they trusted. No doubt the remnant of believing Jews in that coming day will find great comfort, consolation, and instruction from this incident in the lives of Daniel's three companions, as those in Daniel's day must have found as they were living under Gentile rule.

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