

DANIEL 3 | *The Fiery Furnace*

Nebuchadnezzar Sets Up a Golden Image

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image (עֲלָם) of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits.¹ He set it up on the plain of Dura,² in the province of Babylon.³ 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces⁴ to come to the dedication⁵ of the image (עֲלָם) that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁶ 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image (עֲלָם) that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image (עֲלָם) that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And the herald proclaimed aloud,

You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music,⁷ you are to fall down and worship the golden image (אֲנִי עֲלָם)⁸ that King Nebuchadnezzar has

¹ This is about 33 metres high 3 metres wide. It seems very disproportionate. The famous Colossus of Rhodes stood just a bit higher at 70 cubits. Perhaps the design was based on the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Da 2:31). Did Daniel counsel against this? Where is Daniel in this chapter? The numbers 60 and six stand for man.

² “Possibly Tell Dēr (27 km SW of Baghdad), though there are several Bab. places named *Dūru*” (D. J. Wiseman, “Dura,” *NBD*, 284). It also could be six miles southeast of Babylon (Keil, 118-19). This echoes back to the tower of Babel.

³ This is the same province over which Daniel and his three companions have charge (Da 2:48-49). The events of this chapter took place sometime between 602 and 585 bc.

⁴ Basically, all the government officials of the known world who spoke many different languages. Some of these titles are Persian. This is because Daniel finished writing *Daniel* during the Persian period.

⁵ The government officials are coming for a dedication. They don’t know yet that they will be commanded to worship a golden image. Nebuchadnezzar entraps them.

⁶ This phrase is repeated several times. God made man in his own image (עֲלָם). Now Nebuchadnezzar has made a golden image (עֲלָם) in man’s image. **Ge 1:26-27** 26 Then God said, Let us make man in our *image* (עֲלָם), after our likeness (דְמוּת). And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27 So God created man in his own *image* (עֲלָם). In the *image* (עֲלָם) of God he created him. Male and female he created them. **Re 14:9-11** 9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its *image* (εἰκόνα) and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its *image*, and whoever receives the mark of its name. See Je 10:1-16.

⁷ Some of these instruments have Persian and Greek names. Music, atmosphere, and aesthetics (and other things like it) can inhibit our conscience so that we do things we wouldn’t ordinarily do. This reminds of the work of Joseph Goebbels and Leni Riefenstahl. Lots of emotion. Little faith and reason. Why would we worship our own creation rather than our Creator (Ro 1:22-23)?

⁸ Nebuchadnezzar disagrees with the dream he received in Da 2. He will do everything possible to ensure the head of gold lasts forever, thus the image is of solid gold. Babylon forever!

set up.⁹ 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.¹⁰

7 Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that *King Nebuchadnezzar had set up*.¹¹

A Malicious Accusation

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans¹² came forward and maliciously accused the Jews (יְהוּדִים). 9 They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar,

O king, live forever! 10 You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. 11 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom you have appointed¹³ over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.¹⁴ These men, O king, pay no attention to you.¹⁵ They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.¹⁶

⁹ Nebuchadnezzar wants total allegiance from all government officials from around the world so that the great image stays golden and never turns to silver. He is trying to prevent the prophetic dream of ch. 2. He wants to stop the stone! **Da 2:45** 45 A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

¹⁰ The furnace was probably one of the great brick-kilns outside the city of Babylon. This is to be a demonstration of loyalty. Nebuchadnezzar is looking for allegiance to the Babylonian state through submission to the Babylonian gods. As in Re 17-18, religious Babylon and political-economic Babylon work together. This is a ceremony designed to unify the Babylonian empire under one man. This scene foreshadows the tribulation. Nebuchadnezzar is a type of the antimesiah. The image is a type of the image of the beast in Re 13. In the tribulation, the antichrist will command everyone to worship him and his image (Re 13:3-18).

¹¹ When all the powers and weight of government press upon us, it is difficult to resist. See *Idolatry*. **Ex 20:3-5** 3 You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them....

¹² These Chaldeans are jealous of Daniel and his three Jewish companions.

¹³ **Da 2:49** 49 Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

¹⁴ Where's Daniel? Perhaps Daniel is exempt because his loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar is already proven. What are other Jews doing?

¹⁵ This isn't true. They pay attention to Nebuchadnezzar and are willing to do most things he asks them to do. They serve in the best interests of Babylonia. However, they won't worship the golden image. See *Religious Freedom*. **Ac 5:29** 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men.

¹⁶ Serving the Babylonian gods and worshipping the golden image are all of the same. Babylonian religion and politics are one.

Nebuchadnezzar's Rage

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them,

Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,¹⁷ that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?¹⁸ 15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god (אֱלֹהִים) who will deliver (יִצֵּא) you out of my hands?¹⁹

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's Finest Hour

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego²⁰ answered and said to the king,

Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to rescue (יִצֵּא) us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will rescue (יִצֵּא) us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not,²¹ be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve (פִּלְחָה) your gods or worship (סִגְד) the golden image that you have set up.²²

¹⁷ You can forcefully change one's name (Da 1:7), but you can't forcefully change one's heart and mind.

¹⁸ Believers must sometime refuse to cooperate with the state.

¹⁹ An all-powerful totalitarian state, proceeding on the basis of atheism and materialism, may say this today. Nebuchadnezzar is testing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but so is God. If the three compromise, they won't be in any danger from Nebuchadnezzar, but they will have to answer to God. If the three give in, does it mean they aren't justified?

²⁰ The discipleship group sticks together. It is not easy to be the only "odd ball" around. **Php 1:27-28** 27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Messiah, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

²¹ The three understand that God does not always save his people from martyrdom. **Job 13:15** 15 Though he slay me, I will hope in him.... **Mt 10:28-33** 28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows. 32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

²² "We would rather die than worship your image. We have a higher loyalty." They must have known and understood the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dream from Daniel (Da 2:17-18, 36). This is a phase two faith situation, not a phase one faith situation. The three have already proven their phase one faith. They will not go to hell if they cave to the pressure, but they will lose rewards. **Jn 17:15-17** 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. **2 Ti 1:8** 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God....

The Burning Fiery Furnace

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.²³ 20 And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. 22 Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.²⁴

Four in the Fire

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste/alarm (בְּהֵרָל). He declared to his counsellors, Did we not cast three men bound (כִּפְתָּ) into the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, But I see four men unbound (שְׁפָרָא),²⁵ walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt.²⁶ And the appearance (רִי)²⁷ of the fourth resembles (דְּמָה) a son²⁸ of the gods (בְּרִי־אֱלֹהִים).²⁹

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door³⁰ of the burning fiery furnace. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants (עֲבָדִי)³¹ of the Most High God (אֱלֹהֵי עֲלִיָּא),³² come out, and come here! Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counsellors gathered together

²³ "As hot as possible."

²⁴ **1 Pe 4:12-13** 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Messiah's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

²⁵ The ropes, symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar's power over them, are gone.

²⁶ The three are saved not only from the heat but also from asphyxiation and toxic fumes.

²⁷ **Da 2:31** 31 You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its *appearance* (רִי) was frightening.

²⁸ The head of gold is seeing the stone cut by no human hand (Da 2:45).

²⁹ **Ps 23:4-6** 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh forever. **Mt 28:20** 20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. See also Ex 3:12; Is 7:14; 43:1-3; 63:9; He 13:5-6.

³⁰ This was a brave thing to do, given what happened in v. 22. Nebuchadnezzar was very impacted by what he saw.

³¹ Do onlookers know we are servants of the Most High God?

³² Nebuchadnezzar is recognising, at least here, that the God of the Jews is the highest of gods. **Da 4:2** 2 It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. **Da 5:18** 18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship, greatness, glory, and majesty. **Da 5:21** 21 ... Until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he desires.

and saw that the fire³³ had not had any power (שִׁלַּט) over the bodies³⁴ (גְּשֵׁם) of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.³⁵

Nebuchadnezzar Blesses the God of Israel

28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said,

Blessed (בֵּרַךְ)³⁶ be the God (אֱלֹהֵי) of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel/messenger (מַלְאָךְ)³⁷ and delivered (יָצַד) his servants, who trusted (רָחַץ) in him, set aside the king's command,⁴⁰ and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god (אֱלֹהֵי) except their own God.⁴¹ 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people (עַם), nation (אֲמָתָה),⁴² or language (לְשׁוֹן) that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue (נִצַּל) in this way.⁴³

³³ **Da 7:11** 11 And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body (גְּשֵׁם) destroyed and given over to be burned with *fire*.

³⁴ Ultimately, God has promised to deliver not only our souls but our bodies as well. **Mt 10:28** 28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

³⁵ God does not promise always to save in this life (He 11:36-38), but he can save if he wants to (He 11:32-35). Resurrection, however, is assured for *every* believer.

³⁶ **Da 2:19-20** 19 Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel *blessed* the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said: *Blessed* be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. **Da 4:34** 34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I *blessed* the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁷ Nebuchadnezzar calls whom he saw an angel, but that doesn't mean the person he saw was an angel. The preincarnate Jesus is called the angel of Yahweh often in the Old Testament. See *Angel of Yahweh*. Jesus disappears as mysteriously as he appeared.

³⁸ Cf. v. 15. **Ps 97:10** 10 O you who love Yahweh, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints. He *delivers* them from the hand of the wicked. **Ps 108:5-6** 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! 6 That your beloved ones may be *delivered*, give salvation by your right hand and answer me! **Ps 138:7** 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand *delivers* me.

³⁹ See *Phase Two Faith*.

⁴⁰ At times believers must set aside the king's command.

⁴¹ Nebuchadnezzar admires the three Jews' commitment to monotheism.

⁴² "*ummat Muhammad* the community of Muhammad, the followers of Muhammad" (*HALOT*, 1815).

⁴³ Nebuchadnezzar recognises the God of Israel is unique, but he is not a believer yet. Religious freedom for the Jews is now guaranteed for the duration of the Babylonian empire. Life for the Jews in Babylon was relatively pleasant.

30 Then the king promoted (צִלַּח)⁴⁴ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.⁴⁵

Overview

1. The four stories recorded in Da 3-6, are intended to warn Gentile rulers and encourage the remnant of Israel during the times of the Gentiles, represented by the great image in Da 2 and the four beasts in Da 7. Da 2 and Da 7 frame the four stories.
2. This story is one for the ages!
 - a. **He 11:34** 34 ...Quenched the power of fire....
3. In the coming tribulation a Gentile ruler (Da 7:8) will demand for himself the worship that belongs to God (2 Th 2:4; Re 13:8). Any who refuse to acknowledge his right to receive worship will be killed (Re 13:15). Assuming political and religious power, he will oppress Israel (Re 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 do not worship the antichrist will be severely punished. Some will be martyred for their faithfulness to Jesus. But a few will be delivered from those persecutions by Jesus at his second coming (Zec 13:8; Re 12:10-17). In the tribulation, God will do for this believing remnant what he did for Daniel's three companions.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Promotion has so far happened at the end of each chapter in Daniel. The lesson is God promotes believers who don't compromise.

⁴⁵ Under Daniel (Da 2:48-49). Implied is that Yahweh will deliver the faithful remnant of Israel through the times of the Gentiles. **Is 43:2** 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

⁴⁶ Dwight D. Pentecost, "Daniel," 1340.