

Daniel: *Dual Book of History & Prophecy*

Chapter 3 – Nebuchadnezzar’s Image of Gold

This is an inspirational story of great faith and trust in God, even in the face of an incredible trial.

Most scholars believe that there is a 10-20-year gap of time between Chapters 2 & 3.

It seems apparent that the golden image described here is a result of King Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to the revelation in Chapter 2 in which he was symbolized by the head of gold.

The King’s Image of Gold in the Plain of Dura (Verses 1-7)

1 Nebuchadnezzar made a huge (60 cubits \approx 90 feet high, 6 cubits \approx 9 feet wide) image of gold (probably wood overlaid by gold ^{Exodus 37:25-26, Isaiah 40:19, Jeremiah 10:3-9}). The image was set up on the “plain of Dura”, with Dura being a general term for a ‘walled enclosure’. Many scholars believe that an existing mound (a brick construction) 6 miles SE of Babylon and about 45 ft square by 20 ft high may have been the base on which the golden image stood.

There is some controversy as to what the image was: a few have suggested the pagan god Nabu, but most scholars agree that an image of King Nebuchadnezzar himself makes the most sense.

A cubit has various meanings in different ancient cultures. However, it was commonly defined as the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, but is typically referred to today as 18 inches.

Point to ponder: The dimensions of the image involve the number representing man: “6” ^{Revelation 13:18}.

2-3 King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all of his government officials to gather for the dedication of the image, and they obediently assembled before the gold image, prepared to worship it.

Daniel gave the titles for all of the government officials in Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian Kingdom. They were satraps/princes (administrators and the chief representatives of the king), prefects/governors (military chiefs), governors/captains (governors of civil governments), advisors/judges (counselors of the government or chief arbitrators), treasurers (superintendents of the public treasury), judges/counselors (legal experts), and magistrates/sheriffs (judges).

4-6 The herald cried out the king’s decree on how all people ^{Revelation 5:9,7:9,10:11,13:7,17:15} must worship the image: at the sound of the music they were to fall down and worship ^{Isaiah 46:6} or else they would face an immediate horrible death by being “thrown into a blazing furnace”.

Both Satan (through the king) and God ^{Matthew 13:49-50} use a fiery furnace to represent judgement.

7 Fearful of the blazing furnace, all the people were obedient to worship as the king decreed.

Daniel’s Companions Accused by the Chaldeans (Verses 8-12)

8-11 The astrologers (or Chaldeans) went to the king to speak negatively about the Jews, and they began their address to the king with the usual flattering statement ^{Daniel 2:4}, then simply restated the command ^{v.6} and the punishment of King Nebuchadnezzar’s decree ^{v.7}.

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12 After these statements, they finally indicated their intended purpose in coming before the king by announcing that his very own administrators of the province of Babylon ^{Daniel 2:49} (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) had not only refused to obey the king's command to worship the golden image, but that they were also not serving the king's gods.

The several years since the young Jewish men (the 'captive foreigners') were placed in positions of great power and responsibility had not quelled the anger and resentment of the native "wise men".

Although never a stated requirement in the decree, serving the king's gods ^{Exodus 20:3} would be just as blasphemous as idolatry ^{Exodus 20:4-6} to the three deeply-faithful Jewish men.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego Refused to Worship the Image (Verses 13-18)

13-15 The accusation made the king "furious with rage" and he had the three men appear before him. Nebuchadnezzar first asked his administrators if the allegations were true. However, before they could answer, the king restated the decree's command and threat. Nebuchadnezzar then questioned them about what god could save them from his "hand": an indication that the king believed in his own sovereignty.

The fact that the king called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come to him in order to confront them instead of carrying out his decree to "immediately" throw them into the furnace indicated the king was showing them favor by giving them a second chance.

16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied calmly to the king that, while they had always been faithful to the king in their jobs, in matters relative to their faith, they ultimately did not need to answer to the king (reflecting their faith and trust in – and worship of – the one true God). In response to the king's question ^{v.15}, the three stated that "if" they were thrown into the furnace, "the God [they] serve" could "save" ^{Psalms 18:46-48} them from the furnace and "rescue" ^{Jeremiah 1:8} them from the king, (this illustrated their faith in the power God had over Nebuchadnezzar and all kings). They concluded by admitting God may not save them, but even if He didn't, it would not change the fact that He is the one true God ^{Job 13:15a}.

The King Cast the Three into the Furnace (Verses 19-23)

19-20 Nebuchadnezzar's rage returned ^{v.13} and his respect for the men ^{Daniel 1:19-20} evaporated. As a result of his fury, the king ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than normal. The king also commanded his strongest soldiers to tie-up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the fire (to make sure the "god" of the three men did not stop them). God promised to punish the Israelites "seven times over" if they were disobedient to Him ^{Leviticus 26:18}. Here again, Satan copied God by getting Nebuchadnezzar to make the punishment times seven ^{v.19}.

21-23 The soldiers obediently threw the three fully-dressed and bound men into the furnace. God allowed the plan to begin to backfire on the king when the "strongest" soldiers in the

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king's army were burned up by the flames, as they threw the Jewish men in the fire.

This incident proved how incredibly hot the fire was and illustrated that it would take an incredible miracle for any human to survive the super-heated furnace.

Point to ponder: If King Nebuchadnezzar really wanted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to suffer, wouldn't it have made more sense to lower the furnace temperature instead of increasing it? Since the soldiers were killed by the flames alone, any ordinary person thrown in would have died instantly.

The Miraculous Deliverance from the Furnace (Verses 24-27)

24-25 Nebuchadnezzar, having seen two things beyond his comprehension, asked his advisors: "Weren't there three men...[thrown] into the fire?". They responded with a resounding 'yes'. The king then described that he saw "four men walking around ... unbound and unharmed" and "the fourth looks like a son of gods", emphasizing the miraculous nature of what he saw.

Most scholars believe the "fourth" man in the furnace and later referred to as an "angel" ^{v.28} was Jesus Christ (i.e., a Christophany), referred to many times in the OT as the "Angel of the LORD".

26-27 Realizing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been saved from the fire's destruction, Nebuchadnezzar shouted to them to come out from the furnace, calling them "servants of the Most High God". The officials gathered around to see that the three were absolutely untouched by the flames: not their bodies, hair, robes – nor did they even smell like smoke.

Every time he was humbled, Nebuchadnezzar matured a bit in his understanding of and appreciation for the God of the Bible: he first called Him the "God of gods and the Lord of kings" ^{Daniel 2:47}, the "Most High God" ^{v.26}, the "Most High" ^{Daniel 4:17, 34}, and the "King of heaven" ^{Daniel 4:37}.

In saying "[The advisors] saw that the fire had not harmed [them]...", what Daniel was, in essence, saying was King Nebuchadnezzar's improper judgement had no power over the three faithful Jews.

The Second Decree of King Nebuchadnezzar (Verses 28-30)

28 Nebuchadnezzar gave praise to God for the miracle of rescuing His servants (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) for their willingness to trust in God in the face of the king's decree.

29 Recognizing who had saved the young Jews from the furnace, the king made a new decree: if anyone said anything negative against the God of the three men, they would be punished by being "cut into pieces and their houses turned into rubble". Notice that Nebuchadnezzar did not admit that God was the only god (yet), just that He certainly was the most powerful.

30 The king then, not only reinstated Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but promoted them. This is the last mention of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah) in Daniel.

Point to ponder: Some scholars have suggested this story is reminiscent of the End Times:

fiery furnace ⇒ the Great Tribulation; Nebuchadnezzar ⇒ the Antichrist; Daniel ⇒ the church;

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ⇒ the 144,000 Jews ^{Revelation 7:1-8, 14:1-5}.

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