

Survey of the Bible Daniel 3:1-30

The last time we finished up the second chapter of Daniel and it ended with a pretty dramatic depiction of the future reigns of different kings and their kingdoms including the future reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

God was gracious to Daniel as he gave him both the dream and interpretation of the dream to share with Nebuchadnezzar.

And the king was awestruck with the clarity and preciseness of this revelation which he acknowledges as coming from the God of Daniel as being above other “gods.”

Daniel 2:47 ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

The king was so thankful that he granted to Daniel and his friends special political positions within this reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 2:48-49 ⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel *was* at the king's court.

It would be at this point that we might imagine Nebuchadnezzar as being so humbled in the presence of the God of Daniel that he would now bow before this “God of gods” and “Lord of kings.”

And we might go so far as to say that this particular experience would push Nebuchadnezzar over the edge to accept the God of Daniel. And of course if the matter was only one of having the facts placed before him and the experience of actually encountering a supernatural experience, as Nebuchadnezzar did, we might come to that conclusion.

But that would be premature since faith in the one true God does not come by human wisdom or even encountering a miracle as was shown in the case of God supernaturally revealing His will to Daniel and thus to Nebuchadnezzar.

In fact, we see similar experiences all throughout the word of God where people have such experiences and yet will not turn and

humble themselves before God. The Pharaoh in Egypt at the time of Israel's departure comes to mind as does the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:27-31 ²⁷ "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers-- in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but *if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!*' ³¹ "But he said to him, '*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.*'"

People, by their very natures, are enemies of God and unless God takes their heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh they will continue in their sins even if they witness the miraculous as we will now see in our text today as Nebuchadnezzar goes from seeing with his eyes and hearing with his ears the magnificent truth of the God of "gods."

Daniel 3:1-5 ^{NAU} 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. 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 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. ⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language, 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.

The question as to why Nebuchadnezzar erected an idol and what is represented in that idol is something we want to look at.

When we read this and the following passages regarding this idol we usually associate it with Nebuchadnezzar himself as if this is a facsimile of him.

But that's not what the text says. It simply says, "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold." It doesn't tell us what that image is; only that "you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up."

By the way, it is interesting that Nebuchadnezzar is setting up this image on the heels of the previous chapter that described an image that depicted four kingdoms as was revealed to Daniel. That image was most certainly portrayed in the form of a man whose head was made of pure gold all the way down to "the legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."

And so, it is unmistakably human in appearance which makes sense since the kingdoms portrayed in that image are of human origin that will ultimately break to pieces as the Kingdom of God smashes it and then fills the earth with its righteous reign.

Could this image in chapter 3 be a representation of Nebuchadnezzar? I suppose, but the context seems to suggest that it is in connection to the gods of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 3:14 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?"

It may very well be that the image was in the form of a human since the revelation given to Daniel was in the form of a human. But Nebuchadnezzar's image seems to be closely associated with his gods.

And in light of the image that was given to him by Daniel Nebuchadnezzar likely was trying to recapture that image of his kingdom where he is said to be the king of kings with a head of gold with his gods supporting his reign.

But instead of this image having a head of gold the entire image is made of gold, probably overlaid with gold.

And so Nebuchadnezzar's image doesn't have to be a representation of him personally but rather of his kingdom to which the world must bow.

The problem, of course, will be Nebuchadnezzar's failure to recognize his own words that the God of Daniel is "God of gods" and so Daniel and his friends are compelled not to bow down to the image or the kingdom it represents as the gods of that kingdom play a major role in Nebuchadnezzar's success.

By the way, as a footnote, this image is no small thing. It is sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. Using the smallest measurement for a cubit of 18 inches we are looking at an image at least 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.

No other structure in that region at that time would be able to compete with such a structure. It would have been seen at quite a distance.

One other thing is important to point out here about this image and that is the way it was used politically by the enemies of Daniel and his friends.

Remember, despite how Daniel saved the lives of the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar's court, Daniel was still an outsider, being a Jew. And this Jew was now in charge of all of Babylon and the wise men themselves.

Daniel 2:48 ⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

Whether the wise men conspired by putting into the head of Nebuchadnezzar the plan to build this image with the intent of using it to destroy Daniel and his friends we can only speculate, but it is clear that they do use it as opportunity to destroy this man of God.

Daniel 3:12 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."

As we will see these Chaldeans who bring these charges before Nebuchadnezzar make the same mistake that Nebuchadnezzar makes, and that is their short memories of how the God of Daniel completely overshadows the gods of Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar himself makes this clear.

Daniel 3:15 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 do 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?"

“And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

Really? Again, as we have seen time and again, people do not reject the Creator God for lack of knowledge, either knowledge seen in the creation itself or the revealed knowledge from God Himself. People reject the God of gods because of their sinful hardened hearts which they themselves cannot turn.

John 1:12-13 ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Nebuchadnezzar has thrown down the gauntlet and Daniel’s three friends will be happy to take it up as they have only One they can turn to by faith.

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

What is interesting and instructive about this passage is that Daniel is not mentioned in this passage. In fact, if we back up a bit, the charges that were brought against these Jews was not brought against Daniel.

Daniel 3:12 ¹² "There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego,...

Why do you suppose Daniel is not mentioned in the charges by the Chaldeans?

We’re not told. What we do know is that Daniel would not have bowed before the image as well as his friends. But his friends are singled out. It is possible that since Daniel was given authority over all the Chaldean wise men in Nebuchadnezzar’s court they may have feared him.

On the other hand Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are placed over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel *was* at the king's court. And so, the Chaldean’s may not have felt

threatened by them. We simply don't know. But the rest of the chapter doesn't even mention Daniel's name.

It is the testimony of these three men that is highlighted as they place their trust in the God who delivers. But they also bow to the will of God which, as far as they are concerned, may not include their deliverance.

There are times in all of our lives where our trust in God may be tested even when we may conclude that God will allow such a test to run its course without His intervention. Job was a man who understood this.

Job 2:9-10 ⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are placed on the stage of redemptive history to represent the God of gods of whom even Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge. They will not bow to the image nor Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

And as such they will suffer the consequences of the decree set forth by Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 3:20 ²⁰ 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.

And after the fire was made even hotter, (and because of that the valiant warriors of Nebuchadnezzar were burned up themselves), the three were cast into the blaze. And here is where things get interesting.

Daniel 3:24-25 ²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵ He 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!"

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are seen by the king strolling around inside of the furnace without harm. But he also sees a fourth person walking around with them and he describes this person like a son of the gods.

How could this fourth person be described like this when all that could be seen was a blazing fire?

It would only make sense as this fourth person stood out as quite distinctive in appearance from the other three that the designation “son of the gods” is applied to him.

It may very well be that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact see a distinction that would allow this fourth person to outshine even the hottest of fires. Some of these passages come to mind.

Revelation 1:16 ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and *His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*

Revelation 21:23 ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, *for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

And now we have the King’s response to such a sight.

Daniel 3:26-30 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. ²⁷ 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. 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. 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." ³⁰ Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Notice that Nebuchadnezzar identifies the fourth person as an angel. From his perspective this made sense as this angel delivers the three. But Nebuchadnezzar is simply making a distinction

between this fourth person, and the other three, whom he knows are mere humans.

And so, calling this fourth person an angel does not mean it is in fact an angel, but an agent sent from their God to deliver them.

Though this fourth person could be an angel, the likelihood that this is the Messiah who delivers His people from the flames of fire and eternal punishment, is more consistent with the role of the pre-incarnate Christ appearing on the scene of redemptive history in this Old Testament setting.

By the way, what is different here in verse 28 from Nebuchadnezzar's response to Daniel in the passage we saw last week?

Daniel 2:46 ⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense.

After Daniel reveals the secret things to Nebuchadnezzar he falls on his face and did homage to Daniel. Here in our text today Nebuchadnezzar does not do homage to Daniel's three friends but immediately gives the glory to their God.

And now Nebuchadnezzar makes another decree regarding anyone who would speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap.

And of course we might now conclude that Nebuchadnezzar has finally come from the dark side to the light, right? Not so much. And we'll see this again as we move to the next chapter.

But as we close it is worth noting that though Nebuchadnezzar concedes that no one should speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, he does not call their God his God. In fact, there is nothing in the text to suggest that the first decree to worship the image and the gods of Babylon has been eliminated.

And this is the temptation for the church today as it tries to live side by side with the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego and the gods of this world as it is promoted in the wisdom of this world.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, we need to be willing to follow wherever God leads without compromise, even if that leads to the fires of tribulation that follow all who embrace Christ.

Luke 6:22-23 ²² "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. ²³ "Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

Many in the world may pay lip service to God and may even give glory to God for His great wonders, but in the final analysis, as we'll see next week, until God humbles us and causes us to see Him, people will always be throwing God's people into furnaces or to the lions or any other man made system that tries to downplay the importance of who the Creator is and what the Creator demands of people, which is worship of the One true God, not the gods of this world.